



Ramata Camara, communication extension worker in Bancoumana. She is noting women's observations in Bambara on the impact of the project during the 2009 3AG-FABEMA Focus Group meeting.

ICT, a genuine tool to reduce isolation and raise health awareness

Lessons learned from the 3AG-FABEMA Mandé Information Network project

This learning brief describes the lessons learned from the “Mandé Information Network” project implemented by the Association for Assistance and Support for Rural and Urban Groups (3AG) and the Federation of Mandé Grassroots Associations (FABEMA). It has been written for professionals in the sector who are seeking inspiration from this experience and for organisations that would like to implement similar projects.

Authors: Samba Togola, Bénédicte Marcilly

Most of this brief's content is based on results from monitoring and evaluation exercises that have been performed with the help of the International Institute for Communication and Development (IICD) and the Malian Monitoring & Evaluation partner over the last three years. This M&E system, which was developed by IICD, consists of quantitative and qualitative assessments. Each year, questionnaires are filled in

anonymously by the end users of the project (a representative sample). The answers are then analysed to discover more about end user profiles, levels of use and satisfaction, and the impact of the project. This process is complemented by periodical Focus Group discussions in the country which are attended by project staff and end users in order to discuss the project data and to exchange views about the successes, challenges and solutions.

In addition to the lessons from the evaluation data and

from the Focus Group, this paper also looks at other issues that have emerged throughout the implementation of the project. These practical lessons are also discussed in this learning brief, which was elaborated in close collaboration with the project partner, 3AG.

Context

Mali is an enormous landlocked country in Western Africa where desertification has a major impact. The Mandé area, which is located between the capital Bamako and the Guinean border, is one of the least developed parts of the country. Situated in the upper valley of the Niger River, the villages of this region are separated by outcrops of the mountain chain Fouta Djallon. Infrastructure is almost non-existent here and the population, most of whom are farmers, have virtually no access to basic social services.

The distances between villages in the region are large. Given the inadequacy of the roads, these villages are sometimes linked by country tracks. However, the latter are often impassable in the winter. With rainfall varying between 750 mm and 1,000 mm, the region is difficult to reach for a large part of the year. Telecommunications infrastructure is also lacking. The telephone network is virtually non-existent. The local people even have difficulty tuning in to national radio.

All these factors mean that communications between the villages and the rest of the country are extremely difficult. Therefore people resort to informal communication strategies. For example, they send messages via people who travel by motor vehicle or bicycle. This strategy is only partially successful because messages often fail to arrive, or only arrive after a considerable delay. Sometimes, the information is distorted or the person who is asked to pass on the message simply forgets to do so. Hence the necessity to use other more effective communication resources.

With the aim of improving access and communications for these villages, the Association for Assistance and Support for rural and urban Groups (3AG) set up a project for 35 villages in the Mandé and Tiakadougou areas. These villages, which are located in ten rural communes in the administrative circles of Kati and Kangaba in the region of Koulikoro, are all members of the Mandé Grassroots Associations Federation (FABEMA). 3AG, which was established in 1990, is dedicated to empowering rural organisations. It has been engaged since 2001 in the transfer of competences and responsibilities to FABEMA. In effect, FABEMA is comprised of 40 sub-sectors, 5 sectors, 2 unions and 1 federal office. Its activities directly benefit its 4000 active members in 117 grassroots associations. 3AG aims to empower FABEMA and to establish it on an autonomous footing to such a degree that it can sustain its activities itself.

One of the main obstacles faced by FABEMA in its work has been the lack of communications between its two bases in Bancoumana and Dangassa and the other villages where it is active. In light of these problems, 3AG and



Mali Profile

Surface area (km ²):	1,240,200 km ²
Population:	13.0 million
Life expectancy:	48.4 years

Source: World development indicators, World Bank database, 2009

Access to communication technology per 1000 people par 1000 personnes

Mobile subscribers	271
Internet users:	16
Personal computers:	8

Source: World Bank – ICT at a glance, 2008

Data on the project

Sector:	Health
Number of users and beneficiaries:	50 000
Target groups:	Farmers, women, young people, hunters, fishermen and leading figures in the Mandé rural areas.

FABEMA developed the idea of the “Mandé Information Network” project.

Project description

The project consists of establishing an effective system of communications and information in the Mandé and Tiakadougou regions in order to facilitate the collection, processing and dissemination of information between 3AG, FABEMA and its members. The project was launched in April 2005, tackling the communications problem using a shortwave radio system (RAC) – this is an autonomous radio system for long-distance communications. The system operates on solar energy in five selected villages, with a central RAC station linked to the Internet in the 3AG head office in Bamako. The information can be sent from Bamako to all the connected villages and back, but also between the different villages using the RAC system.

