

Listen, think and act: Radio broadcasting to promote farmers' participation in Mali's land policy

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Summary

The vast majority of agricultural production in Mali is carried out by smallholder farmers. These farmers are often unaware of the laws and policies that govern access to the land and resources they rely on to secure their livelihoods. This means they can lose out as access to resources is secured by large-scale agribusinesses or investors. In response, the Institute for Research and Promotion of Alternatives in Development in Africa (IRPAD) launched a project to raise the awareness of farmers and their organisations of agricultural laws and policies in order to enhance their capacities to influence policy and to participate in decision-making in agriculture and natural resource management, particularly on land issues.

IRPAD used an innovative tool to communicate information on the law and related policies to rural people and farmers' organisations. The approach combined community-based training and pre-recorded radio broadcasts explaining the provisions of the newly adopted Agricultural Orientation Law (*Loi d'Orientation Agricole*, LOA), which sets the foundation for the future of Malian agriculture. This information significantly improved farmers' and communities' understanding of the content of this framework law as well as their capacity to engage in its implementation.

About IRPAD

The Institute for Research and Promotion of Alternatives in Development in Africa (IRPAD), based in Mali, carries out a wide range of research activities in the fields of agriculture, pastoralism, fisheries, the economy and social development in Mali and in Africa from scientific, legal, sociological, economic and education perspectives. It uses findings from this research to identify alternative approaches to social and economic development (www.irpadafrique.org).

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1. Introduction

Agriculture is a key element of the Malian economy and the main livelihood activity for the vast majority of its population. In recognition of this, the Malian government drafted a progressive and well thought out framework law to guide agricultural development, the *Loi d'Orientation Agricole* (LOA). The challenge now lies in the implementation of this law and in enabling Malian farmers to use its provisions to secure access to the land and resources on which they rely.

The Institute for Research and Promotion of Alternatives in Development in Africa (IRPAD) has developed a tool to raise awareness of the provisions of this law and foster debate on the governance of natural resources at the local level. Research and training have been carried out and a set of radio broadcasts have been recorded and made available to rural radio stations in two regions of Mali (Segou and Sikasso) to inform farmers of the content of the law and spark debate on how to get involved in decision-making.

The content of broadcasts and training were informed by the results of research conducted by IRPAD and other stakeholders, namely the Association of Professional Farmers' Organisations (*Association des Organisations Professionnelles Paysannes*, AOPP). The purpose of this research was to assess the extent of farmers' and local communities' involvement and participation in agricultural policymaking. The analysis showed a lack of awareness among farmers and their communities on policymaking, their own role in this process and even their rights.

Importantly, the broadcasts, the training and the debates that followed were all carried out in Bambara, the most widely spoken national language. Local participants appreciated the use of their language and were more proactive and asked more questions throughout the process because of it. Rural Mali is centred around a largely oral culture. The use of carefully crafted audio cassettes in conjunction with community radio to communicate information on a policy document is new to Mali and proved to be a valuable approach in this context. This paper sets out IRPAD's experience of developing broadcasts for rural radio on the provisions of the LOA.

2. Background to the tool

2.1 Mali's policy context: the Agricultural Orientation Law (LOA)

The LOA is a framework law adopted by the Malian government to promote sustainable agriculture. This policy document is a vision for the future of the country's agriculture and forms the basis for all agricultural policies and laws to be adopted from 2006 onwards. The LOA seeks to put an end to sector-based approaches to rural development. It sees agriculture in a holistic way, addressing all the relevant sectors through a more integrated approach. Under the law agriculture is defined as a set of activities incorporating 'plant production, cattle farming, fishery and forestry' (Article 7).

Prior to the LOA, some major policy limitations had significant implications for farmers: coherence between policies and sectors was a major challenge; the national land policy contained in the Land Code did not provide for secure land rights for customary land tenure, the main mechanism used by farmers for accessing land; there was no government assistance to farmers who were victims of natural disasters; farming was not formally recognised as a profession including lacking the commensurate social and economic advantages granted to other professions; there was no financial support to poor farmers helping them to access credit, equipment and inputs (seeds, chemicals, etc.). The LOA sought to address some of these challenges.

