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### **ALED's Contribution to the 70<sup>th</sup> World Library and Information Congress**

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#### **Introduction**

Mali has a total area of 1,241,238 km square and a population of eleven (11) million people. Its educational system features a low rate of school attendance, especially for girls. The Government of Mali has launched an initiative called the 10 Year Education Programme that aims to increase the gross rate of school attendance from 55% to 95% between now and the end of 2010 with a target of 45% female participation. To achieve the results of this project, the contribution of libraries is very significant, especially in the rural areas. These areas are isolated and do not offer easy access to reading materials.

Generally, the problems that the educational system of Mali is trying to address are the following: the absence of books in the school, at home and in the various cultural centres, as well as the lack of appropriate structures to encourage reading and the shortage of qualified staff trained in stimulating reading. In spite of the efforts already committed by the State and certain non-governmental organizations (NGOs), supplying books is very expensive and inadequate because of the problems of local publishing and the importation of books. Most children and adults do not have access to reading materials. This problem is especially serious for young girls and women whose rates of literacy are low.

In these circumstances, the needs of the local institutional and community levels are large and the resources of the Association for Reading, Education and Development (ALED) to address them are very limited.

## **Organization and Development**

ALED was established in April 1997 with the support of CODE, a Canadian NGO, which has worked in Mali since 1985. CODE decided to give up its direct provision of services in Mali and chose to work in partnership with a local organization. From 1995 to 1997, when CODE continued to deliver its programmes designed to promote literacy and education, the regional office for West Africa became more and more autonomous. ALED then received the approval of the Government of Mali as a not-for-profit association which **aims to contribute to a literate environment in Mali.**

Administering and directing all Code's programs, ALED is dedicated to promoting the pleasure and culture of reading in children and adults, as well as the use of reading materials for more independence. Thus ALED set up a program: **Support for the Development of Reading in the Segos Region**, the fourth regional capital in Mali. The programme consists of the following elements:

- Creating and strengthening of libraries
- Training library staff
- Purchase and distribution of books
- Reading promotion
- Publishing
- AIDS prevention among students

ALED's goal in providing activities in these areas is **to contribute to community development through the promotion of reading.**

To implement these activities, ALED works very closely with the local groups, with government structures such as the Minister of Education through its branches of the academy of teaching, the Centres of Pedagogical Animation (CAP), and the schools; the media and press, and the regional branches of youth work, arts and sports; and the professionals in the book sector.

To achieve its goal, ALED has identified the following objectives:

- Improve citizens' access to reading materials;
- Create and increase the desire and habit of reading among young people and adults;
- Strengthen the library management skills and use of books among the staff and the users;
- Support the full participation of women in the development of a reading culture.

### **Creating and Strengthening of Libraries**

#### **Creating Libraries**

All the libraries built by ALED are in rural areas. These areas are difficult to reach because of the state of the roads and lack of transportation. This isolation is one of the major obstacles that leads to the lack of reading material in these areas.

At present, ALED has established 44 libraries in the interior of the country. Most are in schools. In serving both as school and community libraries they are open to both the school population and the public. They are all equipped to support reading. They have furniture (chairs, tables, bookshelves, a cupboard and a desk) and quite a wide range of books (1500 on average in each library) written in French and the local languages. This collection is made up of donated North American books and locally purchased books according to the express needs of the users.

Every library has personnel, normally assigned from the teaching staff, who volunteer to manage and provide programming for the library. However, in certain localities, the staff is recruited by the mayor's office. Every library has a Library Management Committee, set up by the community. The Committee has representatives from every walk of life (young people, women, teachers, the local government, the branch

of the Centre for Pedagogical Animation), the parents' association, and the new literates). The role of the Committee is to resolve any problem relating to the library's management and operations, to raise awareness about the services of the library and encourage its use and to raise funds to ensure the continuation of the library the event of the program coming to an end.

According to the results of the final exams at the end of the school year, it is generally accepted that children who go to the library have gradually improved their marks. Some of them receive recognition by achieving the highest marks in the country or at the regional level in the national exams (DEF and CEP).

The creation of libraries has given rise to a great commitment and enthusiasm for reading. Communities show their approval, their interest and their commitment by building or restoring a reading room which becomes the library. At the inauguration ceremonies which attract several thousand people, the festivities are organized by the locally elected representatives, the administrators and parents' associations.