The origins of the project

The project emerged during a round table meeting organised by the International Institute for Communications and Development (IICD) in January 2004 on the theme “Development strategies and opportunities for agricultural networks using new information and communication technologies”. The round table meeting gave the various participants the opportunity to analyse and circumscribe

the problems faced by agricultural networks in Mali and to propose appropriate technological solutions. The meeting resulted in the proposal for the “Mandé Information Network” project.

The objectives of the project

The development objective for the project is to raise villagers' awareness of health issues, nutritional security and education by means of information, communications and training. To this end, the organisations involved have developed the following specific objectives:

- improving farmers' results by furthering the circulation of information on agricultural techniques
- facilitating farmers' access to national and international outlets to enhance the marketing of their products
- improving information flows among 3AG-FABEMA grassroots associations
- facilitating the dissemination of information among 3AG-FABEMA-grassroots associations
- facilitating the dissemination of information to Community Health Centres (CSCOM)-FABEMA-beneficiaries
- reducing the number of required physical visits to the villages by extension workers
- enhancing the production and the productivity of the beneficiaries
- raising the income of the beneficiaries
- reducing the cost of information
- helping FABEMA become more autonomous.

An initial evaluation of the project in 2007 demonstrated that not all of the objectives had been achieved because of the short duration of the first phase of the pilot project (3 years), and because of the inadequacy of ICT training and computer skills. During the extension phase (one year) in 2008, the project therefore continued with the objectives from the first phase, adding two other objectives:

- empowering the involvement of seven CSCOM through the activities of the project for one year
- backing up health awareness sessions (Behaviour Change Communication) using ICT for one year.

Target groups

The project target groups are farmers and local people in the Mandé rural area, the 117 FABEMA grassroots associations, 3AG (the support structure), FABEMA (the umbrella organisation) and the seven Community Health Centres (CSCOM) in the project region.

Selected technological solutions

The organisations involved opted for a technological solution at two levels:

- It was decided to use the RAC technology to link FABEMA and the grassroots associations. This consisted of installing radio stations in the five FABEMA sectors, and a central RAC station at the 3AG head office. These RAC stations also included modems for e-mail.
- To link FABEMA and 3AG, it was decided to use Internet



Good hygiene practice in the Mandé region.

”The project supplied the NGO with five computers and virtually all the extension workers at the level of the 3AG office now have a computer. All these machines are connected to high-speed Internet.”

Samba Togola, 3AG Programme Coordinator

technology. This involved installing computers and modems with an Internet connection in Bancoumana and at the 3AG head office in Bamako. This connection system was accompanied by the installation of a telephone line in Bancoumana in order to facilitate oral communications between 3AG and the head office.

The project acquired RAC sets, computers and accessories, modems, solar panels, generators and multimedia tools such as the digital camcorder and digital cameras. The five RAC stations in the project are all operational and the offices of FABEMA in Bancoumana and Dangassa have both been supplied with a computer and a photocopier.

Project management

During the first stage, 3AG provided the management for the project from Bamako and implementation was basically the responsibility of two FABEMA extension workers based in Bancoumana and Dangassa respectively. The two extension workers are backed up by 12 volunteers who ensure the continuity of the RAC stations in the villages in question. At the level of 3AG, a project leader coordinates all the activities and works with specialists (in particular in the fields of health, education and agriculture) who collaborate with FABEMA on its economic and social development activities.

A limited group of local users, including FABEMA extension workers, members of its federal office and 3AG, were trained to use the RAC equipment and in basic ICT (computer, email, Internet). The project trained ten FABEMA extension workers, two at each station, to use these radios.

ICT use appreciated

“The project allowed us to master information technology. I have to admit that I didn’t know how to use the computer before this project. We only had two old computers at the office, and the extension workers and myself wrote our texts in longhand before passing them on to the secretary. However, she couldn’t input all the documents in time.

