

**SAHEL NGO POPULATION NETWORK  
CASE STUDY**

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## Table of Contents

<b>PREFACE.....</b>	<b>iv</b>
<b>I. INTRODUCTION .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>II. SOCIAL CONDITIONS AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH IN THE SAHEL .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>III. BRINGING GOVERNMENTS AND NGOS TOGETHER.....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>IV. FROM OUAGADOUGOU TO BAMAKO.....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>V. THE NGO NETWORK SINCE BAMAKO: COUNTRY EXAMPLES.....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>VI. PARALLEL NETWORKS: PARLIAMENTARIANS AND JOURNALISTS.....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>VII. LESSONS LEARNED AND FUTURE CHALLENGES.....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>APPENDIX A .....</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>APPENDIX B .....</b>	<b>17</b>

## Preface

This report is one of four case studies—Turkey, Sahel, Ghana, and Peru—documenting the experiences of advocacy partner networks that have been formed or strengthened under the POLICY Project. The POLICY Project is a five-year, USAID-funded project designed to create supportive policy environments for family planning and reproductive health (FP/RH). POLICY is committed to forging a participatory policy process that involves more diverse and larger numbers of actors than the high-level decision makers traditionally involved in formulating and implementing policy. To this end, the project promotes the active and effective involvement of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and other representatives of civil society in policy advocacy to advance FP/RH policies that respond to the expressed needs of beneficiaries. POLICY stimulates the involvement of these new policy stakeholders by creating and strengthening advocacy networks. Worldwide, POLICY works with NGOs, women’s groups, professional associations, community-based organizations, and youth groups to transfer networking and advocacy skills and to enhance various groups’ ability to function as respected and credible legitimate partners in the policy arena.

The Sahel case is the second in the series and chronicles the genesis and efforts of the Sahel NGO Population Network, a regional network composed of NGOs from eight Sahelian countries in West Africa—Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Chad, The Gambia, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, and Senegal. The case study is based on information collected through more than 30 interviews conducted in four of the eight member countries— Burkina Faso, The Gambia, Mali, and Senegal—and with POLICY staff in Washington and the field\* as well as a comprehensive review of relevant documents. Appendix A provides a complete list of respondents.

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\* Feedback was requested from network participants in Cape Verde, Mauritania, and Niger through correspondence, but none of the participants replied.

# Sahel NGO Population Network Case Study

## I. Introduction

*“Necessity drives us to establish this network”*  
Keffing Dabo, Population Advisor, CERPOD

In fall 1997, something remarkable happened among population and reproductive health (RH) NGOs in West Africa. Through a process supported by the POLICY Project and the Center for Applied Research on Population and Development (CERPOD) in Bamako, Mali, the first regional advocacy network of family planning (FP)/RH nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) began to take shape in the Sahel. The story of the Sahel NGO Population Network demonstrates how opportunity, commitment, and a modest financial and technical investment enabled FP/RH NGOs from eight different countries to come together and share their visions and strategies for improving FP/RH policies in the region and within their own borders.

Today, the network has empowered its members to make significant contributions as FP/RH advocates in their respective countries. The network continues to coalesce and become stronger. It is embracing journalists and parliamentarians to further advance population policy in the countries that make up this fragile region.

The Sahel NGO Population Network is a loosely structured group with a few dozen NGO members from Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Chad, The Gambia, Mauritania, Mali, Niger, and Senegal.<sup>1</sup> All of the member organizations work in FP/RH. The network’s mission focuses on three primary objectives: (1) promote innovative strategies in the development and implementation of population and sustainable development programs; (2) build partnerships between governments, NGOs, and development partners; and (3) help ensure implementation of the Population and Sustainable Development Plan of Action, signed by the eight Sahelian governments in Ouagadougou in 1997.

This case study describes events that led to and played a role in the network’s creation. It also describes the collaborative relationship that exists between the network, CERPOD, and POLICY. The FP/RH demographics and policy environments in selected countries and the Sahel as a whole are discussed and lessons learned by POLICY and the network summarized. Finally, the challenges to overcome for the network to sustain its advocacy role in the population policy arena are exposed.

## II. Social Conditions and Reproductive Health in the Sahel<sup>2</sup>

The vast Sahel region is equivalent to two-thirds of the continental United States. However, the countries that make up the Sahel are among the poorest on the face of the earth. Annual per capita gross national product (GNP) in Burkina Faso and Mali, for example, is approximately one-fifth that of the developing world (\$230 and \$240, respectively, versus \$1,200).

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<sup>1</sup> A list of network member organizations is included in Appendix B.

<sup>2</sup> All country-specific data are taken from the World Bank, 1998, “World Development Indicators”; all Sahel data are taken from CERPOD, 1996, “Population du Sahel—1995,” Bamako, Mali.

Life expectancy in the Sahel is significantly lower than in the remainder of the developing world (60 years for males and 63 years for females, excluding China). Life expectancy in Mali and Senegal is 50 years, and in Burkina Faso it is 46 years. The Sahel has some of the highest infant mortality rates in the world. At 111 deaths per 1,000 births for the region as a whole, 115 per 1,000 in Chad, and 118 per 1,000 in Niger, infant mortality exceeds considerably the developing world average of 59. Similarly, whereas the average under-5 mortality for the developing world is 80 per 1,000, it is 220 in Mali, 155 in Mauritania, and 134 for the Sahel as a whole.