## **Strengthening Libraries**

### **Strengthening the Collection**

Every year an increasingly large and varied number of books are distributed to all the ALED libraries. The majority of books come from donations of North American books and these are supplemented by books bought locally on subjects that meet the needs of the users of the library.

Libraries created by other institutions or schools may request books from these sources from ALED.

### **Installing Other Equipment**

Most of the library sites do not have electricity. Therefore, ALED install a solar panel to light up the reading room so that the library can be open at all times and students may use the facility to improve their attendance and their results at school. Indeed, in the rural areas, a lighted room attracts those who can not come during the day. In some communities, the adults and the children who have just learned to read use the opportunity to learn in the evening.

In addition to the solar panel, two libraries have a bindery where books from the collection or from other sources can be prepared. The bindery has allowed these libraries to generate income for their needs.

Audio-visual machines (radios and videos) are available in some of the libraries. Thanks to the projection of cultural films, and the listening to radio program related to Mali, its stories and local information pertaining to the traditions (Indigenous Knowledge), the library is vibrant and provides a stimulating environment for the community. The library programs lead children and adults (men and women) to the reading materials, after each of these events.

### **Training the Library Staff**

Each year, during school vacations, ALED organizes a session for training in library management and animation. Conducted by a resource person or a specialized institution, the session has 25 to 28 trainees. Most of them are teachers involved in managing the libraries. Seventy per cent of the training time is devoted to library animation, role playing and local visiting that enables the library to carry on and to increase its attendance rate. The animation activities also allow the library to become known in the community and its surroundings, to attract new users, to keep them coming and to earn their loyalty so they become regular library users.

During the session, a module dealing with *gender* is included in the program, since an analysis of statistics shows that the attendance rate by women and girls is low. In order to remedy this discrepancy, the module underlines the difficulties and constraints experienced by women and girls in attending the libraries at the same frequency as men and boys. Thus, the trainees, having worked in small groups, play roles in the large plenary session that illustrate strategies for attracting females to the library. At the end

of each demonstration, other participants make comments to correct any errors or to improve the strategies.

The remaining 30% of the time is devoted to library science following the Dewey Decimal Classification System, a technique of standardized library management used in French-speaking countries. The training in library science allows the trainees to organize and manage all the library materials so they are accessible to the users.

### **Reading Weeks**

Two reading weeks are organized each year in the Ségou region: one in the town of Ségou itself; the second in Markala, a village 35 km from Ségou that has one of the ALED libraries. In addition, the reading week in Markala gives three other neighbouring communities the opportunity to take part in the festivities and competitions.

More than 3,000 people attend the opening ceremonies for reading weeks. Each one is a large-scale festivity in which all administrative and school authorities take part. On that occasion, a cross-school soccer game is organized in the towns concerned. All students, as well as people from all other social backgrounds, fill the stadium to attend the opening ceremony, which is broadcast by the national television. A group of musicians, the local band or an animation team also takes part in the event. During the soccer game, animators are constantly calling out slogans to support library attendance or reading. Before the beginning of the ceremony, administrative and school authorities visit the stands where books are on display. During reading week, the following activities are organized:

#### **Reading games:**

Reading games are aimed at children from primary schools (the six form or grade students). For each reading week, more than 1,500 grade 6 students from the community and surroundings take part in the games. They take part in pre-selection trials that have three stages:

The elimination stages that can take up to three days: after the subject has been given to all the pupils in the class (an average class has 95 pupils) the jury chooses the best students;

The semi-final. From the first selection, the students have the competitions of the semi-final and 20 to 30 students are selected for their performance;

The final: From those who remain, the students take part in the final competition and the 5 best are made winners of the Reading Games.

All candidates who reach finals receive a prize, the top 5 receiving more substantial prizes. Prizes are publicly handed to students in the presence of their parents and friends, at the ceremony ending the reading week. These awards give rise to a competing spirit among the young, who are striving to outdo one another. They encourage and stimulate learning how to read among children.