And only one of the two old computers was connected to the telephone line. The 3AG extension workers would stand in line for the Internet and, on top of that, the connection was very slow. It was all very discouraging. The project supplied the NGO with five computers and virtually all the extension workers at the level of the 3AG office now have a

computer. All these machines are connected to high-speed Internet.” Samba Togola, 3AG Programme Coordinator

The information technology to which 3AG was given access in the context of the project was very useful indeed for the NGO. The project empowered professional development at 3AG, in particular by including all the computers with access to high-speed Internet in a network. It facilitated document handling and the transmission of information to the FABEMA head office and the organisation’s local offices. In turn, FABEMA was empowered in terms of the dissemination of messages targeting the project beneficiaries. Communications are now established between the FABEMA RAC extension workers and the extension workers of other RAC stations in the area such as those of the CSCOM.

A path strewn with obstacles

Nevertheless, at the end of the first phase of the project, 3AG and FABEMA were confronted with the inadequacy of income generated at the level of the RAC stations. Initially the project intended to charge a fee for use of the system. They had to accept reality: the extension workers and the beneficiaries were making little use of the RAC system. According to the users, this was largely due to the lack of training and ICT skills. In actual fact, the infrequent use of the RAC and the non-payment of fees meant that the amount of income generated was low.

The project also ran into major difficulties linked to the thematic approach. Indeed, during the first stage (2005-2007), 3AG and FABEMA had emphasised the dissemination of information about market prices for farming organisations. During the course of the project, it became apparent that most FABEMA agricultural products were sold at local markets. Price differences between these different markets were so minimal that the farmers were not interested in taking their perishable products from one market to another.

As a result, even though the RAC system responded to a demand for improvements in communications and information exchange in the two organisations, the return on investment was not sufficient for the first phase of the project. FABEMA and 3AG understood that they needed to move towards synergy between the initial project activities and more targeted local development activity. This would allow them to improve the use of ICT and safeguard returns.



This well could cause major health problems. 3AG and FABEMA give hygiene and sanitation training to show how people in the Mandé region can reduce health risks.

Change of course

The question that then arose was how to proceed and use ICT to involve the project beneficiaries in local development themes that interested them on a day-to-day basis.

3AG and FABEMA therefore considered their competences and thought about what they could really offer to the project beneficiaries. 3AG focused largely on the institutional empowerment achieved during the first phase of the project (professionalisation of the staff, better-quality documents appreciated by the partners, better time management, and enhanced visibility). FABEMA emphasised the fact that its 4000 members (women, young people, hunters, fishermen, community leaders) and their 10,000 indirect beneficiaries constituted an important component of local civil society. The two organisations also took into account the difficulties of access to the region due to the geographical location (mountain country) and concluded that all the associations making up FABEMA had a direct interest in the community health activities.

3AG and FABEMA therefore decided to integrate the project in the health system of the project area, and to raise awareness on issues relating to food security, education and health by using ICT.

In Mali, the Community Health Centres (CSCOM) are the grassroots health structures managed directly by local people. The CSCOM therefore represent, for 3AG and FABEMA, one of the best available openings for establishing synergy between the project and the beneficiaries.

In March and April 2007, there were therefore two important meetings attended by FABEMA, 3AG and the authorities of the health district of Kati and Ouélessebouyou. Two important points emerged from these meetings. First, of 39 CSCOM operating in the Kati health district, only two had a simple RAC system, this by contrast with the FABEMA RAC systems, which had modems that could connect to the Internet. The CSCOM with no RAC system had difficulties in communicating with the others and in generating content that interested the beneficiaries. The five FABEMA RAC stations were therefore able to serve the CSCOM in the vicinity and make a major contribution to empowering their communications system. Secondly, the CSCOM were able to systematise their Behaviour Change Communications sessions by using ICT. They received support for that purpose from the FABEMA RAC extension workers.

During the extension phase of the project in 2008, the two organisations therefore emphasised empowering local trainers in the use of multimedia with the aim of raising awareness among local people about health issues. The FABEMA and 3AG extension workers therefore started to work with the CSCOM awareness raising campaigns related to vaccination, the prevention of the HIV-AIDS and maternal care.

The basic tools used by FABEMA and 3AG during these awareness raising campaigns were digital photos, videos and PowerPoint presentations. As Souleymane Fadiga, the 3AG project coordinator, emphasised: “Using digital cameras and camcorders, we record health awareness raising sessions in

one village and show them in other project locations. We were trained to use the basic software and the multimedia applications. We were also trained to use PhotoFiltre PowerPoint and in the use of the Internet.”

Some project results

The project booked several positive results, and a few concrete examples are given here.

