Conflicts over land in the Niger river delta region of Mali
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This thesis is a fruit that took a long time to mature, a dish that required a long time to be cooked. In the course of the process, many people at different stages were involved and I owe a lot to them for financial, administrative, intellectual and psychological support.

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In Mali, the national institute of agricultural research, IER (Institut d’Economie Rurale) hosted my field activities. Dr. Bino Teme, the director of the institute paid a kind attention to my presence among them and facilitated my stay by organizing my departure to Mopti where I joined the local research team. The Mopti team researchers warmly welcomed me and took care of practical arrangements for my research; Dr. Kodjo and his colleagues adhered to my research topic and got quickly involved. They facilitated my stay in Madiama, provided transportation facilities and field enumerators. In particular, Mr Traoré was the field facilitator who moved with me from one village to the other, introducing me to the villagers. I thank you all for your support and friendship.

The fieldwork was an opportunity for me to discover the amazing context of the Niger River inner delta of Mali and its kind people. In each of the visited villages, we were welcomed and after introduction, tea, sugar and charcoal were systematically provided by the villagers. Later on, a boy was designated to cook tea for us in order to energize us; this ‘technique’ was really useful for us tired after long hours of interviews. Thanks to you all from Madiama, Tombonkan, Nerekor, Tatia-Nouna and Promani for your great hospitality, worthy of African societies.
In 2001 when I applied for a scholarship both at Wageningen University and at the University of Groningen, I could not imagine that so nice creatures would welcome me amidst them. Prof. Ruerd Ruben from the Economic Development Group promptly and positively responded and I was accepted for a short term stay at Wageningen University (WU) while the possibility of a financial support through a Mansholt scholarship was examined. Meanwhile, the University of Groningen through the Centre for Development Studies, formally granted me a scholarship allowing me to finalize my dissertation. From that time on, I had two promotors: Prof. Caspar Schweigman, director of The Centre for Development Studies at the University of Groningen, and Prof. Ruerd Ruben at WU, who later was appointed as Director of the Centre for International Development Studies in Nijmegen. They regularly organized meetings with me in order to discuss details related to the thesis. Both were very committed to get a good job done; particularly Caspar would take me everywhere by train in The Netherlands to show up at those meetings. A good company promotor-student was frequently conveyed by train from Groningen to other cities. Caspar, full of modesty, showed me such a friendship that ever existed between a student and his promoter. His hospitality reminds me of the one I experienced in some African villages. He would read the whole stuff I submitted to him in details, very systematically and ask me to explain every tiny cloudy point in order to make sure that it could be understood even by lay people. Ruben was very quick to react to my writings and suggested some deepening or improvements based on innovative views. Although very useful to me and valuable to the whole thesis, such an educational method was not so easy to follow. The remaining cloudy points or weaknesses are of my responsibility.

During my first stay at Wageningen, I met with a particular economist: Dr. Gideon Kruseman. He served as a technical adviser to me. The model developed required a high level of qualification in GAMS. Gideon was the required specialist to help me. Hard-worker, he has a broad, deep and keen knowledge of GAMS codes, theoretical models and the field where my research was conducted, i.e. Mali, a country where he conducted his PhD research. In total, he did have the most adequate profile to help me. His patience and practical sense of transmitting his knowledge have been so useful to me as well as his clear thinking allowed our joint work to make substantial progress, particularly during my last stay with him at the agricultural economic institute LEI in The Hague.

Gideon, you are obviously part of this thesis although possible mistakes or failures are fully of my responsibility.

All staff of the Centre of Development Studies of the University of Groningen has been so kind to me; particularly Arthur de Boer who took care of me from the very first day to the last hour. He was always busy to help and to make sure that everything was going smoothly with me. Arthur thanks for your kindness.

Pieter Boele impressed me with his points of view of a philosopher and his broad knowledge of Africa and his interest into African people. He paid
particular attention to African students and occasionally invited us for parties. Pieter, I appreciated your kind attention.

People of LEI welcomed me for a short stay in August 2006 which allowed me to work with Gideon on my model; I thank them all for their help and warm hospitality. I am grateful to IFPRI for allowing me to adapt their model to my case study; I particularly thank Dr Peter Hazell for referring me to IFPRI for technical support, Drs. Sherman Robinson and Hans Lofgren for providing me with accurate material and assistance in the modeling. Prof. Laya Sawadogo of the University of Ouagadougou, frequently enquired about the thesis, constantly encouraged me in the long way towards the defense; thank you professor for your friendship and support.

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My wife and five kids have been laid aside for a long time; they all bore my almost crazy decision to abandon them for years. Venance Delwendé, because he was a baby when I left for the United States, was afraid of me and could not accept me as his father when I got back now and then. Sorry for missing you for such a long time; thanks for understanding your spouse and father. I hope this period of separation will be nothing but a diving-board for another life.