

Promoting Access to Information in Mali

Project Description

Making demonstrable progress towards good governance through greater citizen Access to Information

Since February 2004, the Carter Center (CC) has been working with the office of the President of Mali and the Institutional Development Commission (CDI) of the Ministry of Public Administration, State Reform and Institutional Relations to improve transparency and good governance in the Malian administration.

The project is helping the CDI and 6 pilot government agencies put into practice better public service and access to information through a six-pillar Strategy focused on building the skills, resources and administrative organization needed to make it easier for Malian citizens to gain access to personal and public documents. The Strategy is an integral part of Mali's wider project of state reform, the Institutional Development Program (PDI).



Former President Jimmy Carter and President Amadou Toumani Touré review mid-point progress, September 2005

Process and results to date

Choosing an approach : In 2004, the Carter Center worked with government, civil society, parliamentarians and donors to develop an initial analysis of the laws and practices that shape information flows in Mali and to identify different options for improving public access to information. Stakeholders agreed on an approach that would support concrete advances in the application of Mali's existing legislation while identifying gaps and weaknesses in that system. President Touré confirmed the decision to pursue a *pilot phase* in December 2004. Lessons learned from the pilot process will be used to help Mali decide how to strengthen citizen access to information.



ATI in Mali:

A challenging point of departure—inadequately trained agents, limited financial and physical resources, a lingering administrative culture of secrecy—but political will to open the administration to its users.



Preparing the 2-year pilot phase: In 2005, the Carter Center worked with the Malian government and stakeholders to develop the *Strategy for Access to Information in the Administration (SAISA)* and to select 6 pilot agencies to put it into practice.



Developing an ATI Strategy specific to the Malian context

TCC and Malian officials from the Presidency and the CDI review stakeholders' input to SAISA development and pilot agency selection (April 05).

The Carter Center also supported CDI and pilot preparation of various elements of SAISA implementation:

- Coordination meetings led by the CDI and including key government partners (Presidency, Bureau of the Mediator of the Republic, National Department of Archives, AGETIC, MATQL, MFPRERI/ DAF) ;
- Verbal communication of the pilot agency list to the Council of Ministers (June 29, 2005);
- Awareness raising workshops for the administration and civil society on the value of access to public information;
- Initial evaluation of the infrastructure, equipment, and training necessary to implement the SAISA and allocation in the 2006 budget of the MFPRERI/ CDI (PDI funds), MATQL, and AGETIC;
- Regular planning meetings with the pilot structures.

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Process and results to date (continued)



Building capacity and content : ATI Pilot Phase

The first half of 2006 marks the beginning of pilot phase implementation of the SAISA. The Carter Center continued to work closely with the CDI and the pilot structures on the establishment of internal SAISA implementation teams, development of agency-specific action plans, awareness raising, initiating more efficient archiving and record-keeping systems, and training pilot structure personnel. Key processes and outputs to date include:

- Signing of the MOU between the CDI and the Directors and Ministers of the six pilot agencies;
- Sharing pilot experiences and lessons learned from ATI initiatives in other countries;
- Agreement on a preliminary list of documents held by the pilot agencies that will be made available to the public in the short-term;



High-level commitment to openness:

Signature of the MOU between the CDI and Ministers and Directors of the pilot agencies agreeing to mutual roles and responsibilities. (February 2006)



- ▲ Role playing to build capacity to professionally handle user requests (June 06)
- Practical exercises on applying archiving principles and procedures (April 06)

- Finalization of agency actions plan for implementing the SAISA over the period January 2006 through December 2007;
- Addressing institutional and administrative issues linked to the creation of internal SAISA teams;
- Initial analysis of institutional organization issues linked to the smooth flow of information within the pilot agencies and between the agencies and public service users;
- Training on archiving and record-keeping, and the professionalisation of welcome desk functions
- Communications and awareness raising for Ministers, pilot agencies and the public.

Preliminary Lessons Learned

- ATI pilot agency officials see a professional interest in doing their job better, but also a personal advantage to a more efficient Malian administration: they are public service users too!
- The CDI and pilot agencies have had to work hard to produce the results achieved to date. ATI is a new concept and Malian public servants face severe gaps in the resources, training, and administrative culture conducive to creating a more open administration. Setting progressive but realistic goals and acknowledging even small steps forward have been key to allaying frustration with what is sometimes a 'two steps forward, one step back' process.
- Ensuring ATI is resource-intensive. The CDI is documenting the costs of the pilot process in order to later inform government decision-making about how best to extend SAISA implementation across the administration. The pilots are also looking for creative, cost-effective means for putting ATI into practice.
- SAISA implementation is bringing to light challenges tied to the wider dysfunctions and weaknesses in the Malian administration. Anchoring the SAISA in the wider PDI helps ensure that systemic problems (e.g. unclear institutional texts and decision-making processes; rudimentary physical resources; transfer of resources to decentralized government) are documented for consideration under other elements of the PDI.

Next steps

In July 2006, the CDI hosted the first 'milestone meeting' with pilot structures, other government agencies, civil society and donors to discuss progress to date. Efforts over the second half of 2006 will be focused on consolidating the internal SAISA implementation teams, developing a monitoring and evaluation process and indicators, and planning and executing capacity building initiatives and continuing technical support, including additional training on archiving and support to outlining and managing existing information flows. Preliminary work on communications will also be undertaken.

Conditional upon available funding, the Carter Center emphasis for 2007 will be on close monitoring and evaluation of pilot agency performance, providing additional technical assistance to address obstacles encountered, and continued awareness raising and information via expanded communication about ATI and the SAISA pilot initiative to other agencies, civil society and the media. A global review of the ATI process will be conducted at the end of 2007 in order to draw specific conclusions drawn from the pilot process on the measures necessary to ensure an effective ATI regime in existing Malian legal and cultural conditions, and to provide recommendations on how Mali could move to a more comprehensive ATI regime.