- The use of the five RAC and of the ICT facilities by other actors such as the CSCOM, the Upper Niger Valley Office (OHVN), the schools in the project area.
- FABEMA has become more visible and more empowered at the institutional level. According to the FABEMA President, the project has established a leadership position for the federation, which has now achieved regional recognition during the establishment of the agencies of the Mali Chamber of Agriculture.
- The project has boosted confidence among the FABEMA support partners. On the basis of the project’s activities thanks to the RAC in the intervention area, the Fonds Ingrid Renard of Belgium has also financed two RAC.
- The CSCOM use the RAC at least once a month. This gives them the opportunity to warn of, or treat, more diseases. For example, thanks to the RAC:
 - At least 40 cases of dystocia have been referred.
 - 70 injuries or serious illnesses have been referred.
 - At least three alerts were given for epidemics in the locations covered by the project.
- In late 2008, the project RAC played a major role in the

campaign for the national nutrition week in the Republic of Mali and particularly in the project area. The CSCOM of Selefougou, Fouh, Dangassa and Kegnero provided the population with extensive information, in cooperation with the RAC extension workers, on the importance of nutrition and vaccination.

- Several awareness raising sessions were organised in the villages covering health and hygiene issues. A total of 1014 people participated directly in awareness raising activities and training related to malaria, breastfeeding, prenatal consultation, hygiene and sanitation (wells and latrines). During 18 awareness raising sessions each year on maternal care, the project reached 20,000 women.

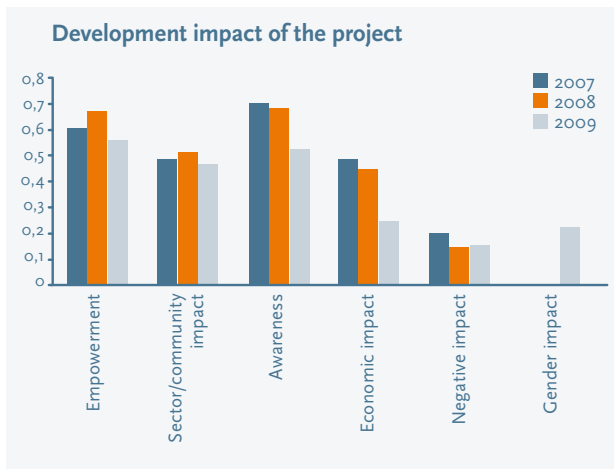
Impact

The users evaluated the perceived impact on development of the “Mandé Information Network” project over a period of three years using the IICD Monitoring & Evaluation system and personal accounts. From 2007 to 2008, there was a clear increase in the impact of the project on development in the area. The evaluation reports from 2007 to 2009 indicate that information, training and local development, and in particular health, constitute the primary preoccupations of the end users of the project. As shown on the graph, the impact on the sector or the community, and the economic impact have all risen.

Nevertheless, from 2009 onwards, the year in which the project continued without direct financing from IICD, the impact of the project generally declined. It is clear that the



Nestor Koné, Head Doctor of Dangassa’s community health centre during an awareness-raising event on maternal health issues.



pilot stage of the project (3 years) was not enough for FABEMA and 3AG to establish their communications system on a sustainable basis.

Project impact on development

Nestor Koné, Head doctor of the Community Health Centre of Dangassa had the following to say in Bambara: “bana kumbèn kafisa n’a furakèli ye”. In other words: “Prevention is better than cure.” He reported: “The project delivered numerous solutions for our problems. Before the project, the raising of awareness on health problems took the form of posters and discussion meetings. Now, showing the images allows women to understand better and they ask for more health information. We go to the CSCOM with our images, show them, and then the women ask questions and receive answers. At present, several health indicators are improving, such as the number of prenatal consultations, the number of pregnant women receiving malaria medication, the number of women using impregnated mosquito nets and the number of non-eventful births.”

Raising awareness

In 2008, the key year for sessions using visual means to address health issues, 80% of the users felt that they were sufficiently aware of the possibilities afforded by the project for improving health. Thanks to ICT (multimedia tools, video projectors, RAC and computers), the second stage of the project facilitated the work of the CSCOM geared to improving health conditions among the people of Mandé.

The awareness raising sessions on health mainly took the form of discussion meetings with visual support during which the themes covered related to prenatal consultation, nutrition, hygiene and sanitation. 3AG and FABEMA also provided training for midwives in the CSCOM. “During the session, the midwife leads the activity, the doctor provides support and I supply complementary information,” states Fatou Diaw, the 3AG Health Coordinator for FABEMA. “After the question and answer session, we interview the medical staff in preparation for the showing of the awareness raising images. The discussions organised on these lines in

some CSCOM are shown at night on large screens in other villages in the vicinity in order to raise awareness among local people on health problems.”

