

# DEVTECH Sphere

DEVTECH SYSTEMS, INC.  
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## RADIO LINKS RURAL MALI TO THE WORLD DevTech's Work Under the Women in Development IQC Contributes to Gender Research

*The market woman in Bamako tunes in to the noontime broadcast of her favorite radio soap opera. A farmer just beyond Niamey's outskirts listens for news about local cotton prices and catches the tail end of a story about cattle rustling in a neighboring village. School-age kids in Ouagadougou crouch behind adults, eavesdropping on the latest music from Bamako, Dakar and Abidjan. Women and girls listen in the background, talking between stories and preparing food in homes from Badalabougou to Timbuktu.*

Across the West African Sahel, where women's access to resources is limited, levels of education and rates of literacy are low, and technology infrastructure remains underdeveloped, radio reigns supreme among communication media. The fundamental technology hasn't changed much over the years, and yet the recent decade has witnessed a virtual explosion in radio programming—especially from rural and community radio stations.

Partly, that growth is due to enlightened liberalization policy measures adopted by governments. Twelve years ago, at the end of Moussa Traore's dictatorship in Mali, only a handful of radio stations transmitted from inside the country. Today, Mali finds nearly 150 stations broadcasting. Most of these are in rural areas, where low-power transmitters bring programming to local listeners within a 75 km radius. Growth of the sector is also spurred by changes in the consumer, including from the advent of affordable radio imports from the Far East, with battery-powered sets recently becoming available for as little as 1500 CFA (\$US3-4). Suddenly, radio is within realistic reach of Malians everywhere, men and women alike.

The popularity of radio—especially in rural areas—is also due to the lack of other alternatives. Television programming is thin and sets are scarce. Where they are available, they're running off batteries for impromptu nighttime sidewalk cinema. Print materials are costly, and are rarely available in the local language translations. Persisting illiteracy (85% and 68% among women and men aged 15—49, respectively; DHS 2001) prevents widespread access to newspapers and books, to say nothing of Internet and email.

Presently, there is little question that radio offers the best means of reaching people in West Africa. As a development practitioner, DevTech understands radio has to do more than provide music and entertainment, but aid in advancing the nation. Whether about malarial prevention or the different candidates standing for election, radio offers an information lifeline to critical communities. At the same time, DevTech approaches the subject from the perspective of gender. In the present case, access to radio is ensured when a society's women and girls have been appropriately integrated within the ranks of producers and consumers.



*Local Malian radio station*

In Spring of 2004, DevTech coordinated a study of Malian women's access to radio. A number of similar studies had previously been undertaken, on rural radio in particular; but the literature was scant with specific regard to women's access to radio. As the holder of the USAID/EGAT/WID Short-term Technical Assistance and Training Task Order, DevTech was well-positioned to provide this type of technical assistance to the Office of Women in Development (WID) and the USAID mission in Bamako, and undertook a countrywide data collection and analysis exercise during March and April of 2004.

In cooperation with the Communications for Development ("ComDev") team at USAID/Bamako and with assistance from UNESCO, DevTech developed a detailed survey questionnaire, including local language adaptation, and designed a sampling framework to assess women's access to radio. Excluding the distant northern reaches of Kidal (which, at the time, would have been difficult to reach due to security concerns) DevTech engaged local experts to implement listener surveys in 22 locations, including the capital city Bamako and diverse regions elsewhere in Mali. (90% of Mali's population lives outside the capital city of Bamako, concentrated for the most part along the irrigated floodplains of the Niger River.) The enumerators—nearly all women and fluent as needed in Bambara, Peuhl, Dogon, and the other local languages of the respective regions—fanned out in teams across thousands of kilometers to accomplish the data collection task.

Over 1000 women, aged 12-54, were randomly sampled: the median age surveyed was 29; fewer



*Surveying a radio listener in rural Mali*

than 20% had received any formal education; just under half indicated any level of economic activity; and over 80% were married. The survey aimed principally to describe listener-ship patterns, including such contributing factors of ownership, means, demand, programming availability, and opportunity.

Some of what the study confirmed came as little surprise: Malian women are generally avid listeners who appear to be principally constrained by *access, the opportunity to listen at will*. On average, one of two women in Mali has access to listen to radio programming. Overall, about a third of Malian women describe themselves as daily listeners; nine out of ten of these daily listeners tune in for more than one hour a day, whereas half listen for more than three hours daily.

Based on the total population surveyed, one out of four women in Mali owns her own radio set. In Bamako, a city of one million, where access is greater than elsewhere in the country and slightly more than half of women own a radio, the proportion that listens at least once a week rises to three-quarters. Among owners,

the rate of listening is predictably higher: about three-quarters listen to the radio for at least an hour a day.