Maternal mortality rates are also among the worst worldwide—more than 100 times those of Western Europe and nearly twice the rates of many other countries in sub-Saharan Africa. Every year in Chad, 1,000 out of 100,000 women die during childbirth. In The Gambia, the rate is 1,100 per 100,000. Indeed, according to the World Bank, only six other countries in the world exceed the rate of 1,000.

Population growth rates and total fertility in the Sahel are extremely high. The current population of this environmentally and economically fragile region could double from more than 50 million today to more than 100 million by 2022, if current growth rate continues. In comparison, the entire African population will double in 25 years and Asia in 43 years. Overall, the Sahel has a total fertility rate (TFR) of 6.5 and a population growth rate of 3.1 percent, which compare poorly with a TFR of 5.8 for Africa and a TFR of 2.9 for Asia. At the same time, only 4 percent of Sahelian women over age 15 are using modern forms of contraception versus 17 percent for Africa as a whole. With the Sahel's skyrocketing population, agricultural demands are likely to increase, food self-sufficiency will become more difficult to achieve, and desertification will intensify

In terms of female literacy, the situation in the Sahel is equally dismal. Whereas 61 percent of women in the developing world can read, the literacy rate for women in the Sahel is a mere 19 percent. Forty-one percent of Sahelian men can read and write. In Burkina Faso, the region's only non-Muslim country, only 13 percent of women over age 15 can read. Female literacy rates are slightly higher in Mali (23%) and The Gambia (25%), but still lower than for all of Africa (47%). Moreover, little is being done to rectify the problem. In Niger, for example, only 18 percent of girls and 32 percent for boys receive elementary education. In some Sahelian countries, the proportion of women completing high school is less than 2 percent.

In a region where governments are faced with a multitude of pressing issues, but have limited financial and technical resources, the Sahel NGO Population Network may be one of the few ways to forge public/civil society partnerships that draw attention to critical population issues. However, the challenges of establishing such a network are significant. The immense poverty faced by Sahel countries means that NGOs struggle to attract adequate financial resources, and if funded, face a variety of urgent needs from the communities they serve. Using scarce resources to support a regional network and further FP/RH advocacy goals may not be a priority.

On the other hand, because needs are so great in the Sahel, the region stands to gain a great deal from regional synergies between governments and NGOs. By bringing NGOs together, a regional network can strengthen NGO effectiveness within local communities and improve their ability to influence the policy process. The hope of the Sahel NGO Population Network is that by engendering regional cooperation and interaction, network members will be able to gain skills and credibility and translate knowledge and ideas into policy gains at the national level.

### III. Bringing Governments and NGOs Together

The strategic partner of the POLICY Project in the effort to establish a regional network of population NGOs has been Bamako-based CERPOD, established in 1988. CERPOD is a division of the Permanent Interstate Committee for Drought Control in the Sahel (CILSS)<sup>3</sup> under the trusteeship of the Sahel Institute. Since its inception, CERPOD has played an increasingly important role in the development of social policies and in the promotion of consensus among decision makers through technical assistance and regional forums on population policy.

In fact in 1988 and 1992, CERPOD organized regional population conferences for policy experts from CILSS countries. The first conference took place in Niger where the N'djamena Plan of Action was adopted; the second was held in Senegal where the Declaration of Dakar was adopted. Although both conferences brought together population policy experts, neither conference included population ministers or NGO representatives. In 1995, when delegations of the CILSS countries took part in developing the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) *Programme of Action*, they adhered to the consensus document but felt the need to look at the ICPD priorities in the light of the Sahelian context.

In fall 1996, CERPOD began planning the First CILSS Ministerial Conference on Population Issues, to be held October 1997 in Ouagadougou.<sup>4</sup> From the start, POLICY worked with CERPOD to design and prepare the conference. Early in the process, both groups agreed that the conference would address the omissions of the previous regional conferences and introduce the ICPD *Programme of Action* in order to launch its implementation. First, POLICY and CERPOD envisioned that the preparatory phase and proceedings would engender in population ministers a sense that they had a major stake in the next Sahelian population and RH plan of action. Secondly, the two sponsors insisted that NGOs from all eight countries assume a fundamental role in identifying FP/RH priorities for their respective countries and in representing those needs to their official conference delegations.

As CERPOD began the task of working with the official government delegations to prepare national reports to present at the Ministers' Conference, POLICY began reaching out to NGOs in CILSS member countries. The desired outcome of these coordinated efforts was a set of national reports that reflected the expressed needs of beneficiaries as represented by local NGOs. In support of this goal, POLICY proposed that a local NGO in each member country take the lead in organizing a meeting to discuss and prioritize FP/RH needs and accomplishments from the perspective of civil society groups. Depending on the timing of the meetings, NGO recommendations would either be incorporated into the official national plans before the conference or be presented at the conference in consideration for the final plan of action. CERPOD also agreed to invite at least one NGO representative with technical expertise in FP/RH to join each national delegation attending the conference.

To this end, POLICY identified potential NGO partners in each of the CILSS countries. Once the NGOs had expressed the interest and capability, POLICY offered them small grants of about \$1,000. The grantees were charged with organizing and hosting a one-day forum of civil society representatives to identify FP/RH priorities for the country and elect a representative to present their priorities at the Ouagadougou Conference. In several instances, the NGOs used the

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<sup>3</sup> The nine member countries of the CILSS are Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Chad, The Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, and Senegal.

<sup>4</sup> Eight of the nine CILSS member states were involved in the conference; civil war prevented the participation of Guinea-Bissau

forum to review their government's official population platform and were able to contribute to the national reports submitted for the conference.

