



NEWSLETTER

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FROM THE DIRECTOR

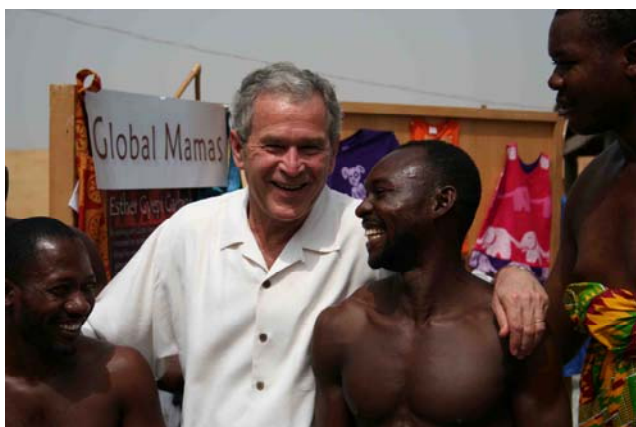
It is a pleasure to share highlights of the USAID/West Africa Regional Mission's programs with you. During the past decade, USAID/WA has been a leading actor in protecting the region's unique biodiversity, improving the health of families and communities, promoting democracy, and increasing opportunities for economic growth in the region.



USAID/WA is working closely with the Governments of the region and other international donors to help ensure the success of the regional socioeconomic development efforts. The region is making significant progress in consolidating democracy, developing the economy along free-market lines, combating corruption and trafficking in persons, fighting HIV/AIDS, and protecting the environment. Donors agree that the West African region now has its best chance in a generation to institute political accountability, liberalize the economy and achieve poverty reduction targets. As a result of its demonstrated commitment to the principles of investing in people, ruling justly, and economic freedom, seven countries in the region have so far been selected as Millennium Challenge Account (MCA) eligible; two at Threshold level and five at Compact. Burkina Faso recently moved into the compact stage and Mauritania will begin its threshold programs in the coming months. The success of the Niger Threshold program, and the new compacts with Burkina Faso and Mauritania, continue to show the importance of USAID in the West Africa region.

Thank you and keep up the excellent work.

Henderson M. Patrick, USAID/West Africa Mission Director



President Bush during a recent visit to Ghana.

TRADE AND ECONOMIC INTEGRATION:

IT'S IN THE BAG: HALLMARK SHIPS RECORD ORDER FROM MALI

Mali's handicraft industry was abuzz in 2007, as artisans across the country prepared thousands of handbags for Hallmark, the largest greeting-card company in the U.S. The bags, made from traditional Malian mud cloth called *Bogolan*, are now on display in Hallmark's Gold Crown stores under the PRODUCT (RED) label, part of a widespread commercial initiative launched by Bono and Bobby Shriver to raise money for The Global Fund, providing AIDS relief in Africa. For more than 200 producers, mostly tailors and cloth dyers, the benefits are already real: months of steady work earning more than twice or three times Mali's minimum wage.

The sheer size of the order – a total of 120,430 bags and 126,000 bead strands for greeting cards, sent in weekly installments – makes it one of the largest single handicrafts purchases ever made in Mali. But the order is groundbreaking in other ways too. It is the first export Mali has shipped under a provision of the U.S. African Growth and Opportunities Act aimed at handmade textiles, which gives the order duty-free status in the U.S. It's also the first time Hallmark has done business in Africa – getting assistance along the way from a unique group of organizations, including the USAID West Africa Trade Hub, the U.S. Peace Corps, MBAs Without Borders, and Africa Now.

ACCESS TO FINANCE YIELDS FIRST BANK LOAN

The headache of getting credit is nothing new to Robert Darko, who has shipped handicrafts from Ghana to the U.S. and Europe since 1994 – mostly to Pier 1 Imports, one of the largest home décor retailers in the U.S. Delays in pre-shipment financing mean that Darko, founder of Kraft Export Consult, can't buy raw materials or customer-required packaging or pay the 1,500-plus artisans who fill the orders for baskets, wood masks, ceramics and other products.

In 2007, Darko joined 270 other participants from 74 export-ready companies in a joint trade-development project from USAID and ECOBANK to improve access to credit for small businesses across West Africa.

Thanks to the program's assistance, Kraft Export Consult recently received \$80,000 in pre-shipment financing from ECOBANK Ghana Limited, allowing him to fill a \$142,000 order from Pier 1. Meanwhile, applications from four other participants are being processed.