#### **Reading competition**

The reading competition is aimed at students attending high school, alternately from grade 7 or grade 8. It is organized along the lines of the reading games. More than 1,000 candidates can take part during the first elimination stages of the competition. The subjects chosen are based on real life and current situation such as infectious diseases, HIV/AIDS, schooling, the environment, hygiene and nutrition. In the final round, 20 students have to read a text or small album that they must understand. Questions on the material in the text are asked of the students. There are no questions of a general nature. The best readers are those who make the most points on the questions. The distribution of prizes is done in the same way as noted in the Reading Games. The topics allow young people to prepare themselves for a more active role in the social and civic

life of their communities. Special prizes are also given to the best readers who have read the greatest number of library books.

Games and reading competitions give rise to a healthy spirit of competition among children and make them aware of the joy of reading.

### **Book displays/sales**

Book displays/sales give booksellers an opportunity to make their products and themselves known; moreover, they give a chance to the public not having a local bookshop to discover the diversity of books. Students from all school establishments in Ségou, accompanied by teachers, take a guided tour of the stands according to a schedule set up by the organizing committee for the reading week. These tours enable the students from various schools to discover, appreciate, handle or even buy books or become familiarized with them.

### **Panels**

Panels are organized at FM radio stations and on the national television network; they are a way to make the Malian radio and television public aware of the importance of reading and of the problems related to a popularization of reading. They feature various persons active in the education field (teaching counsellors in the pedagogical animation centres, librarians, parents, students and the ALED team). During the broadcasts, the radio and television public can take part in the debates by telephoning their comments.

The various reading animation and promotion activities work as catalysts, giving rise to associations active in the promotion of reading, the creation of libraries, the organization of conferences/debates, seminars, reading workshops, etc.

Thus, there is now a structure within the Ministry of Education called the School Library Cell. It was established as a result of one of ALED's projects called: Reading in Mali (LECMA).

### **Talks and Conferences/Debates**

#### **Talks**

These talks are held in the local Bamanan language in a cultural centre or in a library. They are centred on country tales by a traditional storyteller of the area, and tales taken from a book. They can often be focused on a current topic such as AIDS or other infectious diseases, hygiene or the environment, or taken from a book with a resource person animating the story. Talk sessions for the children and the general public are above all a means of animation for the library.

#### **Conferences**

These generally take place in a high school and have a public made up of teachers, students and other members from civil society. Conferences may be led by a publisher and/or a writer whose works are well-known. Reading is their main topic:

- The content of a book written by the speaker;
- The reasons and consequences of non-reading;
- The stakes and importance of reading;
- The relationship between reading and development.

#### **Promotion**

Promotion helps to popularize reading material and make people aware of reading. It is a factor in activities such as reading weeks, library openings and training sessions. Beyond those activities,

other promotional activities are organized in which media are asked to cover the event. The following can be noted:

### **Broadcasting skits**

ALED appeals to comedians to develop skits for the broadcast media (television). Three skits have been produced. The first emphasizes the importance of reading in a school context, as well as in all aspects of socio-economical life. The second looks at library attendance by girls, who have little time for the library because of fairly hefty household chores often imposed by their parents. It also defines the difference between a reader and a non-reader. The third is centred on the prevention of AIDS in a school context (a rather vulnerable context since the teenagers who are in the majority are exploring their sexuality).

### **Publishing articles in newspapers:**

The official press (l'Essor) and private newspapers publish articles on the activities of the reading week, the opening of libraries and the training of librarians. The intent of these articles is to raise awareness and promote a taste for reading in the population.

### **Readers' clubs**

In some libraries there are readers' clubs made up of children from the primary schools who take part in the animation activities of the library. They attract their friends to the library and thereby encourage them to read and take part in the reading games and competitions.

### **"Project Love" kits**

Every two years, ALED receives from CODE a container of kits from CODE. ALED distributes these to the schools in Mali. These kits are made up of miscellaneous school supplies (notebooks, pens, pencil, markers, erasers, rulers, scissors, sticky notes, staples and staplers etc) and are a gift from Canadian students and school teachers who share their resources with partners in Mali as a token of friendship and solidarity. In this way, pen pals and exchanges between the students and teachers of Mali and Canada are established.

