

Radio Station Saves Lives in Rural Mali

Challenge

Five hundred kilometers from Bamako in the heart of the Niger Central Delta, the village of Diafarabé is home to 13,500 cattle herders, fishermen and farmers. Though located on the banks of the Niger River, Diafarabé is virtually an island for several months each year — cut off from market access and information of the outside world — due to heavy rains, the rising river and poor infrastructure. A fifty-year-old dike surrounds the town in an attempt to prevent catastrophic flooding during the rainy season.



Photo: USAID Mali/Oumar Doucouré

Repaired dike guarding the village of Diafarabé.

Initiative

Many villages and towns in Mali experience the kind of isolation that Diafarabé does. USAID helps communities in Mali establish their own radio stations as part of a program to connect Malians to current events, market prices, and basic information about health and other social concerns. All radio programming is produced by members of the community.

USAID has created or assisted in the development of 87 community radio stations throughout Mali. Diafarabé opened its radio station with USAID support in late August 2003. The radio stations are community owned and run, as well as administered by boards - which must have community-wide representation including women board members - elected by the community.

The radio station broadcasted a state of emergency and stayed on air until the community was fully mobilized.

Results

The radio station has already proved crucial to the safety of the community. Just days after the radio station made its on-air debut, torrential rains fell throughout the day, dumping over 4 inches on Diafarabé — the heaviest rainfall in 30 years. The rainfall was too much for the village's old dyke. That evening, while most people in town slept, the dyke gave way and water started pouring into the village.

Two young men, witnessing the deluge, alerted the Mayor and rushed to the radio station. The radio station broadcasted an emergency message and stayed on-air until the community was fully mobilized. Immediately, cattle were moved to higher ground to prevent drowning. Working throughout the night, villagers struggled to rebuild the dike and hold back the Niger river from destroying their village and jeopardizing countless lives.

The next morning, neighboring villagers who were alerted by the broadcast the night before provided help on the dyke's reconstruction. Mali's extensive radio system is one of the best in Africa. As Diafarabé proves - information is not only educational, it has the potential to save lives.