USAID and Ecobank Officials Present Loan to West African Exporter

Access to Finance began in 2007 with the support of several USAID-funded organizations, including the West Africa Trade Hub, the International Executive Service Corps (IESC), and the Volunteers for Economic Growth Alliance (VEGA), which implemented the project along with ECOBANK, Africa's leading regional independent banking group. The goal was better relationships between commercial banks and small-to-medium enterprises, particularly those exporting, to increase access to credit and lead to more suitable financial products. Easier credit also helps create a healthier environment for trade, both within West Africa and beyond. Without bank loans, exporters often resort to less formal lines of credit with much higher interest rates – or forego the export order altogether.

The 74 participating enterprises from Benin, Burkina Faso and Ghana export apparel, processed and specialty foods, shea butter, wood products and handicrafts to the U.S. and Europe. They joined ECOBANK officials from six West African countries, who were there to learn about constraints faced by small businesses and find common ground for expectations. During four 3-day workshops, senior-level US volunteers recruited by IESC helped the entrepreneurs address specific problems in accessing finance.

Participants also received toolkits and templates to help prepare business plans and make cash flow projections, as well as guides for preparing financial statements in line with International Financial Reporting Standards (IFRS). Since then, the Hub has registered producers with the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, making it easier for them to export to the U.S.

Kraft Export Consult used these project toolkits to ensure that the format of their cash flow statements and other supporting documents were acceptable to ECOBANK, substantially reducing processing time.



Export Finance Issues Discussed at USAID Workshop

SENEGALESE EXPORTERS REEL IN MILLIONS

Eight months after attending the European Seafood Exposition (ESE) held in Brussels on April 24-26, 2007, Senegalese seafood exporters have reported more than \$6 million in sales from the show, which they attended with assistance from the West Africa Trade Hub. Exports of fresh and frozen, whole and filleted products have been shipped from Senegal to the U.S., Canada, Belgium, Denmark, France, Greece, Italy, Portugal, Spain, and the U.K. More shipments are scheduled in 2008.

The Hub paid \$25,000 for the booth space, enabling the exporters, who paid for their own travel and lodging, to attend. Promotional brochures designed and printed by the Hub featured all the Senegalese exhibitors, providing additional company and contact information for visitors. Mohamed Abd Ali, General Manager of La Pirogue Bleue, said the ESE and the resulting orders have galvanized new investment and a new direction at the company:

“We have already begun to expand our factory and we plan to double our current number of employees – as well as increase the amount of processing so that we can offer a product that is ‘ready to eat.’”

The Hub encourages West African seafood companies to focus on exporting smaller quantities of value-added products in support of a more sustainable fishing sector in West Africa. At the ESE, the Hub launched the West Africa Sustainable Seafood Development Alliance, which seeks to increase cooperation among local and international organizations, public and private stakeholders to attain a sustainable seafood sector in the region.

“We are ready for the American market,” Ali said. “This opportunity, facilitated by the Trade Hub, is a welcome diversification of our markets.”

AGOA WORKSHOPS IN MAURITANIA AND LIBERIA

During the week of March 17, workshops in Mauritania and Liberia highlighted the provisions of the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA), as well as USG programs which can encourage trade and investment and provide support to entrepreneurs. The seminars, which attracted wide participation from both the public and private sectors, featured presentations from multiple USG agencies, including U.S. Departments of State, Labor, Agriculture, the Trade Representative, OPIC, the African Development Foundation, and USAID’s West African Trade Hub.

PRESIDENT BUSH VISITS GHANA:

It was quite a day for Robert Ellis, former statistician for Ghana’s Department of Motor Vehicles, who now creates home décor with an African theme, selling to companies like Pier 1, Cost Plus World Market, and Target in the USA. He and seven other manufacturers were invited to exhibit their products for a special visit to Ghana by President Bush, First Lady Laura Bush, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, and their staff. All of the exhibitors have successfully taken advantage of the African Growth and Opportunity Act and all have received assistance from the USAID West Africa Trade Hub.



President Bush at the Export Showcase

Robert Ellis and one other exhibitor, Renae Adams of the Global Mamas apparel manufacturing cooperative, had been afforded the very special opportunity to brief President Bush and his team privately on their successes and challenges. After their meeting, the President and First Lady emerged to the festive beating of traditional drums, dancers, a school choir, an assembly of senior chiefs, and – oh yes – exhibits of products exported under AGOA.

