

2011

France's external action against land degradation and desertification



Directorate-General of Global Affairs, Development and Partnerships

“*Desertification, extreme weather events and rising sea levels are challenges to security and even survival. The developed countries are duty-bound to show solidarity.*”

*Speech delivered by **Nicolas Sarkozy**, President of the French Republic, at the 2007 United Nations Climate Change Conference in New York.*

Desertification and land degradation, a challenge for us all

Contrary to popular belief, **land degradation and desertification (LDD) does not only affect drylands in Africa**. These processes affect almost half of the globe's surface, about one hundred countries on all continents and a third of the world's population among the poorest and the most vulnerable. These phenomena have increased over roughly the past sixty years owing to population growth, unsuitable practices of natural resource exploitation and increasing climate irregularities.

A development and environment problem

Desertification is wrongly regarded as meaning the extension of existing deserts, whereas it is land degradation as a result of human activities in dryland areas.

Land degradation reduces or destroys the soils' production capacity (farming, forestry, pastoralism). It results from excessive or unsuitable human activities (overgrazing, poor land management, excessive harvesting of firewood) that cause soil erosion, loss of soil fertility and soil salinization. Soil productivity has been reduced up to 50% in some regions. The ultimate stage of degradation is irreversible: soils then become sterile.

We talk of **desertification** when land degradation occurs in a climatic environment **with scarce rainfall**. According to Article 1 of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD, Paris, 1994), desertification means "land degradation in arid, semi-arid and dry sub-humid areas resulting from various factors, including climatic variations and human activities."

LDD has a multiple impact on the environment (soil erosion, water scarcity, disappearance of wild flora and fauna, depletion of soil fertility and biodiversity) **and on populations** (poverty, famines, migrations, conflicts).

Combating LDD will thus help achieve two of the eight anti-poverty **2015 Millennium Development Goals**, namely to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger and ensure environmental sustainability.

LDD is drawing rural populations, particularly small family holdings in developing countries, into **spirals of poverty**: the greater their needs, the more they overuse the natural resources on which they depend for their income and food, and the more these natural resources become degraded, hence jeopardizing **food security**. Variability of prices of agricultural products is a further factor for fragility.



Soil erosion in South Africa- © IRD/Jean-Louis Janeau



Agricultural and rural development in developing countries and the future of small family holdings are at stake. **The principal actors in the fight against LDD are farmers and stockbreeders**, most of whom lack sufficient resources for this purpose. They need support from their village and professional organizations, civil society, scientists and governments. Official development assistance (ODA) must gauge the scale of LDD and the disasters that are bound to occur if no action is taken; ODA alone can generate adequate funding to combat LDD.

A large part of the world is affected

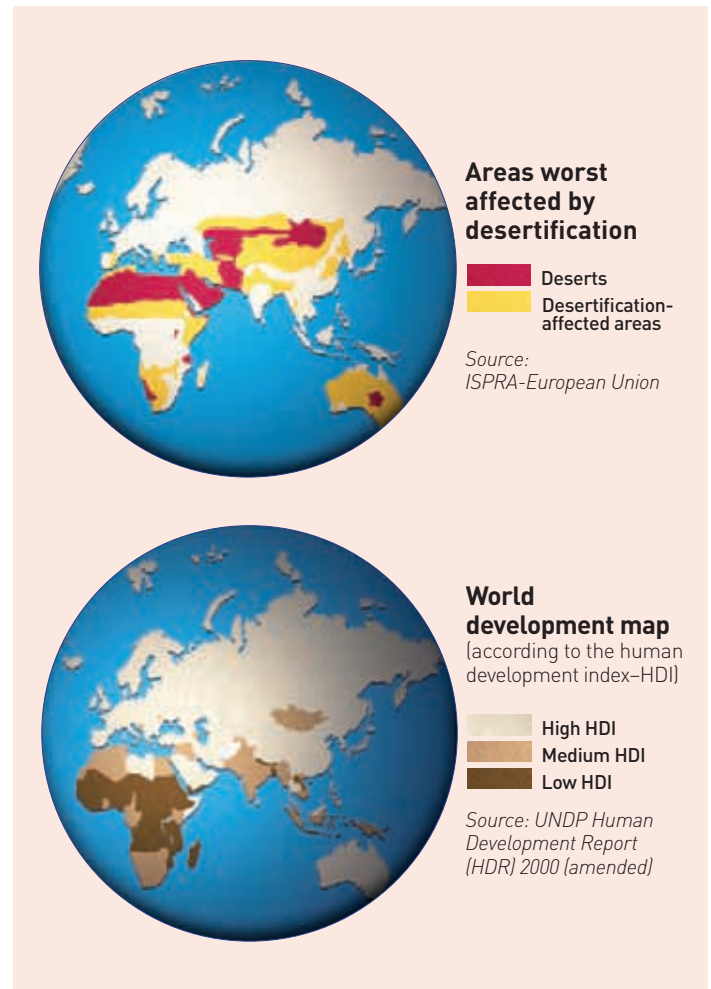
LDD is one of the major challenges facing humanity: 2 billion people are under threat and 9 billion people will have to be fed by 2050.