Sayon Camara, a project user in Damalamakandiana, confirms this: “The discussion with visual support is very important for the women, especially for the pregnant ones. It allows them to make pregnancy easier due to the mastery of some basic health concepts.”

“Our local people are very happy with the visual element”, states Fatou Diaw. “Simply saying there will be a cinema showing gets the entire population out. The dissemination of information about health using these tools has been very satisfactory.” The project team organised awareness raising sessions in the villages (for example in Dangassa) on the basis of the activity programme of the Community Health Centres.

Economic impact

According to the different personal accounts of the users and project staff during the Focus Groups and on other occasions, the project has had a positive economic impact. “The Mandé Information Network project furthers communications between 3AG, FABEMA and its localities. It has reduced the cost of communications in the Mandé area and also helped beneficiaries access useful information. The project has empowered FABEMA to become more autonomous. It has also reduced the amount of travel by extension workers by disseminating information through the RAC”. (Moriba Camara, FABEMA President)

Despite the low rate of participation in the email system, FABEMA farmers found that the information circulated on the five RAC stations about grain market prices, in the area or at the national level, was valuable. One FABEMA RAC worker confirmed this: “We broadcast grain prices for the different markets in the area, which gives the farmers a good picture of the situation”.

By informing the producers about the prices for agricultural products and supplying them with information about the good quality of the seeds and agricultural inputs, the project helped increase production and productivity. The users also said that access to information through the RAC had given the FABEMA farmer organisations the opportunity to establish grain stocks at reasonable prices in good time. This meant they knew when it was a good time to sell.

Community impact

The users also found that there was a very considerable effect on the community. They were particularly appreciative of the information provided about health issues in 2009. “This project delivered numerous benefits to local women. At present, thanks to the raising of awareness using visual aids, they come for prenatal and postnatal consultations without being asked. They also bring in their children for vaccinations. They get their children to sleep under impregnated mosquito nets. Currently, malaria is rare here due to the health awareness campaigns. Indeed, it isn’t possible to list all the benefits that this project has brought

”Thanks to this project , I now know how to turn on and use a computer. I have also been supplied with a camera and received training in how to use it. Thanks to the project, I have picked up a lot of experience in the field of raising health awareness.”

to the community”, says user Kandia Camara.

The project covered the three CSCOM in Siby, Bancoumana and Dangassa, with support from the head doctors of the CSCOM (these three centres cover four out of ten communes). The scope of the project has, according to the users, genuinely had a major impact on health in the project area. The midwife at the Dangassa CSCOM, Bintou Traoré, confirms that the projection of images on a large screen during the discussion meetings has resulted in a drastic change in their way of working. “We see a lot more people now. We raise awareness among these people and, in turn, they do the same with other people. The centre is full on prenatal consultation days. Now, thanks to the widespread rise in awareness that we have achieved, women no longer give birth at home in makeshift conditions.” Even apart from the themes relating to reproductive and preventive health, the users think that the project has been successful in terms of its beneficial impact on hygiene and sanitation issues. Indeed, the FABEMA extension workers who received training during the first phase of the project (introduction to information technology, multimedia, use of visual aids) are very active in the field. They take pictures of good and bad hygiene and sanitation practices to support the awareness raising activities of the CSCOM. As far as agriculture is concerned, the users thought that the dissemination of good information about the grain markets and the agricultural campaign were very valuable for the community. Not only did the project empower the FABEMA autonomy process, it also reduced the amount of travel by extension workers due to the dissemination of useful information through the RAC. This allowed the extension workers to work in greater depth on local development activities.

According to the personal accounts of several users, the information spread through the RAC has also helped the people in the communities to prepare better for the winter. “The villages pass on information relating to the winter in their localities. We received information from 3AG and FABEMA in Bamako and Dangassa. When rain floods a village, the extension worker informs us by RAC and we make the appropriate preparations. We also exchange information about grain market prices from the entire area using RAC.” (Balla Traoré from Bancoumana)

Empowerment

In broad terms, the users genuinely felt that the two phases of the project had empowered them. During the Focus

Groups and in their personal accounts, the users said that there has been an increase in skills, their social status, their self-esteem and their influence on decision-making. As demonstrated by the comparison of the impact in 2007 and 2008, empowerment rose from 46% to 61%.