Ellis recounts how he was moved by the concern that the President showed to him and the other exporters. Not only did the President eagerly engage him in the specifics of his business, but Mrs. Bush later also sent Ellis a handwritten note. Included with the note was a page from a U.S. design magazine that featured contemporary furnishings with hints of the African designs they had seen at the exhibit. Ellis says he is now inspired to be even more innovative in the future to meet the changing needs of the American consumer.



President Bush examines the goods on display

NIGER — THE MILLENNIUM CHALLENGE COOPERATION (MCC)

On March 17, 2008, MCC Niger launched a three-year program which focuses on bolstering girls' education, reducing public corruption, streamlining business creation procedures and improving rights and access to land. The Minister of Finance, Ali Mahamane Lamine Zeine and USAID West Africa's Mission Director, Henderson Patrick signed the agreement.



Minister of Finance, Ali Mahamane Lamine Zeine and USAID West Africa's Mission Director Henderson Patrick at the signing ceremony

MCC UPDATES:

BURKINA FASO GRANT APPROVED



Burkina Faso's compact with the United States is MCC's 17th agreement and follows a successful MCC threshold program that, in partnership with USAID, helped improve girls' education in the country over the past two years. The new compact will build upon this success and fund the construction of classrooms in 132 "girl friendly" schools for grades 4 through 6. The compact will also improve land and rural productivity through investments in irrigation and water management, technical assistance to farmers, access to rural credit and improved rural and primary roads.

As part of MCC's overall mandate to reduce poverty through economic growth, MCC threshold programs are designed to assist countries that are on the "threshold" of eligibility for large-scale Millennium Challenge Account grants, or Compacts. This is the 2nd Threshold Program, with a 3rd under review.

Threshold program assistance is used to help countries address the specific policy areas for improvement indicated by their scores on 17 policy indicators in three categories: Ruling Justly, Investing in People, and Encouraging Economic Freedom.

These policy indicators are central to the criteria and methodology for compact eligibility and are products of respected international institutions and national data. Each indicator was selected based on its relationship to growth and poverty reduction, the number of countries it covers, its transparency and availability, its analytical rigor, and its objectivity.

HEALTH:

AWARE HIV/AIDS & REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH

USAID/West Africa's two flagship health projects, the Action for the West African Region (AWARE) HIV/AIDS and Reproductive Health projects, have been promoting improved health policies and replication of best practices for service delivery in the region for the past 5 years. Both projects have resulted in great indirect impact on the health systems and policy environment in West Africa.

Support to West African Health Organization (WAHO) in national policy harmonization effected two key improvements in the regional legal environment:

- 1) Four countries (Senegal, Burkina Faso, Togo, and Niger) passed a model Reproductive Health Law overturning laws prohibiting family planning. Over 10 million reproductive age women and couples now have rights to manage their family size.
- 2) The ECOWAS Health Ministers showed their commitment to family planning by passing a resolution endorsing a regional contraceptive commodity security strategy which harmonizes commodity policy and regulatory frameworks across ECOWAS member states, thereby setting a strong policy foundation for improved access to and management of family planning commodities for over 130 million people.

Similarly in maternal and child health, USAID support to improve the management and advocacy skills of a cadre of regional technical institutions to provide cost-effective, practical south-to-south technical assistance to national and regional government effected adoption in five countries (Benin, Burkina Faso, Guinea, Mauritania, and Niger), of the Intermittent Presumptive Treatment policy to treat malaria in pregnancy, directly impacting over 29 million reproductive age women and children under five.

In HIV/AIDS, working with the Ambassadors of Hope (a network of high-profile West African parliamentarians, journalists, and religious leaders), the program effected passage of a model HIV/AIDS Law in nine countries (Niger, Benin, Guinea, Togo, Mali, Guinea Bissau, Sierra Leone, Mauritania, and Burkina Faso) that guarantees infected people political rights against discrimination. As a result, over 700,000 people living with HIV/AIDS now benefit from a more secure political environment which sets the stage for other advancements in social and economic domains.



HIV billboard in Cape Verde

A key component of these projects is actively sharing best practices and lessons learned with regional and donor partners and exerting a positive influence on programming and policy decisions in West Africa. To help accomplish this, the AWARE-Reproductive Health and AWARE-HIV/AIDS projects hosted a series of dissemination workshops between February and July 2008.