POLICY awarded the first round of small grants to NGOs from Mauritania, Senegal, Mali, and The Gambia (Table 1). POLICY was unable to finalize grants with NGOs in Cape Verde and Guinea Bissau because of communication difficulties and war. The grantee in Niger carried out the NGO forum, but banking problems delayed the transfer of funds. NGOs from Burkina Faso, Chad, and The Gambia attended the conference without grant support. The recipient NGOs and grant amounts and dates are presented in Table 1.

<b>Table 1. POLICY Project Small Grants to Support Preparatory Meetings and Participation in the 1997 Ouagadougou Ministers' Conference—Round One</b>			
<b>Country</b>	<b>Grantee</b>	<b>Amount</b>	<b>Date</b>
Mauritania	Association Mauritanienne pour la promotion de la famille (AMPPF)	\$1,000	11/96
Senegal	Sante maternelle et infantile dans le spectre non etatic (SANFAM)	\$1,000	11/96
Mali	Association de soutien au développement des activités de population (ASDAP)	\$1,000	11/96
Gambia	Gambia Family Planning Association (GFPA)	\$800	11/96
Niger	Coordination des organisations non gouvernementales et associations féminines nigériennes		Award not finalized

**Mali.** In preparation for the Ministers' Conference, the ASDAP hosted an NGO forum attended by more than a dozen NGOs. The NGOs articulated three sets of priorities—education, the environment, and RH—that have a significant impact on population issues. The participants were able to develop a detailed list of priorities and specific recommendations for addressing them.

**Senegal.** In preparation for the 1997 Ouagadougou Conference, POLICY provided a small grant to SANFAM to convene a meeting of Senegalese NGOs to identify FP/RH priorities for the national declaration and elect NGO representation for the conference. The Group for the Study and Education of Population Issues (GEEP) was selected to represent Senegalese NGOs in Ouagadougou.

In addition to the NGO grants, POLICY worked with CERPOD to prepare the Ouagadougou Conference draft Plan of Action by abstracting information from the national reports submitted by each government in advance of the conference, incorporating input from the NGO meetings, and using the ICPD *Programme of Action*. Because the process was so participatory, the final conference documents reflected the accomplishments and priorities of both government and nongovernmental conference participants and acknowledged the unique contributions of each. By building a partnership between government and civil society in the policy process, CERPOD established a precedent and mechanism for more responsive and representative policy making in the future.

## *The Ouagadougou Conference*

By the time the NGO representatives and the Ministers of Population arrived in Ouagadougou in October 1997, both groups had tacitly acknowledged the need to work together at the conference. Although the NGOs came to Ouagadougou primarily to represent grassroots FP/RH priorities for their country delegations, the meeting catalyzed other developments. The NGOs were able to share networking experiences as well as advocacy strategies with one another. Furthermore, the government representatives witnessed first hand the technical expertise and collaborative spirit of the NGO sector and the benefits of a civil society/public sector partnership. In addition, the Ouagadougou Plan of Action, which was signed by all delegations, became a natural and ideal fulcrum around which NGOs could organize advocacy efforts.

Because of all the preparatory work, the Ouagadougou Declaration and Plan of Action passed easily. Taking note of the grave RH situation of the Sahel, the Plan of Action sets out ambitious goals for the CILSS member countries—goals that will require a concerted and multisector effort. By having leading FP/RH NGOs present for the signing of the Declaration and Plan of Action, the NGOs are now in a position to hold their respective governments accountable to the FP/RH policy commitments outlined therein.

Indeed, the Plan of Action devotes an entire chapter to “Partnership between the Public Sector, the Private Sector, and Nongovernmental Organizations.” Specific steps urge member states to closely involve NGOs, community associations, and grassroots groups in the implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of the Plan of Action. Such partnerships will be essential if countries are to meet the health and social targets outlined in the agreement. For example, the declaration commits governments to work toward increasing life expectancy to 65 years, while reducing infant mortality to 40 per 1,000 and child mortality to 50 per 1,000 by the year 2010. The plan commits states to double current contraceptive prevalence by 2005 and to double it yet again by 2010. It also commits governments to increase the number of FP service delivery points by 10 percent each year. Perhaps even more ambitious, the ministers pledged to increase the primary school enrollment rate for both boys and girls to 100 percent by the year 2010. Achievements of this magnitude will require government/NGO partnerships to support implementation. NGOs will also play an important role in reminding government leaders of their commitments.

During the course of the conference, NGO representatives met informally to discuss and examine the idea of forming a regional network to advocate for improved FP/RH policies and programs at both the national and regional levels. During a meeting facilitated by POLICY staff, NGO participants shared their networking experiences and perceptions and examined the advantages and challenges of a regional advocacy network. By the end of the meeting, the representatives had unanimously endorsed the idea of forming a network. In August 1998, NGOs from the eight countries met for the first time as a network in Bamako.

At the close of the Ouagadougou Conference, the NGOs showed their solidarity and appreciation for being included at the conference by composing a declaration. In a sense, this statement represented the NGOs’ first output as a regional network. The NGO declaration recommended that their governments review on a regional level the implementation of the Plan of Action program every three years. The NGOs stated their intention to form a regional network and expressed the hope that as a network and as individual NGOs they would develop partnerships with their respective governments to help implement the ambitious Ouagadougou Plan of Action.