Nearly all women in Mali listen to the radio at home, and the majority listens most during the morning (66%) and night-time (58%) hours. Anyone familiar with the long work day of Mali women knows that the morning hours (after going to market and during food preparation, and the evening after taking care of the home) may well present the only 'free' time a woman has to lavish on such pleasure as a radio program might offer.

Overall, half of all Maliennes listen to the radio less than once a week. The vast majority (73%) say they don't listen due to lack of access—they neither own nor have ready access to tune in elsewhere. Where no radio is present in her immediate household, only one in five women says she has the ability to listen to the radio. Where within a woman's broader community (i.e. beyond her household, extending to her immediate circle of family and friends) there is no radio present, the level of ready access

drops to only 7%. Just under half say that personal obligations—i.e. work—prevents a higher rate of listening. This is easy to understand given that the agricultural season dominates rural activity, and for the most part precludes opportunity to listen to the radio.

Like people the world over, most women in Mali look to the radio as a source of entertainment—nearly all respondents say they listen to the radio for music. A strong percentage, however, claims to have learned useful knowledge due to radio listening. For example, 85% of listener respondents claimed to have gained awareness of HIV/AIDS, at least in part through radio. Likewise, 79% indicated some sense of the importance of girls' education because of radio programming, 73% as regards malaria, and so on. DevTech's study included some assessment of program content, and nearly every station contacted in Bamako and beyond included daily programming of interest to women, which was both educational and informational. Dedicated programming covered everything from home economics to polygamy

to relations between daughter-in-laws and mothers, to female genital mutilation. In the main, and partly as a result of community radio stations being close to their listener audiences, these programs were aired during timeslots that accommodated women's listenership.

One program—which happens to have a pervasive gender theme—stands head and shoulders above the rest in terms of total listenership, including across gender lines. "Gwa Kunda" is *Chaine2's* popular noon-time radio 'feuilleton' (serial drama) listened to by a majority of Bamakois. Delving deep into Malian household dynamics, with strong social messages aimed at women and men equally, the two star antagonists are the wives of one husband, and their antics treat gender in a popular, educational and sustainable fashion. By taking on issues of home economics, health, rural urban distinctions, and of course, polygamy, in ways that are humorous and embrace the local context of Bamako, Gwa Kunda engages half of all listeners from across Bamako's one million inhabitants, week after week. Despite the unlikely hour of broadcast (the noontime hour is generally

a low-listening period, particularly among women), the success of Gwa Kunda offers a model for replication and adaptation among Mali's radio communities.

USAID/Bamako has been actively involved in providing equipment, training and programming for the Malian radio sector; at the end of 2004, ComDev in association with a local media firm helped launch a new radio serial targeting women listeners. Its support overall has helped move closer to the goal of bringing radio coverage to 90% of the population. Efforts such as these, along with those of thousands of dedicated and budding radio professionals across Mali, hold the promise of improvements in the lives of women and men throughout the country. Ensuring women's access to those airwaves further girds that development process, and can be a catalyst as Mali moves forward.

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### **Cuba: Realidad y Destino. Presente y Futuro de la Economía y la Realidad Cubanas**

The book *Cuba: Realidad y Destino. Presente y Futuro de la Economía y la Realidad Cubanas* by DevTech's President Jorge A. Sanguinety, Ph.D., has just been published by Ediciones Universal in Miami, Florida. The presentation and book signing event took place on February, 3, 2005 at the University of Miami. The University's Institute of Cuban and Cuban American Studies also arranged, for the first time, a videoconference that linked Cubans in Miami and Havana for a discussion on the new book. Ms. Kelly Keiderling, a public affairs officer at the U.S. diplomatic mission in Havana, invited about 50 Cuban dissidents to her home in Havana to take part in the videoconference with the Miami panel.

The Spanish-language book predicts a bright future for Cubans in post-communist Cuba if certain conditions are met. The book does not contain economic jargon or numbers, but instead raises awareness among Cubans about the problems that will occur during a transition period from a communist government. The Havana participants said they were thrilled not only to take part in the videoconference, but to openly discuss the book with others in Miami as well. Due to the interest in the book, it is currently being translated into English.

Established in 1984 by economist Jorge A. Sanguinety, Ph.D., DevTech Systems, Inc. is a consulting firm that offers technical assistance in the following practice areas:

- Economic and Social Development
- Education and Human Capacity Development
- Environment and Natural Resource Development
- Evaluation and Performance Monitoring
- Gender Integration (Women in Development)
- Governance



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