PEACE AND SECURITY:

ANTI-TRAFFICKING INFORMATION AND MOBILIZATION ACTIVITIES IN THE KAILAHUN-LOFA-GUECKEDOU FOREST REGION AXIS

Transfer of capacity

Search for Common Ground (SFCG) facilitated the process of incorporating local drama into the fabric of civil society movements. During the implementation of the Anti-Trafficking in Persons project, funded by USAID/WA, SFCG utilized the trained members of the drama team in Kailahun, called Tegloma Theatre, to produce the local radio drama series “Unity Boat” from Kailahun. This has been a successful way to transfer capacity, provide livelihood, and empower



Scriptwriter reading his scripts

community groups to tackle their own issues. One of the local dramatists, Gina Kpundeh, who is also handicapped and resides in the disabled peoples’ camp, said “I thank God I have been able to be part of this group and with my skill I can now make a living. We

now have a bank account in the community bank in Segbwema and this is a source of inspiration for me. When we acted the drama on trafficking on video it was shown in Kailahun and when the community people saw me, it made me popular and I am now a star, thank God!”

Local language video creates impact

Search for Common Ground also produced four fifteen-minute local language videos on issues of trafficking in persons (TIP). The videos were screened in border communities in Lofa, Gueckedou and Kailahun. Using local actors, the video highlighted real-life situations, leaving the audience shocked about the way in which TIP takes place. During the video feedback session in Kailahun, a woman who described herself as a victim of human trafficking shared her experience with the audience. “I was given to my aunt who used to stay in Kenema, so that I would be sent to school. Upon arrival in Kenema, my aunty did not send me to school. Rather she kept me at home to perform household chores for her own children while they went to school.

Eventually, I fell in love with a Nigerian soldier who was in Sierra Leone on military operations with the Economic Community of West Africa Monitoring Group (ECOMOG). After his mission, he took me to Nigeria to see his relatives



Community members watching the video

without telling me that he had three wives back home and I was going to be the fourth wife. When we got there, I was taken to the village and forced into farming. Life became very difficult and unbearable for

me in Nigeria. Fortunately, some neighbors assisted me with transportation to visit the Sierra Leone embassy in Nigeria. The embassy contacted my parents and repatriated me back to Sierra Leone. I came back with three children I had with the Nigerian soldier.” A shocked and overwhelmed audience demanded that the video be screened again, requesting that the video be shown in schools and copies be made in more local languages.

AGADEZ – NIGER RURAL RADIO REHABILITATION

Despite on-going insecurity in the northern part of Niger, Africare/Niger successfully rehabilitated 13 existing rural



radio stations in the Agadez region and set up one new radio station in the rural commune of Tassara. The Agadez Rural Radio Rehabilitation and Expansion Project was funded by USAID

for a two-year period and is playing a key role in broadcasting messages of peace and other useful information to the isolated population of the Agadez region.

As a result of the rehabilitation of the equipment, radio transmissions now reach an increased number of people living in this wedged northern region. Access to, and availability of, information in this insecure area is still very crucial. As one frequent radio listener said to Africare, "Now our radios broadcast our messages much further, particularly Peace Messages, which are very significant for us".

With the support of USAID, the project beneficiaries received several training workshops, assistance for their information needs, and learned how to work in small groups.



The objective of this particular workshop focused on various technical radio production methods. An additional training workshop in management and

exploitation of rural radios was held in December 2007 at the Africare/Agadez office. This workshop reinforced the capacities of the twenty animators/journalists in the conception, production and the realization of transmission in concordance with international standards.

This training workshop will allow the beneficiary radio stations to broadcast in accordance with the required standards, and relevant laws and conventions that govern radios in Niger and its environs.



The workshops equally empowered men and women.

FOOD FOR PEACE:

