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## **USAID/Mali Project Supports Fundamental Restructuring of Mali's Approach to Food Security**

Every Malian government since Independence has proclaimed that it would strive to assure that all Malians have enough to eat. With the decline in grain production in 2004/05 due to drought and locust damage, food security is again at the center of Malian government concerns. Yet, although the concept of food security has changed radically since the early 1970s, in *practice*, Malian government food security policy has continued to focus on three elements:

- promoting increased grain production, with a declared aim of assuring food self sufficiency;
- viewing food insecurity primarily as a geographical problem, with all the “vulnerable” areas located in the arid northern part of the country;
- responding to periodic food crises through free food aid distribution in hard-hit areas.

In 2004, the Malian government, in an effort to address issues of food insecurity more effectively, created a new Food Security Commissariat (*Commissariat à la Sécurité Alimentaire*, or CSA) in the office of the President. Since September 2004, USAID/Mali has provided technical support to the CSA through PROMISAM (Projet de Mobilisation des Initiatives en matière de Sécurité Alimentaire au Mali, or Project to Mobilize Food Security Initiatives in Mali) implemented by Michigan State University through the Food Security III Cooperative Agreement.

In its short existence, PROMISAM has helped bring about a radical rethinking of Mali's approach to food security. The GRM's “Response Plan” to the current food crisis, which originally spoke of promoting food self sufficiency and widespread free food distribution, now focuses on a much broader and more flexible approach, speaking of assuring “food and nutritional security” through improving food availability (including via trade as well as domestic production), access (improving rural incomes) and utilization (taking account of the important synergies between health and nutrition). PROMISAM has helped CSA understand the role it can play in helping coordinate efforts across ministries (e.g., Agriculture and Health) to address the multidimensional causes of food insecurity rather than becoming a major implementing agency itself.

PROMISAM and the CSA are also working to move Mali away from hunger relief based on free food aid distribution in times of crisis to building sustainable food security at the local level, which is now the declared policy of the Malian government. PROMISAM is currently training trainers to work with local food security committees (which have representation from civil society and local governments), down to the township (*commune*) level, as they identify the communities' individual food security constraints and develop local programs to address those problems through a highly participatory approach. PROMISAM has already trained 139 trainers of trainers in the northern region of Gao, who are working with their local communities over the next few months to develop their local food security plans, building on local understanding of the nature of the problems and the opportunities. These programs can focus on a wide range of

activities, from enhancing local food production to improving roads (facilitating access to food via trade) to nutrition education programs—whatever the community identifies as their key constraints.

The second round of training will take place in June and July in the southern Sikasso region, reflecting a recognition by the GRM that malnutrition can exist in even the high rainfall areas. (Earlier studies by MSU identified high rates of child malnutrition in cotton-producing areas of the Sikasso region). The CSA intends to scale up the approaches developed in the Gao and Sikasso regions to cover the whole country over the next two years, offering all Malians the promise of a more sustainable food security.