The drafting process of the LOA involved farmers and rural communities at all levels. This participative approach created a final document that reflects well the concerns and views of different stakeholders. When it was launched, it was positively and enthusiastically welcomed by all parties and the LOA is generally accepted to be a relatively good law. Some of the key innovative aspects of the LOA are:

- food sovereignty as the basis for agricultural policy in Mali, the second country in Africa to legally recognise this concept; and the establishment of the role of local governments in ensuring food sovereignty in Mali
- funding mechanisms and social security including: a National Fund for Agricultural Development, a fund to enable the poorest farmers to access credit, favourable interest rates on loans for agricultural production and related activities, social security for farmers and a disaster fund and agricultural insurance services
- the clear definition of family farming systems and recognition of family farming as the best option for Mali to develop its agriculture, pastoralism, fishing, cattle breeding and forestry

- specific emphasis on addressing land access for marginalised groups, particularly women, youth and disabled persons
- the establishment of a right to professional training for farmers (meaning that farmers could potentially sue the government if this right is denied to them by decision-makers)
- clarification on the roles of all the stakeholders in agricultural development in Mali including local governments, the state, producers, donors, civil society organisations and research institutes.

Despite the existence of this important framework, many gaps still exist. The implementation process has become problematic because of a lack of coherence between the many national projects and programmes being implemented in Mali and the LOA. Land tenure is a case in point. Despite the fact that the LOA clearly recognised food sovereignty as a key principle underpinning the policy and that poor family farms should have secure access to land, many smallholder farmers are still being displaced. In fact, access to Malian lands is given (sometimes for free) to foreign and national investors to the exclusion of poor communities.

However, the LOA is not an end in itself: it is a mechanism or tool that needs to be complemented by implementing measures developed using the same participatory approach as the one used for the drafting process. Some new institutions were created to continue this process. The key institution is the Permanent Secretariat of the LOA; it is responsible for coordinating actions and procedures related to the adoption of implementing measures, which may be laws, decrees, regulations or administrative decisions.

It is this implementation process that was the real target of IRPAD's initiative. Indeed, the preliminary research, the audio tape on the content of the LOA, the training sessions and all other project activities explained key issues in order to enable farmers and local communities, who will be directly affected by the implementation of the LOA, to positively influence the process.

2.2 Weak representation of farmers in Malian policy processes

Based on concerns by IRPAD staff regarding the poor representation of farmers in policy debates and potentially the implementation of the LOA, IRPAD conducted research into the extent of farmers' and local communities' involvement and participation in agricultural policymaking. It was based on three hypotheses:

- Illiteracy prevents farmers from accessing information and participating in policy debate.
- The government does not do enough to provide information to communities, in part due to resourcing but also demonstrating a lack of transparency.
- There is a gap between the knowledge and capacity of the national leaders of farmer organisations and their local level members.

The research revealed key weaknesses related to communication gaps at the grassroots levels. Regional farmers' organisations complained about the lack or weaknesses of communication channels and tools on legal texts, difficulties in understanding some of the technical terms because of the type of language used and their lack of participation in spaces set up to implement these policies. Not understanding key concepts was a major barrier. Farmers also felt that the legal and policy texts were inappropriate. A farmer described the documents as 'copies of the European laws and not adapted to the Malian context'. For them, the documents are not practical and farmers do not know how to use them.

A large majority (76 per cent) of the people interviewed in the preliminary research felt that the participation by key actors in decision-making processes was of bad quality. In general, women are less informed than men about agricultural laws and policies. This affects their ability to participate in consultation and decision-making processes. Community radio broadcasters stated that they had never been involved in communications around the LOA.

The research also found that being a member of a farmers' organisation offers advantages in that it provides access to key information about policy processes related to rural development, but that there is a need to develop horizontal (between farmers' organisations at the local level but also at regional and national levels) and vertical partnerships with other players. Existing spaces for dialogue should be strengthened to make them more relevant and efficient for all stakeholders, mainly farmers.