## IV. From Ouagadougou to Bamako

### *Follow-up to Ouagadougou*

In the months after the Ouagadougou Conference, all participating countries officially adopted the Plan of Action, providing the NGOs an opening to advocate for better RH policies simply by lobbying governments to respect their commitments made in Ouagadougou. In addition, the contacts that the NGOs had made with counterparts from other countries highlighted the significance of forming a regional FP/RH network. On returning from Ouagadougou, the NGOs reaffirmed their commitment to create and strengthen a regional network. In turn, the POLICY Project pledged to support this process.

Although a network of NGOs working on population issues in eight Sahelian countries may not seem like an innovative idea, in fact the network is distinctive for several reasons. First, despite the fact that these countries share similar RH challenges and that donors have often financed NGOs to travel to international conferences, such as the 1994 ICPD or the annual Francophone Conference, the network represents the first formal meeting structure for NGOs concerned with population issues. Second, not only does the network allow NGOs to strategize together, it also establishes a mechanism for NGOs to collaborate and share information to strengthen their policy advocacy skills. Third, the network offers NGOs with varying degrees of organizational and technical expertise the opportunity to share resources and knowledge to raise each other's professional competence.

Based on the interest expressed by NGO participants at the Ministers' Conference, POLICY proposed a second round of small grants to these same NGOs to support dissemination of the Ouagadougou Plan of Action to other NGOs in their national networks. The grants averaged \$2,000. Seven NGOs used the funds (Mali did the work but used other funds) to hold meetings with civil society groups and publish newsletters to discuss the conference and disseminate the Plan of Action. The groups also took advantage of the meetings to present the proposed Sahel NGO Population Network and get feedback from NGO counterparts. Through the meetings and other dissemination activities, the NGOs gained further national recognition as players in the population policy arena and enhanced their capabilities to advocate for governments to follow-through on the Ouagadougou commitments. The grantees, award amounts, and dates are presented in Table 2.

<b>Country</b>	<b>Grantee</b>	<b>Amount</b>	<b>Date</b>
Senegal	GEEP	\$2,600	4/14/98
Mauritania	Association Mauritanienne pour la promotion de la famille	\$2,000	5/22/98
Chad	Association pour l'etude de la population (ATEP)	\$1,800	5/22/98
Gambia	GFPA	\$1,400	5/22/98
Cape Verde	Associacio dos Jornalistas para questoes de Populacao	\$2,000	6/26/98
Niger	Association Nigérienne pour le bien-être de la famille	\$2,000	7/24/98
Burkina Faso	Association Burkinabée des sages-femmes (ABSF)	\$2,300	8/1/98

**Burkina Faso.** In Burkina Faso, the Burkinabe Association of Midwives (ABSF) used the second round of POLICY small grants to hold a forum for more than 30 NGO leaders and activists. Forum participants examined the results of the 1997 Ministers' Conference and prepared for the upcoming NGO workshop in Bamako. Ms. Brigitte Thiombiano, Executive Director of ABSF, coordinated and presided over the forum, which deepened NGO awareness of the commitments made by the Burkinabe and other Sahelian governments at Ouagadougou. The forum, in turn, enabled the country's NGOs to strengthen their partnership with government counterparts and affirm their willingness to have ABSF represent them at the Bamako meeting.

ABSF also used the small grant to publish and disseminate 2,000 newsletters that described governmental commitments made at the Ministers' Conference, in order to inspire further activism within the NGO sector. The newsletter also provided the public and private sectors with information about the activities undertaken by ABSF and other NGOs in FP/RH. This in turn enhanced the credibility of ABSF and helped the organization advocate for additional support.

**The Gambia.** Following the Ouagadougou Conference, the POLICY Project awarded a small grant to GFPA to prepare for the Bamako NGO workshop. GFPA organized an NGO forum that also was attended by prominent government officials, attesting to the organization's access to policymakers. NGO participants at the forum agreed that a regional network would strengthen the Sahelian NGOs' ability to work effectively at the local level. They asked GFPA to voice their desire for regional collaboration at the forthcoming Bamako meeting. Gambian NGOs also called for specific proposals for regional training, regional exchanges of newsletters, a regional NGO meeting to be held every two years, and a regional fund for population activities that would be available directly to NGOs.

**Senegal.** Subsequent to the conference, GEEP received a second grant to organize two dissemination workshops for NGOs in two of the largest regions in Senegal—Dakar and St. Louis—and to prepare and distribute a newsletter. At the workshops, the NGOs articulated regional priorities that included raising regional awareness of RH issues, creating a regional FP/RH bulletin, and forging a relationship between local NGOs and the emerging Sahel NGO Population Network. The GEEP newsletter and written materials were of such high quality that they have been disseminated to other NGO focal points.

### ***Birth of the Sahel NGO Population Network***

In August 1998, less than one year after meeting in Ouagadougou, CERPOD and POLICY followed through on commitments made in Ouagadougou and supported the first meeting of the Sahel NGO Population Network. The five-day meeting in Bamako was called the Workshop of Sahelian NGOs on the Implementation of the Ouagadougou Plan of Action on Population and Sustainable Development. Twenty-two NGO representatives attended from Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Chad, The Gambia, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, and Senegal as well as CERPOD and POLICY staff.