The countries most exposed are in Africa, north and south of the Sahara, more particularly the countries in the Sahel, East Africa and Southern Africa. LDD also concerns a large part of East Asia and Central Asia, China and the southern tip of South America, and also affects **the developed countries** such as Mediterranean Europe, Australia and North America. It becomes a cause for concern when it affects vaster areas, particularly during long periods of drought.

LAND DEGRADATION AND DESERTIFICATION IN FIGURES

- This phenomenon concerns **almost half the surface of the globe**.
- **All continents are under threat**: 37% of arid areas are in Africa, 33% in Asia, 14% in Australia. Some are also found in America and the southern fringes of Europe.
- Arid areas under threat cover **40% of land**, of which **66% are already affected** (3.6 billion ha. in 2000) and 10% to 20% are seriously degraded.
- **Of the drylands** stricken by desertification, 93% are pastures, 6% rainfed crops and 1% irrigated crops.
- **One-third of humanity is affected**.
- **If nothing is done, 10 million hectares of arable land** (1/5 of France) will be lost each year.

Source: *Millenium Ecosystem Assesment, 2005*



Land, climate and biodiversity: fighting on a single front

LDD reduces the carbon storage capacity of plants and soils and accelerates carbon emissions. Current climate change is likely to intensify these processes and their socioeconomic and environmental impact. The main way for agriculture to reduce its emissions is to improve carbon sequestration in soils. The use of anti-erosion and soil protection techniques in particular are potential remedies.

LDD reduces biodiversity. The disappearance of the vegetation cover results in genetic erosion, destroys habitats of animal and plant species and reduces crop species and hence food security. Combating LDD involves developing areas guaranteeing ecosystem rehabilitation and the preservation of species and landscapes.

Strategic orientations of French development cooperation

In 2006, France adopted a **strategic orientation framework** setting its priority actions for combating LDD. **The principal objective is to further the implementation of actions benefiting affected populations directly.** France acts at all levels of action – from the local to the international level – and together with **all development and civil society actors** in order to create a context conducive to implementing concrete actions.

Acting locally: decentralization and emergence of civil society

The success of actions to combat LDD crucially depends on taking account of populations and on their participation. France supports the decentralized management of natural resources and the emergence of civil society in order for these actions to directly benefit affected populations. France acts locally to:

- **define sustainable projects** by raising the awareness and building the capacities of local actors (including farmers' groups and livestock producers' groups), funding small-scale local projects, and by means of contractual natural resource management and access to land;
- **implement sustainable projects** by means of local actor ownership, technician training, substitute activities for agriculture, mediation between scientists and producers in order to better disseminate research findings, and the recognition of local expertise and know-how.

MULTI-FACETED ACTIONS

- Integrated management of natural and land resources.
- Soil conservation and restoration.
- Improving agricultural production and stock-farming systems.
- Agricultural water management.
- Sustainable forest management.
- Water basin management.
- Environmental monitoring, drought early warning and forecasting/response systems, desertification monitoring and assessment.
- Promoting sustainable land management techniques geared to climate change adaptation.
- Biodiversity preservation.
- Promoting and supporting the working out/implementation of strategies to combat LDD.
- Improving local governance.
- Supporting the decentralization process.
- Building the capacities of natural resource management (NRM) actors.
- Adding value to agricultural, forest, and farmed products.
- Diversifying activities so as to relieve pressure on resources.