These findings informed the development of the communications initiative presented in this paper.

3. The tool explained

3.1 Development and dissemination of the audio cassettes

The development and dissemination of audio cassettes on the content of the LOA aimed to improve rural people's understanding of decision/policymaking processes relevant to rural development. This knowledge should enable farmers to participate in and influence these decisions and policies so that they serve their interests.

The tool consists of two audio cassettes recorded in Bambara, the most widely spoken national language in Mali, to explain the LOA. Prior to the production of the cassettes, the LOA was translated to Bambara and copies were sent to different groups and individuals. Additional text was written by IRPAD to explain the process and the objectives of the radio broadcasts. This process ended with training for all participants enabling them to learn more about the LOA and about policy processes in the country.

On the **first cassette**, agricultural development specialists describe the content of the LOA using simplified language in Bambara. The focus is on land tenure and its challenges. This cassette explains as clearly as possible the concepts, chapters and articles contained in the LOA. Other issues like seed production, land access, food sovereignty, water management and the agricultural fund are also explained.

The **second cassette** contains a debate on underlying land tenure challenges and what they mean for farmers in their daily lives. The voices of well-known leaders were used to promote these debates. This cassette is different from the first one as it discusses the daily lives of farmers in relation to land and their struggles to secure tenure while trying to avoid the privatisation of land.

Voices from the AOPP in addition to those from IRPAD's well-known team were used for the recordings. Recording was done in the meeting room of the IRPAD office and not in a studio: this was a symbolic place for dialogue and awareness-raising. The technical staff from the national radio station who produced the cassettes were also deeply involved in the debate as citizens. In addition, they contributed to the translation of some of the concepts into Bambara, helping to make them more relevant.

After producing the cassettes, IRPAD decided to have two versions, one in a single cassette, the second one separating the two parts. Visits were organised to Segou and Sikasso to identify all community and decentralised radio stations. Contracts were signed with the radio stations to broadcast the cassettes as many times as possible leaving airtime for feedback from listeners from local communities. Some were contracted for 16 broadcasts and others for 32. Each broadcast was opened up for discussion with farmers who could call in to ask questions, or send a message to the nearest community radio or to IRPAD and/or AOPP.

Some community radio stations decided to purchase the cassette for broadcasting even though they were not located in Segou or Sikasso. They were interested in the tool and wanted to create more debate in their area.

3.2 Key steps

The research phase

As discussed, the findings from research set the frame for project implementation. The causes of the lack of participation and awareness among local people were identified and actions were targeted towards the relevant groups. Research was an important step. It established the foundation for an effective programme, informing the allocation of the project's few resources. As part of the research, farmers and local technicians worked with farmer organisations to collect data which enabled IRPAD to:

- establish a record of legal and political processes in agriculture
- determine the mechanisms for drafting and adopting laws and agricultural policies
- identify the application/implementation approaches of agricultural policies and laws
- identify areas/frameworks for the participation of farmers' organisations in the process of drafting, implementing, monitoring and evaluating agricultural policies and laws in Mali.

Production and dissemination of the information/communications tool

The dissemination of the Bambara version of the LOA was complemented by the recording of an audio tape explaining the content of this law and its implications for rural development in Mali. The dissemination approach and collaboration with rural and community radio broadcasters is described above.

Because of the length of the cassettes, it was proposed that the content be broadcast in small sections according to the different issues covered, a bit like a radio series. This option helped to generate larger audiences and had a more logical flow designed to guide an effective learning process. Eight rural radios, four in each region (i.e. four different localities), continually broadcasted the cassette over a 16-week period as an audio series debating the issues one by one. This form of broadcasting allowed the recordings to reach a large number of farmers, sometimes in their farms, their fishing places or when out grazing their cattle (pastoralists). In addition, IRPAD contributed some funds to the community radios to help them financially and to support follow-up activities carried out by the stations. Questions that were raised by farmers were sent to either IRPAD or AOPP. Some village level

groups organised public debates around the issues raised to clarify further their situation and provide support to community members.