While it was POLICY that had encouraged NGO participation in the national delegations at Ouagadougou, CERPOD took the lead in bringing the NGOs together in Bamako. Indeed, CERPOD assumed the lion's share of the work and financed the NGOs attendance. The Bamako-based Groupe Pivot, headed by Modibo Maiga, played a key role in organizing the technical and logistical aspects of the workshop. Maiga was elected to serve as the Regional Coordinator of the network for a two-year term—a position he has held since—and Groupe Pivot was chosen as the regional focal point NGO. The goal of the workshop was to promote and expand the role of NGOs in advocating for the

implementation of the Ouagadougou Plan of Action and to enhance cooperation among Sahelian population NGOs.

In support of the workshop goal, participants shared their advocacy experiences since the Ouagadougou Conference, examined the characteristics of effective networks and advocacy strategies, and formulated a platform of action to guide the network in the short-term to assist their respective governments in implementing the Plan of Action. In addition, the participants officially launched the Sahel NGO Population Network, creating its mandate and simple and loose structure. In principal, the network is composed of national networks in each of the member countries. In practice, each of the national networks elects a focal point NGO to represent them in the regional network. The focal point NGOs are elected every two years and are responsible for communicating and coordinating activities with the regional focal point. The network presidency alternates among the member countries. Specific tasks outlined for the network address NGO communication, creation of national networks, resource mobilization, and information dissemination.

During the course of the NGO workshop, it became clear that the NGOs had disparate levels of organizational capabilities as well as networking and advocacy skills. In view of these inequities, the meeting was used to create linkages between some of the weaker NGOs (in particular, those from Chad, Mauritania, and Niger) and NGOs with stronger and longer records of accomplishment. Workshop participants acknowledged that the network had a long way to go before becoming the driving force they hoped it would become.

In closing, the NGOs issued a declaration that stated their commitment to form a network of Sahelian NGOs with national focal points to coordinate the work of Sahelian NGOs for the implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of the Ouagadougou Plan of Action. More specifically, the network members pledged to continue to do their utmost for the grassroots communities they serve and to provide these communities with FP/RH information and services. Moreover, the larger NGOs suggested that educating and empowering smaller community-based organizations might be the key to addressing important FP/RH issues, especially in rural areas. Some leaders of national NGOs referred to the grassroots NGOs as “the real social dynamos,” behind transformation in rural areas, whereas others described a more symbiotic relationship between larger and smaller NGOs.

Members of the fledgling network also vowed to remind their governments of the commitments they had made in Ouagadougou and elsewhere and to build NGO/public sector partnerships to implement and monitor progress toward these declarations. Ousmane Traoré, an NGO leader from Mali, noted that in recent years the government of Mali had begun to subcontract significant segments of RH work to NGOs because they were recognized to be effective at implementation. “This initiative has deepened the quality of the relationship between NGOs and the government,” Traoré said, calling it “a promising development for the future.”

In addition to providing their own commitments, network members called for cooperation of governments and the international community. First, the NGOs asked governments to fund NGOs and establish partnerships and contracts to implement aspects of the Ouagadougou Declaration. They also called on international development agencies to make funds available to NGOs for population and development activities, to work with governments to include NGOs in development projects, and to study the impact of structural adjustment programs on poverty. In this way, international agencies can support NGO activities while strengthening the quality of NGO/government partnerships and enhancing collaboration in RH policymaking. In addition, the NGOs asked the CILSS to support the newly created network by incorporating NGOs in relevant CILSS meetings and helping support a biannual meeting of the network.

## V. The NGO Network Since Bamako: Country Examples

With the formal establishment of the Sahel NGO Population Network in August 1998, the NGOs were ready to set to work. With the legitimacy conferred by their participation in the Ouagadougou Ministers' Conference and their reputations enhanced by their partnership with the POLICY Project, the NGOs were able to increase their credibility and enhance their stature with their home governments.

To further support the efforts of the network and its members, POLICY initiated a third round of small grants to enhance the advocacy activities of the focal point NGOs in each country and disseminate the results of the Bamako workshop. A grant was awarded to the Malian focal point NGO, Groupe Pivot, to allow Modibo Maiga, the recently elected Regional Coordinator of the network, to visit member NGOs in other countries. Commenting on the grants, Maiga said, "We need to continue to share our creative approaches, our successes and our failures, to utilize to the fullest, the power of this network." The grantees, award amounts, and dates are presented in Table 3.

<b>Table 3. POLICY Project Small Grants to Disseminate Results of 1998 Bamako NGO Workshop</b>			
<b>Country</b>	<b>Grantee</b>	<b>Amount</b>	<b>Date</b>
Senegal	GEEP	\$2,800	5/99
Mauritania	Association Mauritanienne pour la promotion de la famille	\$3,000	9/99
Chad	Association Tchadienne pour le bien-etre familiale	\$2,400	6/99
Gambia	GFPA	\$2,500	9/99
Niger	Association Nigérienne pour le bien-être de la familiale	\$3,000	9/99
Burkina Faso	Clinique pour la promotion de la sante familiale	\$2,700	6/99
Cape Verde	Associacao dos Journalistas especializadoa em Populacao	\$2,800	10/99

**Burkina Faso.** "How did the 1997 Ouagadougou Ministers' Conference change our advocacy work?" asked Brigitte Thiombiano, Director of the ABSF. "Because we [NGOs] were included in the government delegations, we now have much more credibility and visibility in our work. You can't imagine what a difference that makes. ... First of all the idea of even doing advocacy was not on the radar screen of most NGOs in Burkina Faso. With these tools and with the initial training we've had at our conferences on how to implement advocacy efforts, we can now undertake advocacy."