FOOD PRICES ESCALATE IN WEST AFRICA

Food prices have increased by ten to ninety percent in the West African region compared to last year. Price increases are influenced by the international market as well as the various forms of trade barriers being imposed by governments to protect consumers in urban areas. According to data collected by the Regional Food for Peace Office (RFFPO) in Dakar, these measures have increased transaction costs of cereals and already distorted markets. CILSS and the United Nations estimate that 9.6 million people in Mauritania, Nigeria, Niger, and Senegal are facing serious food shortages due to a combination of factors. These countries must be targeted for USG food aid assistance when additional funds become available. The USAID/DCHA regional staff based in Dakar is concerned about the dearth of information on vulnerable populations and coping mechanisms in affected areas and the need for additional FFP monitors particularly in Niger, Burkina Faso, Liberia and Sierra Leone. Donor coordination is also a serious concern. Food price increases vary among and even within counties. For example, the price of one kilogram of millet, sorghum or maize in the production areas of Niger was between 160 and 200 FCFA in March 2008. (FCFA is the Euro-based currency used mostly in francophone West Africa). The price of the same commodities during the same period ranged from 85 to 125 FCFA in Mali and Burkina Faso. This variation in cereal prices can be explained by high deficits in northern Nigeria and the disruption of key cereal markets in Burkina Faso and Nigeria. In an important market in Nigeria known as Dawanau, prices of major cereals are currently twice as high when compared to the same period last year. In this area, high grain prices are reportedly due to increased industrial demands for maize and to a lesser extent for sorghum. In Senegal, food price increases of 10 to 29 percent are being reported by RFFPO partners; a kilogram of millet, sorghum, and maize was sold for 191, 192 and 200 FCFA in March 2007, compared to 231, 213, and 250 FCFA in March 2008. The price of wheat flour, which is the main staple in Mauritania, has also increased by 37 percent in Nouakchott, the capital city.

AGRICULTURE, FOOD SECURITY, AND NATURAL RESOURCES MANAGEMENT:

WEST AFRICA SEED ALLIANCE (WASA):

WASA, a public-private partnership alliance with the goal of promoting a commercial seed industry in West Africa, finally convened its first steering committee (SC) meeting in November 2007 in Accra, Ghana, and was quite successful. The SC is the highest decision making organ and comprises both the resource partners, selected regional organizations, and implementing partners. The SC meets twice a year with one meeting to coincide with the African Seed Trade Association's Annual Congress in order to promote synergies.

Among the expected WASA outputs include – establishment of over 800 agro-dealers in each of the five focus countries; providing over 500,000 farmers quality seeds and planting material; supporting at least 25 local seed companies; and leveraging \$15 million and generating \$50 million in revenue. Major achievements to date include – signing a 5-year cooperative agreement with International Crops Research Institute for Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT); posting a WASA Coordinator in Mali and Chief of Party in Ghana; recruiting

country teams in Mali and Ghana; and participation of 17 countries in a Seed Quarantine Pests workshop.



Workshop on seed quarantine pests, Bamako, Mali

DEVELOPING CAPACITY TO PRODUCE ORGANIC AND EQUITABLE COTTON:

In the first such deal in West Africa, the Union National de Producteurs de Coton du Burkina (UNPC-B) recently signed a five-year sales partnership agreement with Victoria's Secret, the Indian Alok Industries, and Sri Lanka-based MAS Holdings Group, under which these buyers would purchase Burkina Faso's entire organic cotton harvest (1,300 tons).

The West African Cotton Improvement Program (WACIP) is providing financial and technical assistance to UNPC-B to assist the group in meeting this demand, and more broadly to professionalize organic cotton cultivation and handling. As a first step in that direction, WACIP financed the procurement of cotton bags for the harvest, collection, transport, and drying of the organic cotton; organic cotton cannot be sold if handled in polypropylene (plastic) bags.

STRENGTHENING EXPORT CAPACITY OF COTTON ARTISANS:

In order to provide a boost to the artisanal textile activity in West Africa, the Union of Textile and Clothing Specialists (Union des Professionnels du Textile et de l'Habillement du Centre) took the lead in organizing this second edition of artisanal exhibitions and related events for artisan entrepreneurs in Burkina Faso, with the participation of partner networks from Mali and Senegal. The aims were (i) to promote hand loom weaving products, especially the Faso Dan Fani label; (ii) to create a forum for stakeholders in the artisan textile value chain and link them with local, regional and international markets; and (iii) to increase the incomes of artisan entrepreneurs. The artisanal exhibitions were held from November 29 to December 2 in Burkina Faso and December 9-12 in Mali.

COTTON BREEDERS CONFERENCE:

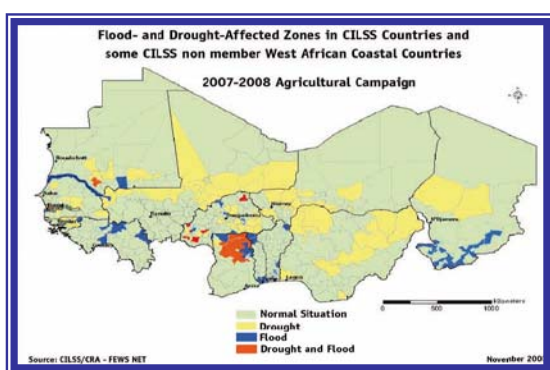
In order to improve the quality of the region's cotton fiber, WACIP, in collaboration with the West and Central African Council for Agricultural Research and Development (CORAF), organized a workshop to promote seed production and improved varieties of cotton in African countries.

