



SUCCESS STORY

Female Candidates Spread Their Wings

With new political skills, women double their representation in local government



Photo: USAID

Malian women nearly doubled their representation on communal councils after political training from USAID.

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Telling Our Story

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Since its 1999 local elections, Mali’s government has worked to decentralize power so it can better address the needs of rural areas. Decentralization has also provided new opportunities for women to become involved in the political system.

USAID’s Women in Government initiative — WING — has supported women’s increased participation in local government by helping them hone their political skills and lessening gender-based disparities. WING sponsored training sessions in 16 communities that addressed civic responsibility, public speaking, leadership, advocacy, lobbying and conflict resolution. The sessions included representatives from Mali’s political parties, as well as male and female political candidates who received technical support and guidance on organizing political campaigns. Of the 11,000 people that attended three training sessions, nearly 85 percent were women.

The initiative also emphasized the importance of communication and information dissemination. While 64 percent of Malian households own a radio, only 5 percent own a television, making radio a much more common and effective information resource. WING distributed more than 500 radios to women’s groups in 16 communities, which agreed they would be used solely for collective listening. The radios “allowed access to the news and [kept] us from having to seek everywhere to find out what is happening,” said one woman in the Mopti region.

By learning how to compete, cooperate, succeed and make their voices heard, women were able to expand their representation in local government. In the May 2004 local elections, women nearly doubled their representation on communal councils, claiming 41 of the seats — more than 15 percent — in the 16 communities that hosted training sessions.

“Thanks to the solidarity among the women in the 14 villages in the commune, I was elected,” said council member Yodouru Banou. “I am going to fight for their well-being. Thanks to the WING training, my fellow running mate, who was not well placed on the...list, joined another party. Due to this strategy, today we have two women council members in Dandoli. I need more training as a council member to prove to everyone that things will change with women on the commune council.”