To anyone who has observed Thiombiano and ABSF in recent years, the transformation is clear. In the wake of the conference, Thiombiano gained access to the highest levels of government. Whether she meets with officials at the Ministry of Planning and Finance, the Minister for the Promotion of Women, or the director of the national television station, Thiombiano has become an even more effective champion for RH in Burkina Faso.

**The Gambia.** "Policy is not just something that the government does. It's larger than just that. NGOs like ours now have a role at the table and we are leveraging that role to change policy," said the Executive Director of GFPA, the country's national focal point for the network. GFPA

director was referring to the support generated by participation of GFPA and other NGOs in the Ouagadougou Ministers' Conference and the creation of the network in 1998.

GFPA is a principal actor among the approximately 20 or so NGOs working in FP/RH in The Gambia; and it is recognized in all sectors for its quality services and dynamic leadership. Lamine Nyabally, Director of the National Population Commission, Office of the President, expressed pride in GFPA's participation in policymaking. Deferring to the association's expertise, Nyabally noted, "The GFPA has been able to play a major role in FP policy, and often does a better job not only in leading the debate but also in service delivery. Today the National Population Commission met for four hours and virtually all of the time was spent working to implement issues enshrined in the Ouagadougou Plan of Action. The Commission is comprised of the Vice President, the Ministers of Health and of Youth and Sport, the Head of the Women's Committee, representatives of the Muslim and Christian communities, me, and two NGOs, one of which is the GFPA. The GFPA is able to have such a powerful impact, not only because of its technical expertise but because they were there at Ouagadougou."

*Mali.* Since the Ouagadougou and Bamako meetings, NGOs in Mali have focused their advocacy efforts on increasing access to contraceptives and raising awareness of female genital cutting (FGC). National statistics in Mali hide considerable regional and rural/urban discrepancies in contraceptive use. The average contraceptive prevalence rate (CPR) for Mali as a whole is a mere 5 percent; however, it barely reaches 1 percent in some areas and rises as high as 23 percent in selected zones of intervention. The NGOs have worked to draw attention to the unmet demand for contraception and have urged public officials to make contraceptives more widely available.

Furthermore, Malian NGOs have put pressure on the government to speak out more strongly against FGC. FGC is practiced extensively in Mali; an estimated 94 percent of females have been subjected to this practice. The NGOs have worked so intensively on these issues with the Ministry of Health (MOH) that the government has subcontracted with many of the NGOs to provide FP/RH services.

At present, Malian population NGOs are poised to begin working with the Ministry of Planning to advocate for increased FP/RH funds in the MOH budget. The Ministry of Planning determines how much of the national budget to allocate to the MOH that, in turn, allocates the budget to specific programs. Collaboration between the Ministry of Planning and the NGOs would be a powerful step in increasing attention to FP/RH policies and programs.

*Senegal.* Throughout the process of creating the Sahel NGO Population Network, Senegalese NGOs were able to make valuable contacts with other Sahelian NGOs. These exchanges have enabled and empowered NGOs in Senegal to leverage the Ouagadougou Plan of Action for advocacy purposes and strengthened their ability to educate regional authorities about the commitments made in Ouagadougou. Typically, regional policymakers are unaware of national policy decisions, yet are called on to make critical decisions about FP/RH policy and programs at the local level. The NGOs efforts to inform and collaborate with local leaders have gained them certain legitimacy and earned them a seat at the policymaking table.

## **VI. Parallel Networks: Parliamentarians and Journalists**

As the next step in developing the Sahel NGO Population Network, the POLICY Project encouraged NGOs to realize the tremendous synergies to be formed by joining forces with journalists

and parliamentarians in planning and implementing advocacy campaigns. The foundation for these partnerships was laid with the involvement of parliamentarians and journalists in the 1997 Ministers' Conference.

*"In the past there was mistrust between the government, parliamentarians, and NGOs.  
It is now clear that we all must work together"*  
Lahaou Touré, Deputy, National Assembly, Mali

### ***Bringing Together Parliamentarians***

After the network was officially launched in Bamako, POLICY decided to promote the formation of a network of parliamentarians from CILSS countries to help advance population policy. POLICY turned to Senegal where a highly effective national network of parliamentarians on population—the Network of Senegalese Parliamentarians on Population—had already been established. The Senegalese parliamentary network is an advocacy “dynamo” that is replicating its techniques with great success. Not only has the network sparked the formation of parliamentary networks in other countries, it has built alliances with NGOs in Senegal and, through the POLICY-supported Sahel NGO Population Network, with NGOs in other countries in the region.

In April 1999, the Network of Senegalese Parliamentarians on Population hosted a four-day meeting of parliamentarians from seven Sahel countries—Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Chad, The Gambia, Mali, Niger, and Senegal—in Dakar.<sup>5</sup> At the meeting, POLICY staff from Washington and Senegal discussed the role that a regional parliamentary network could play in policymaking; also, GEEP's El Hadj Dioum addressed the issue of mobilizing resources for population policy. The Sahelian parliamentarians present elected Momar Lo, leader of the Network of Senegalese Parliamentarians on Population, to serve as the head of the newly created Sahel Parliamentary Network.

In August 1999, Lo traveled to Mali and The Gambia to help launch national parliamentary networks on population. Meeting with parliamentary colleagues, such as Malian Deputy Lahaou Touré, Gambian Deputy Amadou Khan, and other politicians, Lo worked to reassure his peers that the new parliamentary network would support their efforts to promote sound and responsible FP/RH policies. Malian deputy Touré is thrilled with Lo's assistance and with the change in climate between NGOs and parliamentarians. “A few years ago when we (parliamentarians) approached NGOs for partnerships they were suspicious. Now they welcome us. They see us as partners in an effort to help transform the government's policy on reproductive health.” Toure also noted that the coordinator of the Sahel NGO Population Network, Maiga, had been a valuable ally in strengthening government-NGO partnerships.