In addition to the radio broadcasts, another tool was developed: a well-known comedy (theatre) group called 'NYOGOLON' prepared a three-minute sketch. Given the wide audience, IRPAD decided to work with the theatre group to develop a very simple skit showing the impact of bio-piracy on the management of genetic resources in Mali. The sketch shows how local communities are cheated by researchers who exploit them for their knowledge of genetic resources and give back small useless items as gifts. The sketch was very successful and appreciated by local communities who realised the necessity of being aware of the seed and genetic materials they are giving to 'outsiders' for free. IRPAD signed a contract with the national TV station to broadcast this skit.

Training activities to support the broadcasting tool

Four training sessions were conducted during the course of the project in parallel to the audio broadcasts and afterwards. The first was a broad training on rural development and raising awareness of policies in laws for 36 representatives from the Segou and Sikasso regions.

Two simultaneous sessions were also held at the sub-regional level in both regions. Termed 'local workshops', they focused on training local farmers. Although these farmers do not participate in negotiations and consultation with the government during the making of rural development policies and regulations, they do, however, participate in meetings within their organisations to prepare for these negotiations and consultations. The goal of these local workshops was, therefore, to enhance participants' ability to contribute effectively to proposals developed during these preparatory meetings.

The last workshop focused on institutional capacity building. The different actors involved in the project realised that it was important for rural communities to be better organised in order to facilitate better access to information. One key training point was related to the legal status and form of farmers' organisations. A survey of these organisations identified two main types of rural people's associations created under Malian law: cooperatives and unions or farmers' groups. The workshop clarified the differing roles of unions and cooperatives and their areas of intervention as provided by law. A third less common type of association is the umbrella network which brings together coalitions of different kinds of organisations. Examples of these networking organisations include the AOPP and the National Coordination of Farmers' Organisations (*Coordination Nationale des Organisations Paysannes*, CNOP).

4. Main outcomes of the initiative

The process and tools used by IRPAD to achieve its awareness-raising and policy-empowerment objectives have resulted in significant outcomes on two levels: (i) the development of an innovative information and communication tool using community radios and (ii) increased awareness and capacity of farmers to participate in policymaking. This section presents some key outcomes tied closely to the implementation of the broadcasting tool.

- Farmers and rural people were unanimous concerning the usefulness and relevance of the information. As one farmer from Macina explained:

I was working in my farm when I heard from our radio station information on land issues in our region. With my family, we all listened to this discussion since we have a case that needs to be considered by our local authorities. It was so helpful for me! I just decided to go to the radio station and ask for more details. The person I found there gave me some information and advised me to call the organisation that works on this issue for more details. This is why I called you [IRPAD]. (Our translation)

- After listening to the broadcast on local radio, a farmer from Markala in Segou region, who had lost access to his irrigated field, realised that he had to claim it back. He went to the radio station to get more information and then decided to complain to the local administrators. After analysing the situation, the authorities decided to give him back access to his field. It had been taken from him because of difficulties he had in paying the cost of water. He had started growing rice when the authorities from the Office du Niger (the authority that runs the irrigation scheme) came to demand payment and he could not pay.

They decided to take my farm and they gave it to someone who works in an office (a civil servant). He took my farm and all the other resources. My family and myself suffered a lot from that. We asked for information but didn't know where to go. When I heard this news on the radio, I decided to claim the field back knowing that they don't have the right to take my land from me and give it directly to someone else. Finally, they were afraid of the consequences of the situation they created. I decided to talk to the radio so that they can inform people. I don't know if this is the reason why they decided to give back my land. (Markala farmer, Segou; our translation)

- In Sikasso region, a village organised a meeting to discuss land issues after listening to the broadcast. They raised issues related to their own situation and delegated a young farmer to go to the radio station with two questions: one on rights-based approaches and a second on the institutional framework for the management of land. After getting answers to their questions, they decided to hold an annual debate to make their case on land issues to the local council.

