



GOVERNING JUSTLY AND DEMOCRATICALLY

OVERVIEW

PROFILE

Date of Independence: 1960
Population: 12.5 million (2006)
Languages: French
Vernacular: Bambara
GDP per capita: \$470 (yr)
Source: U.S. State Department

MISSION DIRECTOR

Rebecca Black
BP 34
Bamako, Mali
Tel: 223-20-70-23-00

DESK OFFICER

Rabihah Mateen
Tel: 1-202-712-0236
Email: rmateen@usaid.gov
Web: <http://mali.usaid.gov>

BACKGROUND

Mali stands out as a stable democracy in the midst of the troubled West African region. The predominantly Muslim country began a transition to democracy in 1992 and continued with a peaceful change of power in 2002. Real gross domestic product growth has averaged over five percent a year since 1994, facilitating the rise of national income from \$240 per person in 1994 to \$440 in 2006. To assist Mali in continuing to play a positive role in the region, USAID is working to reduce poverty, increase access to information, and improve health and education services.



DEMOCRACY AND GOVERNANCE PROGRAMS

USAID promotes citizen participation in the democratic process, provides local governments with the skills to administer financial systems, develops practices that support decentralization, and increases women's role in decision-making. Between 2006 and 2008, the number of elected female leaders increased by 200 percent. However, Mali is one of the most information-deprived countries, with a largely illiterate population and a nascent technology infrastructure. USAID's programs improve the quality of development information available and reduce constraints on information access. USAID is expanding the network of community radio stations in Mali to Kidal, Gao, and Timbuktu, and has to date funded the creation of 26 radio stations and trained radio staff in programming and station management.

GOOD GOVERNANCE

Mali embraced decentralized democratic governance after the 1991 revolution and established decentralization as an official policy. The legal framework for decentralization and the transfer of financial and administrative resources is in place, but progress toward decentralization has been slow. The Government of Mali posits that lack of management capacity at the commune level is preventing decentralization, particularly the transfer of financial resources to the communes, from moving forward. In response, USAID has developed programs to improve the capacity of communes to manage finances, design development activities and administer local government in an effective, efficient and transparent manner. These programs have demonstrated that with appropriate assistance and training, communes can become self-managed: by 2009, over 90 percent of target communes included citizens' involvement in budget and activity planning, with 92 percent working directly on community health and 83 percent on education budgets. Women's needs are reflected in 66 percent of targeted communes' five-year activity plans.

USAID has also initiated the second phase of a shared governance program that supports decentralization and the strengthening of local government capacity. Thus far, evaluations validated the program strategy and attested to its effectiveness, particularly in increasing general citizen involvement in



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commune planning and budgeting. In addition, USAID continues to support technical assistance and training in financial management, development planning, conflict resolution, and participatory decision making to strengthen national and sub-national government functions.

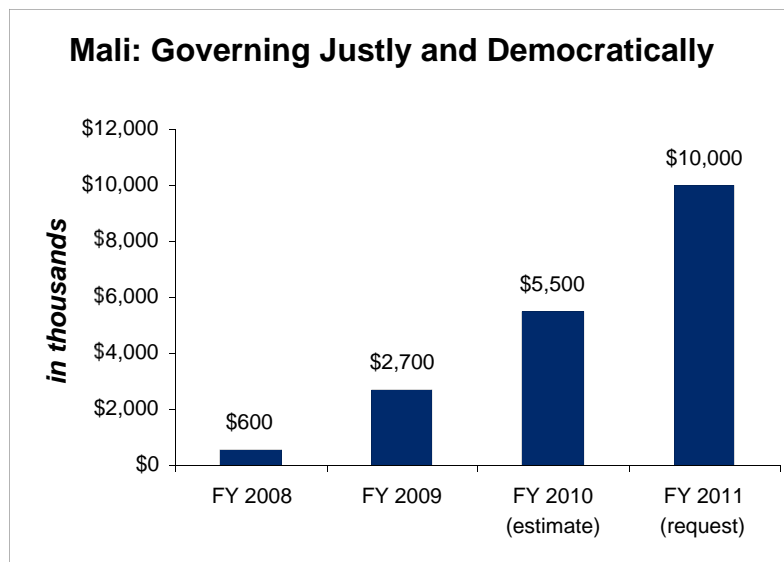
CIVIL SOCIETY

While government institutions in Mali demonstrate a serious commitment to the development of the country, the weakest link in the evolution of democracy remains civil society. Civil society organizations, while relatively new and still somewhat weak in Mali, are strongly motivated by the overall democratic environment and one of the freest media environments in Africa. Under a decentralized system of government, civil society has an increasingly important role to play in determining local budget priorities and ensuring the transparent use of local resources.

A powerful tool for advocacy and transparency available to civil society is community radio, which currently reaches over 89 percent of citizens. Mali has made great strides in creating independent media. Due to very low literacy rates and a vibrant oral tradition, radio is the primary source of information for most Malians. Over the past decade, USAID has created 26 new sustainable radio stations in the north, with full community ownership and participation. For more than 13 years, USAID has built radio stations, trained radio staff and members of the national association of community radio stations, and produced radio campaigns on development-related issues. From 1992 to 2010, the number of FM radio stations increased from three to over 250, however, northern Mali remains underserved in terms of coverage.

Freedom of information is a critical element of a vibrant and engaged civil society and is a prerequisite to the successful transition toward a decentralized government. USAID continues to assist in: the construction of radio stations; training radio producers and presenters in radio program production, conflict prevention and mitigation; and reinforcing existing radio stations.

FUNDING



On behalf of the American people, the U.S. government has provided humanitarian assistance and economic development to those in need around the world since the Marshall Plan.