“Thanks to this project , I now know how to turn on and use a computer. I have also been supplied with a camera and received training in how to use it. I use the camera to raise awareness. For example, to address sanitation issues, I take photographs of clean and dirty locations. I then show these photographs during community meetings, giving explanations and teaching people good practice. I often go to the Community Health Centres (CSCOM) to take photos of women during pre- and postnatal consultations. Thanks to the project, I have picked up a lot of experience in the field of raising health awareness”. (An extension worker from Dangassa) Other users have also made similar assertions: “Thanks to the brief training I got from the project, I now use the computer”; “I get information, and I inform others in turn.”

Nevertheless, despite the success achieved in empowerment in 2008, the number of end users trained in the use of ICT fell in the following year. In 2009, 3AG and FABEMA continued the project activities independently without direct financial support from IICD.

During the Focus Group meeting in 2008, the participants asked the project coordination team to extend the training activities and for Internet connections in the other villages working on health. The project team stated in response that it was possible to provide user training and refresher training for the trainers, while emphasising that capacity would depend upon the resources placed at their disposal. Nevertheless, the team promised that the project would do everything to provide training for the maximum number of end users.

During the Focus Group meeting in 2009 and other subsequent discussions, the community users (young people, men or women) stated that the ICT training and equipment had been inadequate, that the training was not long enough and that there was an acknowledged shortage of ICT trainers, even though some extension workers with training showed other people how to use the ICT facilities. “We provided training on the computer tools for the director of the Upper Niger Valley Office (OHVN) here and for several other people. We even provided training for a young person here, who now acts as a link, providing training in several of the surrounding villages. All this can be attributed to the project.” (Ramatou Camara, RAC extension worker in Bancoumana)



The Dangassa extension worker and photographer during the 2009 3AG-FABEMA Focus Group meeting. He has presented his ideas on the importance of digital photos.

Lessons learned

The ten key lessons drawn from the project for their subsequent community development activities, particularly in the area of health, were:

- The awareness raising approach with ICT by the health extension workers, by the local population and other technical services from 3AG and FABEMA was fundamental at all levels of the project.
- The major difficulty encountered was the inadequacy of the facilities for raising health awareness. The project team has stated that, in the end, it has only two digital cameras and two computers for FABEMA as a whole.
- There is considerable appreciation for the collaboration with the head of doctors from the CSCOM. The doctors have subscribed in full to Behaviour Change Communication approach of the project and they support it in the area of health.
- One of the advantages of the visual approach to awareness raising is that it makes it possible to reach a large number of people, including those who are located at long distances from the CSCOM.
- The organisation of Focus Group meetings in the project has brought together the end users and the members of the health education project team. It has also corrected the discrepancies between information provided in the M&E questionnaire (which was translated into the local language Bambara) and the reality of the project in the field. It was precisely the field visits conducted by the Malian and IICD officers responsible for M&E that had a major impact on data analysis.
- The results from the questionnaires collected about the health education projects were supplemented by very good comments and personal accounts from the users and the project team. 3AG and FABEMA insist that, from now on, questionnaires should be distributed to people who can not only complete them well but also support them with practical examples from the field.
- The empowerment of professional development at 3AG in terms of the structure for the training of the FABEMA farming organisations was crucial. The activity reports were illustrated with pictures of the project and products in time for the partners. The identification and transfer of technological options adapted in accordance with FABEMA requirements improved dissemination in the project area.
- The project is new in its field and the 3AG and FABEMA support structures have not mastered it extensively. There are therefore grounds to continue with it. As the users have emphasised, the work got off to a good start but it was not completed due to a lack of resources.
- It is important to capitalise on the achievements of the project. The answers from the users during the Focus Group meetings indicate that the project has been useful and that it is important to share the results in order to draw in other strategic and financial partners.
- Exchanging experiences with other projects using ICT for development in Mali is useful. During the national Focus