Traditional irrigation system (Tunisia) - © IRD/Jean Pouget



Acting nationally: implementing strategies and action plans in affected countries

France supports the framing of coherent and integrated national policies and strategies.

Strengthening government structures and decentralization and good governance processes is necessary to ensure enhanced involvement of civil society. The search for and the dissemination and implementation of practices of sustainable natural resource management are essential. French policy at national level aims to:

- **support the framing of national policies to combat LDD and strategies** involving civil society and viewed as a priority of development and poverty reduction policy. Land tenure security and access to natural resources are encouraged;
- **develop and promote systems and techniques for the sustainable management of natural resources** by strengthening the national research capacity and promoting sustainable practices such as agroecology in affected countries.

In 2005, the Interministerial International Cooperation and Development Committee (CICID) established an instrument – known as the **Partnership Framework Document (DCP)** – to plan its bilateral assistance in countries of the Priority Solidarity Zone (ZSP) located for the most part in Africa and the Mediterranean. To date, some 30 DCPs signed by France and affected countries take account of the sustainable management of land and natural resources.

REGIONAL INITIATIVE ON WORLD ENVIRONMENT AND DESERTIFICATION CONTROL IN SAHELIAN AFRICA (IREMLCD)

The IREMLCD initiative, which has been implemented by the Permanent Interstate Committee for Drought Control in the Sahel (CILSS) since 2003, finances local projects designed and carried out by civil society for the restoration of degraded environments in CILSS member States. This project is backed by the French Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs (MAEE) and funded by the French Global Environment Facility (FGEF) in the amount of €3 million. The IREMLCD has funded 30 microprojects (by up to €100,000 per project) on anti-erosion systems, poverty reduction, capacity-building, and so on.

Its originality lies in that it enables small-scale projects initiated by local actors to access international financing so as to implement simple and inexpensive techniques to combat LDD such as *zai** (planting pits in which seeds are placed over composted organic matter) and disseminate them with the help of farmers' organizations.

* Cost: €100/ha.



Zai plot, Tahoua region (Niger)- © B. Bonnet

Taking action at regional and subregional levels in the transfrontier fight against land degradation and desertification

The great droughts of the 1970s in sub-Saharan and North Africa have led neighbouring countries with similar problems to jointly develop procedures for environmental monitoring and the prevention of food risks and conflicts. **France provides political, financial and technical support for African regional and subregional organizations** such as the Sahara and Sahel Observatory (OSS) and the Permanent Interstate Committee for Drought Control in the Sahel (CILSS). At regional level France:

- **supports the working out, dissemination and implementation of common and shared methodologies** by contributing to OSS environmental surveillance programmes;
- **support the structuring of subregional action and coordination between neighbouring States** by supporting CILSS and OSS actions which include prevention of food and drought risks, shared water resource management, and provision of assistance to member States in implementing measures to combat LDD;
- **develops new common research themes:** work is underway on the economic and social costs of LDD, monitoring indicators of LDD, and impact indicators of actions to combat LDD.

SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE AS AN EFFECTIVE TOOL

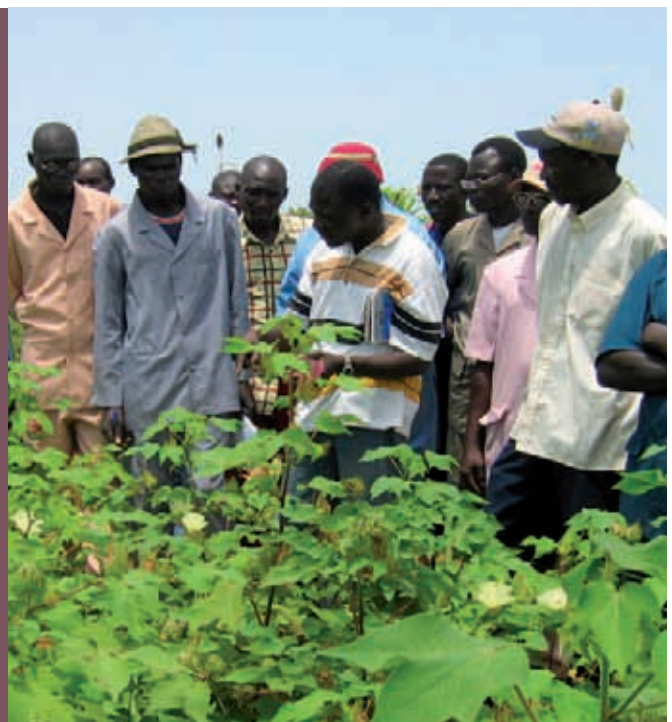
The French Agricultural Research Centre for International Development (CIRAD) has developed cropping systems based on **direct seeding on permanent plant cover (DMC)**: the soil is not tilled but permanently covered by mulch. DMC helps combat LDD and global warming by stopping soil erosion, facilitating rainwater infiltration and retention, stabilizing crop yields and sequestering carbon.