This is a very important commitment that could lead to more power for the communities as they engage their leaders in debate and discussion.

- The Dioumara community radio in Kayes region travelled to Bamako to meet with IRPAD in order to get a copy of the cassette. They broadcast it for free for 20 weeks. They reported that their audience increased during this period and that they had many reactions and a lot of feedback from different villages and pastoralists.

The broadcasts enlightened farmers and pushed them to ask more questions about policies on rural development and their involvement in policy processes. Some farmers asked IRPAD to send 'experts' to hold local meetings with them and/or present live radio programmes in their villages. Some community radios have organised group debates around the issues raised by the broadcasts. These debates have sometimes involved local decision-makers, traditional leaders and other groups.

Local workshops (including leaders and farmers) to reinforce information dissemination and strengthen capacity together with the broadcasts also had positive impacts. There were opportunities for leaders to interact with those they represent and through this enhance their leadership skills and legitimacy. Discussion of issues between leaders and farmers led to the collective adoption of strategies and concrete actions to ensure farmers were able to individually engage in debates on the LOA and its implications for the future of Malian agriculture at the local level. The AOPP also organised a meeting facilitated by IRPAD with the permanent secretary of the LOA to discuss the implementation process – this was an important outcome.

5. Enabling factors and challenges

5.1 Enabling factors

The administrative and political context

Freedom of association is guaranteed by Mali's Constitution of 1992. Organisations are free to take on any issues provided that they state their objectives in their constitutive document. The government grants authorisation or a permit based on this document. Political stability and democracy allowed for the creation of IRPAD and the undertaking of these kinds of initiatives. In addition, the government is mandated to adopt a participatory approach for its policymaking process. This resulted in an inclusive process for drafting and adopting the LOA. This participative approach was a basis for IRPAD's project approach.

In 1996, Mali passed a law on decentralisation, a governance model in which local affairs are managed by elected bodies at the local level (local councils). Decentralisation runs parallel to 'deconcentration', through which the government devolves responsibility for ensuring national laws are implemented in the decentralised districts to its local representatives (governors, *préfets* and *sous-préfets*). In addition, some powers and authorities previously held by central government have been transferred to local councils. This institutional arrangement provides spaces for farmers' organisations and IRPAD to impact the decision-making processes in managing natural resources and other contested production factors like water and land.

The organisation of farmers in Mali and partnership between IRPAD and farmers' organisations

Compared to many other countries Malian farmers are well organised. Despite their diversity (different rural sub-sectors, different agro-ecological ecosystems/regions and the different types/statuses of associations), farmers are ultimately united within regional and national level associations and co-ordinating bodies (AOPP and CNOP). These organisations have the authority to represent their members and negotiate on their behalf at the regional, national and even international levels. These umbrella organisations facilitate communication among farmers and also make it easier to communicate effectively with the outside groups.

IRPAD was able to take advantage of this during the preparation, planning and implementation of this initiative. The AOPP was a key partner and stakeholder. Preliminary meetings held with AOPP resulted in the establishment of an Orientation Committee in charge of coordinating project activities. AOPP leaders, who have a great deal of expertise on agricultural issues in Mali and West Africa, have been

involved since the project's inception. They helped prepare the terms of reference for research, participating in the identification of hypotheses and in the drafting of research questions. AOPP is also involved in the implementation of many other project activities.

In addition, IRPAD's executive director and former scientific coordinator has a great deal of experience of working in partnership with farmers' organisations pre-dating the creation of IRPAD. This experience has created trust between farmers and the organisation. Farmers see IRPAD as their legitimate advocates. This longstanding partnership also helped the project achieve positive results, for example by involving farmers in policy debates and increasing their sense of ownership of the project outcomes.

5.2 Challenges and how they were addressed

Deciding which parts of the LOA to include in the radio presentations took careful deliberation. It was a challenge to ensure that the broadcasts were not too long and the content was engaging and not too dull. This was addressed by producing short segments focusing on particular issues. The production team made sure that listeners understood that the broadcasts did not present the whole of the law.