One of Lo's suggestions to the parliamentarians and NGO leaders is that they collectively undertake a study of the country's laws pertaining to FP/RH, and identify the barriers to good policy. Lo recommends that the interested NGOs and parliamentarians gather for a day or two to reflect on their findings and strategize about the major issues and types of advocacy campaigns needed to bring about policy change. According to Lo, this course of action has been extremely successful in Senegal.

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<sup>5</sup> Mauritania and Guinea Bissau did not participate.

### ***Parliamentarian Action in Senegal***

The Network of Senegalese Parliamentarians on Population was formed five years ago, making it the oldest in the Sahel. Almost two-thirds of the entire Senegalese Parliament participates in the network that can boast of remarkable successes in the areas of FP/RH. One of the tactics that has proved particularly useful, says Mr. Lo, is that “even if a parliamentarian loses his/her seat, he/she remains a member of the network.”

One of the Senegalese network’s greatest successes was realized just last year. In January 1999, Parliament passed and the President signed a law outlawing FGC in Senegal. Given the deeply rooted nature of the practice in Senegalese culture, passing the FGC measure was not a simple matter, despite the population network’s majority in Parliament. The effort began in June 1996 with a workshop of parliamentarians, doctors, NGOs, women’s associations, legal scholars, and Islamic scholars to discuss the issue. Islamic scholars confirmed that the practice was non-Islamic and NGOs and parliamentarians argued for the RH benefits of banning the practice. Eventually, a large enough coalition formed in Parliament in order that 138 of the 140 members voted to pass the resolution outlawing FGC; the other two members abstained. Although overall national implementation of the law remains to be executed, since the resolution’s passage Senegalese localities have gone so far as to arrest women who continue to practice FGC on their daughters. Because of his role in pushing for the anti-FGC resolution, Lo said, “Now, when I walk in the streets women point to me as the one who’s causing them problems.” To change public perceptions, Lo plans to dispatch parliamentarians to work together with NGOs to spread the word about the new law, and about the religious and RH arguments that justified its passage.

### ***Parliamentarian Action in Burkina Faso***

The newly formed Parliamentarian Population Network in Burkina Faso is also having a dramatic impact on the activities of parliamentarians. In August 1999, Burkinabé Parliamentarian Issouf Sangaré, the focal point for the Sahel Parliamentarian Network, organized a weeklong seminar with community leaders in Bobo-Dioulasso to discuss crucial RH issues, such as FGC, sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), birth spacing, and FP.

According to Sangaré, although the government of Burkina Faso adopted a “relatively progressive” population policy in 1991, the policy has yet to be put into practice. At present, the objectives of the country’s Parliamentarian Population Network are to speed the implementation of the population policy. To achieve this goal, the network is sponsoring educational events such as an RH seminar in Bobo-Dioulasso, while also working closely with journalists to further popularize the message. The Bobo-Dioulasso seminar was front-page news in the *Sidwaya*, a local newspaper with national distribution.

### ***Bringing Together Journalists***

The POLICY Project has made efforts to strengthen collaboration between journalists in the Sahel as well as NGOs and parliamentarians. In December 1998, subsequent to the successful NGO meeting in Bamako, 25 journalists from CILSS countries convened in Dakar to discuss FP/RH issues. Senegal was chosen as the site for the meeting because it has a well-developed network of journalists writing on population issues, whereas most other CILSS countries do not. Although the meeting of Sahelian journalists did not result in a decision to formalize a CILSS population journalists’ network, the event clearly sparked action in a number of countries. For example, in Mali, a national network of

population journalists is springing into action. Emulating the Senegalese model, they are launching a *Pop Action* journal and holding seminars on reporting on population and development issues in the press.

According to Yves Jacques Sow, Secretary General of the Senegalese Journalists Network on Population and Development, “links between journalists and NGOs (in Senegal) are very strong.” Sow noted that the Senegalese Journalists Network conducts numerous activities to spark reporting on population and development issues, including \$400 prizes for the best TV, radio, and newspapers reporting, workshops for journalists on how to present population issues in the mass media, and the journal, *Pop Action*, which is distributed to journalists nationwide. The Center for the Documentation of Population Information, which tracks articles written on FP/RH in Senegal, is also part of the network. Since the Bamako NGO meeting in 1998, the number of articles in the Senegalese press on FP/RH has been on the rise, with about 70 articles in January 1999, 200 in February 1999, and 300 in March 1999.

### ***Increased Synergies among NGOs, Journalists, and Parliamentarian: The Senegalese Example***

“In Senegal,” Senegalese NGO focal point El Hadji Dioum said, “there has been a perfect collaboration between NGOs, journalists and parliamentarians [on a national level]. We have developed strong enough linkages with the press so that when we want to call a press conference, the press is there, the story gets covered, and articles get written.” Indeed, the formation of the Sahel NGO Population Network has provided not only a springboard for national action, but also the impetus to effectively use the press. Numerous articles appeared in Senegal’s vibrant daily press, most notably in *Matin*, describing the “dynamic” workshops led by GEEP in May 1998 in preparation for the Bamako NGO meeting. Journalists described these meetings not only as “great moments of social mobilization,” but also as “serious moments of reflection over the priorities to overcome the region’s daunting family planning problems.” Articles have described the network’s activities, while also getting its message disseminated. For example, an article in May 1999 contrasted the TFR of Sahelian women (6.5) with that for all of Africa (5.8). Summarizing the relationships that have been established in Senegal, Dioum stated, “When we need to meet with government officials, we can now do so. The question is, though, how seriously do they take us? What we now need to do is intensify that level of collaboration to achieve greater results...but that will take time—time and hard work.”