The Cotton Breeders conference was held during November 28-30 in Bamako, Mali.

The three-day workshop brought together researchers, cotton breeders, seed farmers, administrators from the Ministry of Agriculture charged with seed multiplication and control for the C-4 countries, producers, and WACIP's Country coordinators from the C-4 countries. Because of the workshop, the group compiled an inventory of the range of genetic varieties in use in the C-4 zone, and developed plans for conserving varietal purity and for linking research to the marketable qualities of cotton lint.

BIOTECHNOLOGY AND BIOSAFETY: CILSS IS PAVING THE WAY

Modern biotechnology or genetic engineering offers tremendous opportunities to boost agricultural production in the West Africa region. However, without proper legislation in place, no country can safely and legally benefit from this new technology. To aid countries in the region, USAID has been supporting the Permanent Inter-State Committee for Drought Control in the Sahel (CILSS) to develop a common biosafety regulation for its 9 member states, for the safe use of transgenic commodities. The aim of this regional approach is to facilitate the introduction of crop and livestock biotechnology applications developed by the public and private sectors.



The CILSS Convention on Biosafety enables the pooling of technical expertise and the consideration of potential environmental impact across country borders and will reduce duplication of risk assessment reviews, ensuring that the risk assessment of transgenic organisms is carried out in a standardized manner that provides adequate environmental protection and access to new, safe technology.

The Convention enables interaction between national biosafety authorities and regional member countries and can assist national decision making where biosafety capacity or structure is lacking.

CILSS has progressed steadily and is now collaborating with ECOWAS to expand the CILSS biosafety framework to include all ECOWAS countries. It was expected that the ECOWAS Council of Ministers would adopt a regional biosafety framework based on the CILSS model by June, 2008. There are also efforts underway between CILSS, ECOWAS and WAEMU to harmonize the CILSS initiative with an upcoming World Bank funded project on biosafety to be implemented by WAEMU. This alignment will ensure that the entire West Africa region will fully benefit from the available resources to develop biosafety regulation.

TECHNOLOGY PACKAGES TO INCREASE PRODUCTIVITY:

WACIP's flagship activity is the dissemination of improved technology packages involving Integrated Pest Management and Integrated Soil Fertility Management techniques to improve soil fertility and control pests, and thereby increase the yields of cotton (and rotational) crops and the profits of cotton smallholders. WACIP kicked off this large-scale activity, which will directly affect 150,000 cotton producers (and indirectly another 210,000) with a regional training of trainers' workshop in Mali in late March/early April, which was addressed by Tiemoko Sangare, Mali's Minister of Agriculture. During the 2008-2009 cotton-growing season, across the C-4 countries (Benin, Burkina Faso, Chad, and Mali), the 32 senior trainers who attended the Mali workshop will each train 25 national extension agents, who will in turn each teach the package to 125 producers in their zones, who will then each pass the new knowledge on to additional producers. This activity is projected to lead to a 15 percent increase in the net revenues of cotton producers and a 20 percent increase in their cotton yields by the 2010 harvest.

HIGHLIGHTS: RECENT ACTIVITIES

WASA Workshop: 17 countries participated in a workshop on seed quarantine pests in Bamako, Mali from November 26-30, 2007. USAID's, Senior Agriculture Advisor gave the closing remarks on behalf of the alliance partners.

Nouakchott, March 17-21: CILSS organized the Food Security Early Warning meeting, to discuss the final crop outcomes for the 2007/2008 agriculture season and analyze the actions done on the zones at risk.

Staple Crops Program: CORAF/WECARD is carrying out a consultative survey with key organizations in staple crops in six representative countries as a pre-requisite to identifying priority investments in this sub-sector. It will be followed by a small working group workshop to develop the priority regional projects over the next five years in support of the CAADP Pillar 4.

The USAID/West Africa Newsletter provides our readers with news about activities and events taking place in our Mission and Region. Please submit all comments and thoughts about our Newsletter to mquarcoo@usaid.gov.