Obtaining feedback from local people following radio broadcasts on the LOA also proved challenging. Staff at IRPAD were unable to keep track of all the broadcasts or to be sure of how many people were listening and how they reacted to the content. As discussed above, some listeners wrote to the radio stations and others travelled to meet the radio presenters. However it was difficult for IRPAD to capture all of these reactions and feedback. The project was implemented over 10 months which is a short period in which to measure outcomes. In this time IRPAD was able to test the strategy and the communication tools. There is now a need to deepen the impact of the work through enhancing the capacity of small-scale farmers to participate in policy debates. The achievement of tangible results will therefore follow from the increased engagement of farmers in policy debates as a result of their improved understanding of policymaking. Transforming the reactions that were captured and the increased awareness by farmers into changes in behaviour and policy implementation is the next challenge.

6. Conclusions

6.1 Lessons learned

A good participatory process for drafting a policy document does not guarantee a participatory implementation phase. Although the newly adopted Agricultural Orientation Law (LOA) was drafted and adopted using a participatory approach, there was no plan for ensuring this participation continued during the implementation phase. IRPAD's research showed that communities were left hanging after the adoption of the LOA and that, since the preliminary consultations, they had forgotten a lot of its content. There was a need for a tool that could help strengthen this approach, making farmers more proactive in their participation.

In Mali, access to information is a right. There is, therefore, space for distributing information on legal documents and policy processes. Parliamentarians generally have a budget for sharing different policy documents with communities. In reality, this dissemination does not take place even if a budget exists. In addition, this right to information is denied to illiterate people since policies are published only in 'The Official Journal' and generally in French. Occasionally a national language version is published but this is very rare. Access to information in this context means physical access but also the capacity to understand the policy documents that are voted on by parliament. Using Bambara to inform and train farmers on agricultural policies and related issues from the local level to the top level is something new in Mali.

Some of the interesting lessons that can be drawn from this case study are, among others:

- Farmers and their organisations are very keen to engage on policy issues but they lack the tools to engage with and challenge decision-makers. There is a need to strengthen the capacities of these organisations, enabling them to meet the communication needs of their members.
- Very simple adapted tools can make a difference if the key beneficiaries are involved in the preparation of these tools. The process of bringing together farmers and media specialists allowed some of them to demystify radio and related communication tools.
- The use of voices from well-known leaders was a key factor for the success of the broadcasts.
- So-called development specialists can learn a lot from farmers and their organisations if they give them space to exchange their stories, perspectives and experiences. Farmers were considered researchers in this process. Their interaction with other researchers was a collective learning process. This gave them space to deliver very relevant outputs after investing a lot of technical input during the preparatory phase.

6.2 Next steps

IRPAD is continuing to work with farmers' organisations at different levels to replicate this process in other areas. The development of other legal tools in the country will also use the lessons learned from this experience to increase their impact. This initiative has opened space for innovation and there is a need to move forward to convince decision-makers to implement similar initiatives so that communities can contribute to the formulation and implementation of public policy. Many relevant and low cost processes can be implemented if decision-makers are committed to participation. It would also be interesting to involve government officials and parliamentarians in this process to give them an opportunity to learn. This piece of the puzzle has been missing in the process. If IRPAD continues its work, these groups will be strongly involved in the project along with other relevant players. IRPAD is also planning to work in other regions of the country and go beyond Mali, contacting organisations in Burkina Faso, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Mauritania where the demand for this kind of tool is very strong. The different tools have been shared with some countries already and this can provide an opportunity to reframe the project.

Acronyms

AOPP	Association of Professional Farmers' Organisations (<i>Association des Organisations Professionnelles Paysannes</i>)
CNOP	National Coordination of Farmers' Organisations (<i>Coordination Nationale des Organisations Paysannes</i>)
IIED	International Institute for Environment and Development
IRPAD	Institute for Research and Promotion of Alternatives in Development in Africa
LOA	Agricultural Orientation Law (<i>Loi d'Orientation Agricole</i>)