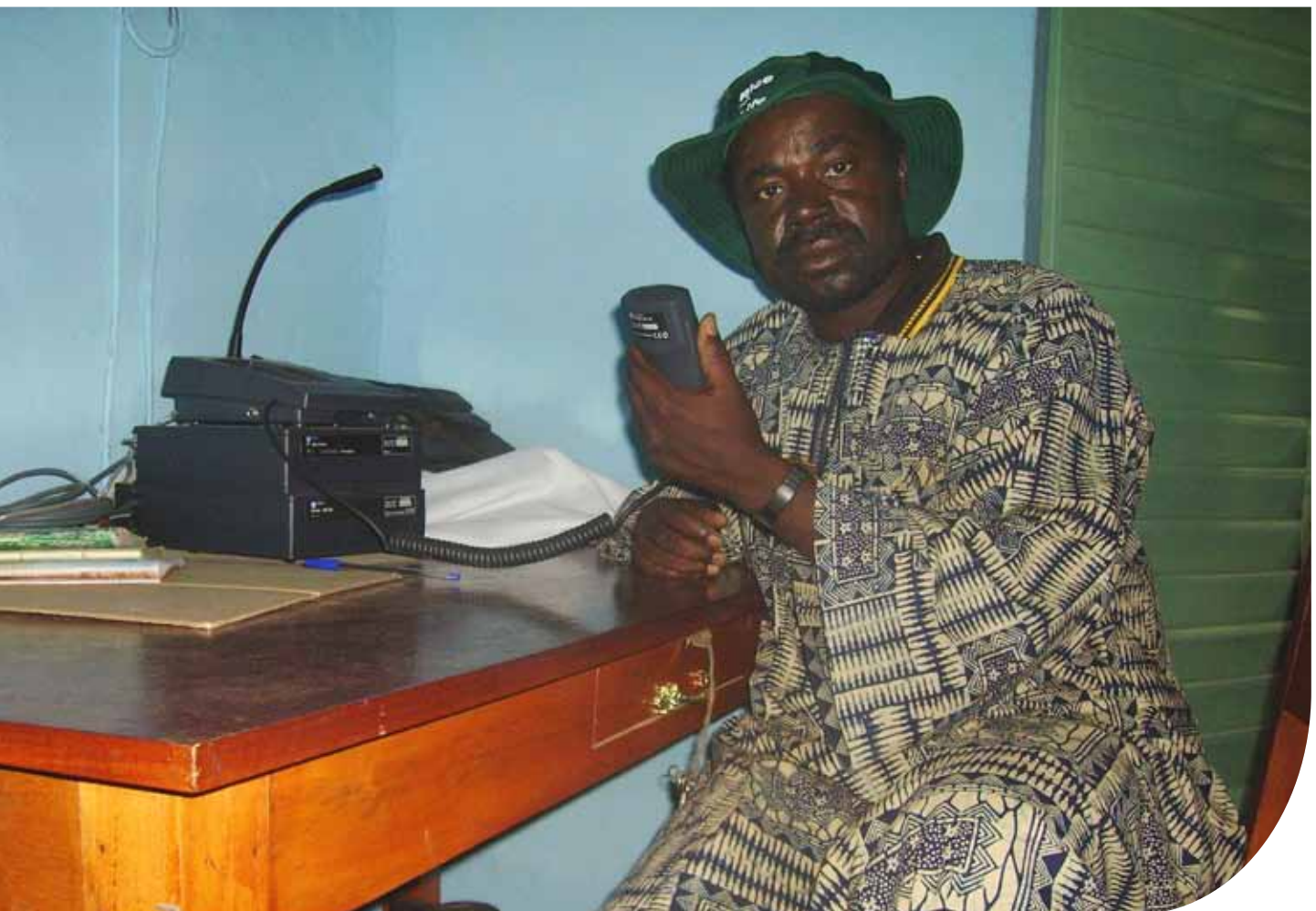
Group meeting dealing with ICT projects for development in November 2006, the other projects supported by IICD helped the Mandé Information Network to initiate its reorientation towards the health sector.

Challenges

The project succeeded in covering only a limited number of villages because of the distances, the difficulties associated with reaching certain villages and the limited resources of the project. The users mentioned the weakness of the energy sources, such as the batteries, which empty quickly. These shortcomings hinder the development of new services such as taking digital identity photographs, making student cards and computer training for pupils. The pupil Youssouf Camara, the prime minister of the Dangassa Children's Government, emphasises this point: "*Ôridinatèri sababula, môgô kelen bise ka môgô tan baara kè, ka dununya kè dugu kelen ye.*" ("Thanks to the computer, a single person can do the same work as ten people and transform the entire world into a single village.") We are serious about the computing training courses here because, every time our big brothers come from Bamako, they talk to us about the benefits of computers."

FABEMA and 3AG did not achieve all the stated objectives related to the email system at the federation's head office in Bancoumana. This is in part due to the difficulties associated with the Internet connection. Because of the access costs of the connection in the area, the option that was finally adopted was the RAC linked to email. However, the arrival of the cell phone network in the area covered by the project has probably had a bigger effect on the more economic use of the RAC by the beneficiaries.