The French Development Agency (AFD), the GGEF with the MAEE and CIRAD have pooled their efforts to develop DMC in pilot countries. Since 2009, this initiative has been extended to the Maghreb, South-East Asia, East Africa and sub-Saharan Africa, in order to disseminate these techniques, strengthen the scientific knowledge of their impact and capitalize on expertise and know-how.

SAHARA AND SAHEL OBSERVATORY (OSS)

This regional organization groups 22 African countries and their subregional organizations, countries of the North, United Nations agencies and civil society. It plays a key role in African regional dialogue and cooperation on the monitoring and management of natural resources, capitalization on know-how, and the dissemination of new sustainable technologies to combat LDD. The OSS supports its member States in the national and subregional processes for implementing the UNCCD and facilitates South-South and North-South-South relations. OSS flagship programmes include:

- Inventory, modelling and concerted management of shared aquifer resources.
- Long-term ecological observation.
- Decision-support tools and drought early warning systems.
- Mobilization of African expertise.



Visiting a DMC-managed farming plot (North Cameroon)
© Krishna Naudin



Acting internationally to define global policy

France supported the creation of the UNCCD and pledged to support efforts of countries under threat by ratifying the Convention. In close liaison with the European Union, it plays an active role in international bodies (United Nations, Global Environment Facility (GEF), World Bank, etc.) and in multi-donor consultation platforms such as the TerrAfrica Initiative.

French international action aims to:

- **promote France's ambitious vision** of the fight against LDD on a global scale;
- **facilitate the participation of negotiators from the least developed countries**, especially African, in international debates;
- **facilitate the involvement in these debates of civil society in the North and in the South.** Exchanges be-

tween NGOs, international solidarity organizations and development actors is to be furthered;

- **involve scientists** in formulating relevant themes relating to LDD control and disseminate knowledge. France helped create the first global scientific network (Desert-Net International – DNI) on this theme and participated in the first UNCCD Scientific Conference in 2009 in Buenos Aires;

- **help frame the strategic orientations of multilateral institutions** by supporting UNCCD bodies. France supports the Convention's 10-year Strategy for 2008-2018 and furthers the development of new projects, particularly in Africa, with the GEF and the FGEF, its French counterpart. It also encourages enhanced synergy between the three International Environmental Conventions.

A PARTNERSHIP PLATFORM FOR SUSTAINABLE LAND MANAGEMENT IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

Six years after the creation of the TerrAfrica programme, sustainable land management (SLM) has improved in sub-Saharan Africa. A dozen countries have developed their national SLM investment plan based on the multi-actor and multi-sector approach advocated by TerrAfrica. Today TerrAfrica posts close to USD4 billion in SLM investment and commitments in some 30 countries. The TerrAfrica Initiative has also

helped improve and disseminate knowledge on SLM (cf. the book entitled *Sustainable Land Management in Practice* published by TerrAfrica in 2011, on <http://knowledgebase.terrafrica.org/topic-folders/terrafrica-docs/en>). TerrAfrica is today steered by the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) and provides a platform enabling the coordination of international and regional SLM actors in Africa.



