

Title: **The Growth of Community Radio in Mali**

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Description: **The use of community radio in support of development activities in Mali has experienced a phenomenal growth**

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Content:

USAID MALI'S EXPERIENCE IN COMMUNITY RADIO ACTIVITIES

USAID Mali has been investing in the community radio sector since 1996, under its Information and Communications Special Objective, and follow-on Communications for Development Special Objective.

The first activity undertaken in the radio sector was a roundtable meeting of donors, local and international NGOs and gov't agencies on the topic of radio and development. USAID soon discovered that there was virtually no coordination of donor and international organization activities in the sector, and that indeed, most organizations working with radio as a development tool knew very little about what others were doing. In response, USAID created a Radio and Development Coordination Committee, which meets regularly and now includes 19 member organizations (including all the major donors, several UN agencies, and many local and international organizations). This Committee has been one of the major strengths of our experience in Mali since it provides a venue for exchanging ideas and collaborating on common programs.

USAID then concentrated on strengthening the nascent association of private FM radio stations, URTEL, by providing institutional support and by training senior staff of URTEL in organizational and financial management, advocacy and outreach. USAID then awarded several grants to URTEL for training of member radio station



staff and other radio and development-related services.

Mali has an impressive number of private FM radio stations (146 as of late 2004), but has no easy way of getting information to these stations, or of sharing and exchanging information. To alleviate this shortcoming, USAID Mali is funding a regional radio program, in the form of a radio soap opera, using WorldSpace technology. (WorldSpace is a digital broadcasting system, using satellites to diffuse signals throughout Africa.)

Taking advantage of this system, USAID has distributed over 100 WorldSpace receivers to radio stations throughout Mali. Starting in November 2004, the weekly radio soap opera in local languages will be broadcast over the network to these radio stations. The program is devoted to development themes (child trafficking, health and welfare, family planning, HIV/AIDS, and other topics). The program includes drama, comedy, music, story-telling and other radio communication techniques designed to attract listeners.

USAID has taken advantage of the impressive number of radio stations to disseminate development information via radio “campaigns”. These have included programming on the recent presidential and legislative elections, HIV/AIDS, and educational issues. Training of radio producers covered such topics as family planning, child survival, HIV/AIDS, girls’ education, natural resource management, agriculture and livestock, and others. These training sessions provide radio producers with the skills required to produce radio messages on those topics.