As the Bambara proverb goes: "*Fô ka diya mana duguba jô, kêbaliya b'a tignè*", "a large village built on big words will go to ruin if the words aren't put into deeds." The other FABEMA member villages heard about the benefits of the health awareness raising project in the CSCOM, which received support from the project during the implementation phase. They asked to be included as beneficiaries from the direct activities of the project. The main challenge encountered by 3AG and FABEMA during the second phase of the project was that it covered only three communes and three CSCOM, out of 10 communes and 39 CSCOM. "It was not possible to reach every intervention location in a single year. That is our greatest regret now because I am sure that the work we started is a good thing and we would like to



Sounkalo Coulibaly, first communication extension worker in Bancoumana on the radio with another extension worker.

“Thanks to the computer, a single person can do the same work as ten people and transform the entire world into a single village.”

Youssef Camara, the prime minister of the Dangassa Children's Government

continue with support from a partner like IICD”, commented Fatou Diaw of the 3AG health unit.

As far as the agricultural sector is concerned, the FABEMA farming organisations have stated that the project could contribute more to boosting their income and agricultural production. Nevertheless, information about seed crops and agricultural additives would have to circulate well between the villages in the project area using a tailored technological solution. At the Focus Group meeting in 2009, the users said not only that the project did not last long enough but also that the ICT equipment and training were inadequate. These were essential factors explaining the limited impact of the project in the ten communes covered by FABEMA. Several of them emphasised once again the difficulties of communicating with each other's villages in the absence of means of transport, while the often-praised Internet connection failed, even disregarding the lack of electricity and human resources (technical trainers).

Pending the arrival of more ICT material in the project area, the project team suggested establishing a system of rotation for the use of ICT by the users. 3AG and FABEMA also wish to provide solutions for the issues relating to the extension of the training base, the Internet connection and the coverage of the other villages in the health areas. The project team has indicated that it is available for the purpose of broader training and that it is willing to provide training in accordance with its resources and to bring the technical trainers up to standard.

On several occasions, the users have complained about the lack of health information, and particularly the lack of information about good and bad local practices in the fields of health and hygiene. According to the users, the health information is not disseminated adequately due to a lack of resources for organising meetings about health in the different villages in the project area.

Next steps and future plans

Upon the completion of the second stage of the project, 3AG and FABEMA drew up a five-year programme for enhancing community health skills by means of ICT in the ten communes where they are active and in the health areas of the 39 CSCOM. The two organisations are planning to submit this five-year project to several partners, including IICD, in order to obtain technical and financial support. Using this five-year plan, 3AG and FABEMA are hoping to replicate their experience with ICT in health throughout the country. Their implementation strategy includes

collaboration in the future with other expert health organisations in Mali, such as REIMICOM, FENASCOM, the Dangassa Community Health Association, the Kati, Kangaba, and Ouélessebouougou health districts and IICD. According to 3AG, this collaboration will further the elaboration of health awareness raising tools and their dissemination to beneficiaries, as well as training for technical health staff. The main conclusion from the Focus Group meeting in 2009 was that the project had, despite the limited duration, managed to do very good work in the Mandé area. Even though the users found that there were shortfalls on the implementation side, the project team is aware of this problem. It has therefore committed itself to capitalising on its experience by sharing it with other partners in Mali and abroad. 3AG and FABEMA hope that sharing their experience will also result in contacts with other partners. The main conclusion from the Focus Group meeting in 2009 was that the project had, despite the limited duration, managed to do very good work in the Mandé area. Even though the users found that there were shortfalls on the implementation side, the project team is aware of this problem. It has therefore committed itself to capitalising its experience through this publication and a film, with the idea of presenting them to other partners in Mali and the world as a whole. 3AG and FABEMA hope that sharing their experience will also result in contacts with other partners.



Project users at the 3AG-FABEMA Focus Group meeting in 2009 during a brainstorm session.

Contact information

3AG

Samba Togola

Programme Coordinator

3AG (Assistance and Support for rural and urban Groups)

Lafiabougou, rue 386 porte 152 P.O. Box 2307 Bamako

Tel: (+223) 229 32 28

mali_3ag@yahoo.fr

IICD

François Laureys

Country Manager Mali

flaureys@iicd.org

Links

<http://www.iicd.org/projects/mali-aaag>

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International Institute for Communication and Development

Visitor's address: Raamweg 5 | 2596 HL La Haye | Pays-Bas

P.O. Box 11586 | 2502 AN The Hague | The Netherlands

Phone: +31 (0)70 311 7311 | Fax: +31 (0)70 311 7322 | E-mail: information@iicd.org | www.iicd.org

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