Return of transhumants (Mali) - © IRD/Olivier Barrière

French development cooperation efforts

Substantial budget commitments

France's financial commitments to combat LDD, and in support of bilateral development cooperation projects/programmes with affected countries, total almost **€100 million per year** for the period 2008-2009. **Actions focus principally on Africa and the Mediterranean.**

France is contributing **multilateral institutions' efforts**, including the UNCCD. It supports organizations and funds involved in LDD-related areas such as sustainable agricultural and rural development and the conservation of natural resources. They include, for example, the GEF, UNDP and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO). France is also one of the leading contributors to the European Development Fund (EDF).

At national level, France finances LDD-related actions of capacity building, training and advocacy. It supports the French Scientific Committee on Desertification (CSFD) and the Working Group on Desertification (GTD) in their capacity as driving forces of the scientific community and French civil society.

The strong mobilization of French institutional actors

The actions funded by the **French Development Agency (AFD)**, which is France's principal linchpin-operator, account for **85% of French bilateral efforts for the fight against LDD** (almost €85 million per year in commitments in 2008-2009). The AFD supports government authorities, the private sector and local community networks in LDD-related thematic sectors, as well as NGO-led international solidarity operations.

The French Global Environment Facility (FGEF), a bilateral public fund for global environmental protection, has devoted **almost €9 million** per year (2008-2009) to fund LDD-related field projects.

The French Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs (MAEE) is responsible for the conduct and coordination of France's international relations. As the focal point of the UNCCD, the MAEE participates in meetings of the UNCCD and international coordinating bodies. It supports subregional structuring in Africa via the OSS and CILSS. It also finances a number of



Millet fields (Niger) - © IRD/Patrick Blanchon

FRANCE'S ACTIONS IN FIGURES (2008-2009)

- **€100 million/year** allocated to combat LDD in affected countries (bilateral aid).
- **137 bilateral cooperation commitments** and support for **261 LDD-related projects** in affected countries.
- **73 French NGOs** and **70 NGOs from the South** are involved in these projects.
- **About 100 French local authorities** are engaged in decentralized cooperation partnerships.
- **30 Partnership Framework Documents (DCPs)** have been established between France and affected countries, covering the theme of the sustainable management of land and natural resources.
- **Involvement of scientific institutions** and French universities.



multilateral contributions and supports the TerrAfrica Initiative. It backs the mobilization of NGOs and scientists, as well as decentralized cooperation partnerships between local authorities in France and in the countries of the South.

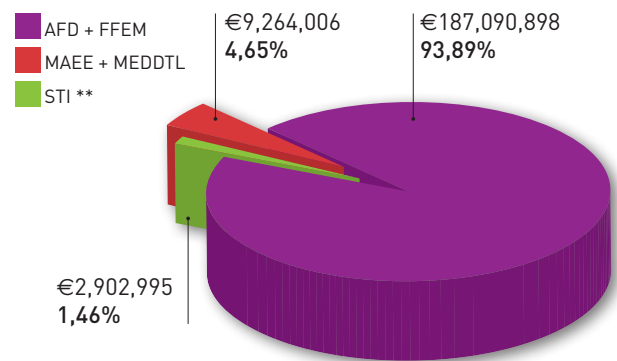
The French Ministry of Ecology, Sustainable Development, Transport and Housing (MEDDTL) supports the MAEE in the follow-up of the UNCCD. The MEDDTL supports the OSS and the networking of French civil society actors involved in the fight against LDD, such as the Working Group on Desertification (GTD), as well as the French Scientific Committee on Desertification (CSFD).

The key role of French civil society

The following two principal actors are mobilizing the scientific community and civil society organizations (CSOs) in France: the French Scientific Committee on Desertification (CSFD) and the Working Group on Desertification (GTD).

The CSFD mobilizes French experts from the concerned scientific disciplines in order to produce, disseminate and

French bilateral commitments to affected countries* (2008-2009)



* The projects concerned do not all make a priority of LDD control, but contribute to it indirectly.

** Scientific and technical information.

exploit knowledge, provide guidance and counselling to policy makers and actors in the field. It strengthens the position of this community in the global context.

The **principal French scientific institutions** (for example CIRAD and the French Scientific Research Institute for Development in Co-operation – IRD) support institutions in affected countries and conduct research programmes on the challenges of LDD.