This program is called Project Love or Projet Amour in French. The schools located in rural or special-needs areas (e.g., the school for disadvantaged children) are the first beneficiaries. In these areas where they are no bookstores or other sources of supplies and where the poverty is greatest, the parents have problems paying the school fees and the teachers are short of everything. The kits, which are much appreciated by the schools and parents, are a decisive factor in the improvement of school learning conditions.

## **Management**

### **Local partnership dynamics**

ALED's programs are designed, implemented and followed up in cooperation with CODE and several local partners. The State helps by granting exemptions from duties for importing the North American book donations and the school kit imports. The administrative and school authorities, (regional governors, prefects and sous prefects, educational directors and heads of the Pedagogical Animation Centres, school principals, elected officials, as well as civilian society, take part in the various activities related to ALED programs. Their support is essential in making available space for the libraries and their personnel, in the organization of ceremonies and program activities, in making the population aware and active with regard to reading, etc.

## Management policy

ALED programs are planned within the five-year framework of CODE's funding from CIDA (Canadian International Development Agency) are designed and managed according to the management system called, **Results-based management (RBM)**. The use of this management tool as an integral part of the management philosophy of CIDA which aims at defining clearly the expected results, i.e., a management according to the results which the project is seeking to achieve. This approach demands a definition of performance and the measurement of performance indicators that identify the impact of the program. The performance framework brings together the relationship and interaction of three poles:

The **realization of the program** through partnerships, intermediaries, beneficiaries and civil society

The **resources** physical, materiel, organizational and human

The **results** in both the short-term and medium term impact of the program.

With the indicators, the performance measurement framework is a tool of Results-based Management that supports the planning of the gathering, analysis, use and communication of performance information and ensures that statistics are kept.

In addition, the financial statements of ALED are professionally audited.

## Budget in 2003-2004

| Code         | Line Object  | Budget 2003-2004<br>in \$ CAD |
|--------------|--|-------------------------------|
| 1.           | Provision of educational materials for children and young people     | 81 300                        |
| 2.           | Skills development in library management and animation               | 18 800                        |
| 3.           | Promotion of a learning environment for young people                 | 17 800                        |
| 4.           | Building and strengthening of the educational netowrks and resources | 9 600                         |
| 5.           | Coordination   | 22 500                        |
| <b>Total</b> |  | <b>150 000</b>                |

## Cooperation and Networks

### CODE

CODE remains the main partner of ALED in managing and administering all programs for which it has granted the financial support and equipment necessary to their implementation. It defines the overall intervention strategy and is active in designing the program and planning its activities by training ALED personnel and supplying the required material, and by complementing program proposals from ALED through commentaries and suggestions.

Throughout the programs, CODE is in permanent contact with ALED and carries out the follow-up of activities through communications, missions, and reports as well as the statistical and technical files for the follow-up of libraries. By calling on external resource persons, CODE plans and carries out the program assessment. It looks after outside financing for the program and plays a vital part in informing and sensitizing Canadians on the soundness and impact of the program. Since it was created, ALED has also enjoyed the support of three other international partners, as follows:

**La Fondation Heinrich Böll 1995-2000:** The German Heinrich Böll Foundation has supported ALED programs for six years, within the framework of the *LECMA (Lecture au Mali)* Project. That support has enabled ALED to set up 20 school and community libraries, all equipped with solar panels, to train 75 teachers in library science and animation, and to organize 30 reading weeks in five Mali areas as well as reinforce 52 libraries.

**Les Missionnaires d’Afrique 2000-2001:** Based in Washington, Les Missionnaires d’Afrique has supported the publishing of a cartoon book: *La revanche du chasseur*.

**Le Centre d’Étude, de Formations Actives et de Développement Entrepreneurial au Sahel (CEFADES) 2002-2004**

This a distant-education project for activities such as cooperatives, small and medium-sized businesses. Less costly and with fewer constraints, remote training is characterized by the geographical distance between trainee and trainer (course designer). There is no face to face contact between the latter (whose work only lies in the design of the course) and the learner. However, the course has a format which enables a virtual dialog between the two. The learning media is via the Internet with a paper support.

**Others**

To manage its programs, ALED works closely with the local authorities who have been identified and enumerated above in earlier sections, including the first section under Management.

