

Title: **Keeping the Books: Communes Find their Way**

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Department: **Democratic Governance**

Description: **A request from a Prefect for financial training for commune officials catches the attention of other donors, and is being replicated**

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Geographic area: **Niamana (Circle of San)**

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Content:

It all began with a Prefect, doing his job. Mr. Sékou Coulibaly, the Prefect of the Circle of San, is responsible for monitoring legal compliance in his Circle, including laws and regulations on fiscal management. When he visited all 25 communes that make up his Circle, he found that only one, Niamana, was in full compliance. Upon closer scrutiny, he discovered that they had been trained by the USAID Mali-funded *Program de Gouvernance Partagé* (PGP) project. This “shared governance” activity, implemented by Management Systems International and a local partner, Koni Expertise, seeks to improve local governance by equipping commune officials with the skills and knowledge they need to effectively and transparently manage local resources. Convinced that the other communes in his Circle could also reach the same level of competence as Niamana and because the PGP project did not have sufficient funding to replicate the training for the remaining 24 communes in the Circle, the Prefect began a search for financing. He was able to get a commitment from World Vision to cover part of the cost of the training, and the communes themselves contributed per diem and travel costs.

Each of the 24 communes benefited from the training, which was designed for commune-level accountants, mayors and sub-prefects, and secretaries general. The training included modules on financial management, accounting, budget planning, and fiscal tracking. This hands-on, practical training gave each individual the opportunity to fill out forms for receipts and expenditures, to calculate totals and to set up appropriate bookkeeping based on actual figures from their communes. Each trainee returned to the commune with his or her financial records in order, and the skills to keep them that way! Mr. Bougouzinè Dembélé, the Secretary General of the Prefect of San, indicated that “There were many aspects of financial management that we did not understand. Because of this training, we now know how to manage expenses and receipts, and we can now put our finances in order”.

Most of the communes had a Procedures Manual from a 2003 training program, but in 20 communes surveyed, not one was being used: they were ignored or unknown to many of the intended users. This hands-on training in tools and techniques for managing the finances in their communes gave financial budget managers a new start, enabling them to follow the legally-required procedures described in the manuals. “We were confronted by misunderstanding of financial procedures. The training has given us a better comprehension of financial management, and as Mayor, I will see to it that we strictly apply proper financial

and budgetary procedures in my Commune” said Mr. Boubacar Bibi Koté, the Mayor of the Commune of Sy.

This activity is a stellar example of synergy in action: a study jointly funded by USAID (through the PGP project) and the German-funded PACT/GTZ identified the need and developed the approach for practical, hands-on training, which was subsequently funded with the help of World Vision (at no cost to the US Government). Now, having witnessed the success of San, other Circles are seeking funds for similar training. Recently the Circle of Ansongo was successful in obtaining funding from the Dutch NGO, SNV; the PGP project will furnish the trainer for this round of training for all seven communes in the circle, with SNV covering all other associated costs.

The result of these training sessions is significantly improved tax collection procedures and the commitment of the population to pay taxes because they have confidence that their scarce resources will be well spent. There is greater transparency in the use of public funds, a system of checks and balances, a better utilization of public resources, and improved budget planning for public services, like schools and health centers—all essential and fundamental elements of successful decentralization. Moreover, the training results in a more rationale and sustainable use of natural resources: communes now have more control over the use of wood, sand and other natural resources, collect revenues from the sales of these precious commodities, and can avoid over-exploitation. Another important benefit of the training is that now it will be much more difficult for corruption to go unnoticed and unchallenged.

Commenting on the training, Mr. Sekou Coulibaly, the Prefect of the Circle of San, said “As a result of the training, the collection agents and I will be better able to monitor tax revenues, and to provide better technical assistance in financial matters to the communes”.

USAID anticipates that the highly successful results of these training sessions will lead to more interest on the part of donors and local institutions, and that the training will be replicated in more communes throughout Mali.



**Mr. Sékou Coulibaly, Prefect of San is explaining to the audience the importance of the financial management training for the communes.**



Mr. El Hadj Karim Traoré of Niamana, during a coffee break, is explaining to some participants the reasons of the success of his commune in financial management and budgeting.



Mr. Toumassé Sogoba, Mayor of the Commune of Djeguena is debating a budgeting issue during a financial management training session in San.