THE GTD: A FRENCH NETWORK OF INTERNATIONAL SOLIDARITY ACTORS

The Working Group on Desertification (GTD) draws its strength from the diversity of its membership which includes NGOs, the CSFD and local authorities, and from its role as an interface on LDD with French government authorities. It is driven by the Centre d'actions et de réalisations internationales [International Actions and Realizations Centre] (CARI) and acts as the spokesperson of French civil society in UNCCD bodies. It aims to:

- mobilize actors and develop a dialogue at national and international levels;
 - pool, capitalize on and transmit expertise and know-how;
 - strengthen the capacities of actors and institutions
- The GTD is an influential proposal-making body in France and within NGO networks in Europe (European network initiatives on Desertification – eniD), in the Sahel (Réseau Sahel Désertification – RéSaD) and worldwide (Drynet).



Launch workshop for the Réseau Sahel Désertification (RéSaD) in Niger - © CARI

French CSOs play a key role in combating LDD. The French government authorities have developed solid partnerships and are working concertedly with the **GTD**, a platform for French international solidarity CSOs that are actively involved in the fight against LDD and natural resource management.

The GTD and the CSFD enable the active participation of French civil society and the French scientific community in **European and global networks** including Drynet (a global network designed to build the capacities of CSOs involved in the development of drylands and natural resource management) and DesertNet International (an international multidisciplinary network and platform for scientific debate).

A strong support for decentralized cooperation actors

A real dynamic is underway in France to mobilize French local authorities (towns, conurbation committees, departments, regions, etc.) in supporting the fight against LDD. About 100 French local authorities are involved in decentralized cooperation partnerships with local authorities in affected countries in order to support decentralization and help them take ownership of their new skills.

INVESTING IN DRYLANDS IS PROFITABLE

- If nothing is done, €100 billion will be lost per year, i.e. 0.5% to 1.5% of GDP in the most affected countries.
- €300/year/ha. during 3 or 4 years is what it will cost to restore degraded soils and their production potential.
- \$10 billion per year is required over 10 years to ensure the recovery of a large part of affected small family holdings.
- Locally, return on investment rates reach up to 30%.

The following conditions are required to attract public and private investors: enhancement and stability of public policy in key areas such as investment, legal security and land tenure security, agricultural prices, education, health and civil peace.

Resource mobilization, GEF/GM 2006.



Bada dam construction work (Mali) - © Les amis de Bada



FRANCE'S 7 COMMITMENTS

- 1. PROMOTE** an ambitious approach to the fight against land degradation and desertification as an instrument for the development of drylands in all continents.
- 2. OPTIMIZE** synergies between combating land degradation and desertification strategies and poverty reduction strategies, strategies for climate change adaptation, biodiversity conservation, water management and food security promotion.
- 3. RAISE AWARENESS** of the importance of combating land degradation and desertification among policy makers and populations in countries of the South and the North.
- 4. AIM FOR** a strengthened implementation of the UNCCD and make the Convention a priority thrust of French development cooperation policy on sustainable development, particularly as regards affected African countries.
- 5. STRENGTHEN** the scientific component of the fight against land degradation and desertification by favouring a global ecosystem approach.
- 6. SUPPORT** actions in the field in liaison with civil society and the scientific community.
- 7. FOSTER** enhanced international environmental governance (IEG) with a view to meeting global challenges in an effective and coherent manner.



Harvesting chillies in Tunisia - © IRD/Jean Champion

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Directorate-General of Global Affairs, Development and Partnerships of the French Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs

The missions of the French Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs are:

- summarize information on the changing global economy and put it into perspective, prepare decisions on the French government's foreign policy;
- draft France's foreign policy;
- coordinate France's international relations;
- protect French interests abroad and assist French nationals outside France.

The creation of the Directorate-General of Global Affairs, Development and Partnerships (DGM) in April 2009, as part of the reform of the Ministry, enables diplomacy to anticipate, identify and respond to the challenges of globalisation more effectively.

Confronted with global issues that have a direct impact on the lives of our citizens and multiple actors, the Ministry intends to emphasise the need to tackle global issues, in the firm belief that every major economic, cultural and societal issue calls for collective action with more outward focus, anticipation, interministerial coordination, responsiveness, interdisciplinarity and a resolutely European approach.



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© MAEE/DCP/2011 - Cover: Soil erosion in South Africa. © IRD/Jean-Louis Janeau