



Radios, Radios, Radios Everywhere!

Throughout rural Mali, access to information largely depends on access to a radio. Radios, which are owned by over 64 percent of rural households, remain the only reliable way to receive information. Yet women often lack direct access and control over the family radio, and money for batteries is hard to come by. In April 2004, the USAID-financed Women in Governance or WING Project began distribution of more than 500 Freeplay radios in 16 communities in four Malian regions.

The Freeplay radios help women to overcome barriers to the information they want and need. Freeplay radios were created for use in rural areas and harsh conditions and are designed to function without conventional batteries. Seventy turns of a manual crank in 30 seconds will provide the listener with 30 minutes of playtime or the radio can be placed in direct sunlight to charge the permanent internal battery. When fully charged, the radio can play up to 24 hours.

Over 500 radios were distributed within the WING project zone, thereby touching the lives of thousands of women. The Freeplay radios are used for collective listening by groups of women and are not given to individuals for personal use. Each recipient women's group selected a Freeplay radio guardian and signed agreements to ensure that both the guardian and the group are fully aware of the role of the guardian and purpose of the listening group. With their new radios women will have better access to all-important information.

As a result, women are speaking out. Many ran in the May 2004 local elections, and the number of elected women doubled in the targeted communities, from 21 to 42 women. These women are accustomed to facing the challenges that life presents them so they will not be deterred easily from becoming active in public life and creating a better future for their communities.