**Problems and Experienced-based Remedies:**

| <b>Problems</b>   | <b>Corresponding solutions</b>   |
|---|--|
| 1. Insufficient reading structures (libraries, documentation centres).  | 1. ALED has created 44 school and community libraries.   |
| 2. Insufficient reading material adapted to the book reader’s taste, due to the weakness of the book industry, the high cost for imported books, and the absence of an efficient book distribution network. | 2. Each year, ALED supplies a variety of more than 3,500 books (in local languages and French), purchased locally, and nearly 800 magazines and newspapers to the libraries.   |
| 3. Insufficient skills in library management and animation.   | 3. Each year, at least 25 teachers are trained in library animation and management.  |
| 4. Lack of promotion of books and reading.  | 4. More than 23,000 people are annually active in two reading weeks organized for basic teaching students. Three skits on reading, library attendance and HIV/AIDS produced by ALED are broadcast at least 20 times yearly on the Mali national television channel. Panels, talks and debating conferences on reading are organized in the media, schools and libraries. |
| 5. Insufficient female attendance rate and low participation of women in library management.  | 5. Activities are held taking our gender equality policy into account. This means insuring the full participation of girls and women in programs while eliminating gender-based discrimination. The policy consists in strengthening women’s attendance in   |



library management committees, a strong presence of women in reading animation activities, as well as the use of libraries by female socio-cultural animators and project designers for animations, cooking shows and literacy sessions for girls and women.

## **Library Follow-up/Assessment:**

### **Follow-up**

Each term, at least two follow-up missions are carried out in the libraries. The follow-up aims to assess the program's progress and the results achieved in conformity with the performance and performance evaluation frameworks. It identifies constraints, problems and possible difficulties (lower library attendance, irregular library opening hours, lack of library maintenance, deteriorating library rooms, badly handled books, etc.), in order to find solutions. These solutions are studied with the members of the library management committees, the librarians, the persons responsible for education (from the Academies and Pedagogical Animation Centres), as well as the locally elected persons. These local partners play a significant role in problem solving.

In order to correct certain technical library management problems and strengthen the skills acquired by librarians, the trainer often takes part in follow-up missions by giving advice, checking on the cataloguing cards, the book codes and their shelving.

In addition to these activities, follow-up is an opportunity for the ALED team to meet the library users, for the greater part students, teachers, members of the PTAs, and the newly literate, in order to make them more aware of the advantages gained by library attendance. Women take part in all these meetings and these activities, during which they express their needs.

This follow-up is the best way to ensure that the problems are identified, and information is gathered to support their harmonious evolution of the library.

### **Library assessment**

Assessment consists in examining the level of achievement of the program aims through the various library activities. Eight library assessment tools are used in the field in order to evaluate the level of real performance by the libraries:

- number of visits;
- number of documents consulted;
- number of animation activities;
- user needs;
- community needs;
- new skills resulting from library attendance by the local people;
- number of documents available in library;
- number of readers and borrowers.

Almost all that information is to be found in library attendance statistics. Statistics are kept on a monthly and sent to ALED. At the end of the fiscal year, an evaluation team from ALED visits the to confirm and discuss the results through an analysis of the statistics with those in place.

### **Future plans**

From April 2004-2006, the program is expecting to:

Create 6 new libraries;  
Buy and supply 7000 books on various topics and distribute 25000 North American books;  
Train 50 librarians;  
Promote reading;  
Organize four reading weeks.

And

Support publishing;  
Renew the AIDS project  
Do research on logistical support;  
Diversify the partnerships.

### **Conclusion**

We know that the people of Mali read very little. The major readers are those who read for an immediate utilitarian purpose (class notes, course preparation, examinations, documentary research, etc.). This situation has had some very harmful consequences, particularly on the level of learning among students, and the quality of teaching and of socio-professional activities. Among all the solutions studied, libraries play a fairly major role in the development of reading, especially in rural areas, which are the most affected by non-reading because of their isolation and the absence of reading material. It would therefore be important, indeed urgent, to create a synergy between the various national and international players to promote reading, in order to give it a central place in the learning and development processes. In order to ensure the continuity of programs, the development of a literate environment in Mali needs a strong involvement of the State, which would play a very significant role, particularly in the development of strategies for education, as well as the implementation and follow-up of reading activities.

ALED for its part, with the support of CODE and CIDA has worked for many years to develop a literate environment in Mali.

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