## **VII. Lessons Learned and Future Challenges**

*“As NGOs, we’re not just making noise, we are delivering results on the ground.  
This has given us the credibility to do advocacy”*  
Modibo Maiga, Sahel NGO Population Network Coordinator

With the support and encouragement from CERPOD and the POLICY Project, it is clear that the creation of the Sahel NGO Population Network has, in turn, been the catalyst for a number of important achievements. The network has had a significant impact on NGO-government relations in many countries in the Sahel. Whether in Burkina Faso, The Gambia, Senegal, or elsewhere, inclusion of NGOs in the 1997 Ouagadougou Conference has given them the resources and legitimacy needed to establish or deepen partnerships with their respective government counterparts in promoting FP/RH policy and programs.

A year after meeting in Bamako, it is much easier for NGO participants in the network to picture a future where NGOs have an equal partnership with governments not only in implementing health policy but also in making it. Maiga, the Mali-based Regional Coordinator of the network, has a grand vision of the potential role the network can play: “Ouagadougou was the first time, as Sahelian NGOs working on population (that) we had the chance to meet together. This is something that is extremely, extremely important. We’ve seen where decades of regional cooperation of governments has brought us, now it’s time for NGOs to have their turn.”

Maiga envisions a future in which NGOs will be able to harness the rapidly falling costs of technological communication to remain in closer contact with other members of the regional NGO network using the Internet, list serve, and websites. Furthermore, he would like to build a broader coalition that involves the region’s artists and universities as well as its NGOs. Maiga concluded, “What we all realized—governments and NGOs—at Ouagadougou in 1997 was that it is not only governments that have a responsibility to implement the Cairo and Ouagadougou declarations but NGOs that have not only an important collaborative role but also a leadership role to play.”

One of the clearest lessons learned has been articulated by one of the network’s hardest workers. Senegal’s dynamic focal point, El Hadji Dioum, is outspoken in his view that “regional networking enables our dialogue with the government to have a dramatically more powerful impact.” Dioum argues that “regional networking allows us to have a unified position, to speak with one voice, both at the regional level and the national level. This way, the government cannot say that ‘NGOs are divided or do not know what they want.’ It is clear, we know what we want, and what we want is for the governments to respect the commitments they made themselves. We know because we were there; they can’t argue with that.”

### ***Challenges Faced by POLICY and the Network***

***Harnessing the Internet.*** Across this technology-poor and infrastructure-poor region, NGO leaders recognize the tremendous potential of the Internet to bring them closer together and intensify collaboration. Some NGOs in the network already use the Internet; however, many others do not. Although most NGOs strongly believe that they could multiply their efforts through an e-mail list serv that would enable them to address and tackle issues together at lower costs, many NGOs in the network cannot afford the computers, modems, and user-fees to realize this potential. Further support from the POLICY Project may be needed to accelerate network integration.

***Building Partnerships between Stronger and Weaker NGOs.*** Several members of the network point to the differences among NGOs across borders. GEEP’s Dioum in Senegal noted that the NGOs in each country are at various levels of development and effectiveness. Senegal’s Maiga noted that some countries have had environments where NGOs could flourish and other have not. Both network members propose that NGO focal points in countries where NGOs are less developed be paired off with focal points that are more developed, in order to foster a mentoring relationship. Exchange visits have taken place but need to be intensified to share techniques and approaches and strengthen weaker NGOs, while increasing the level of cooperation so that NGOs can be equal partners with each other.

Similarly, Lo, head of the Network of Senegalese Parliamentarians on Population, suggested that further funding is needed to enhance the pairing of countries with weak national parliamentarian networks with countries where they are strong. Such an effort will continue to strengthen the Sahel Parliamentarians Network and allow parliamentarians to meet on similar if not equal levels. “When network member are at such disparate levels,” Lo said, “the full potential synergy is not attained. We

have the potential to reach that stage, but it will take work to get there and the POLICY Project should be our natural partner in this effort.”

***Overcoming Language Barriers.*** NGO participants in non-Francophone countries, such as The Gambia and Cape Verde, testified that language differences constitute a formidable barrier in their efforts to coordinate regionally, and thus work locally. GFPA’s Dibba perceived that the creation of the Sahel NGO Population Network is an important step forward, but said, “We elected good people in Bamako, however we have hardly heard from them since.” Gambian NGOs also complain that communicating with their colleagues in non-English speaking countries is difficult and that local organizing efforts are stifled by the lack of materials in English. Materials produced by CILSS and CERPOD are not always available in any language but French. Non-Francophone members of the network have asked POLICY to fund translations of materials to make them more widely available.

***Meeting Regularly.*** Across the board, members of the Sahel NGO Population Network perceive a need for support to allow network members to meet more frequently. POLICY’s first round of small grants brought together NGOs within each country to discuss the upcoming Ouagadougou Ministers’ Conference. The second set of small grants helped NGOs disseminate results of the conference in order to use the information in their advocacy efforts. The third set of grants allowed NGOs in each country to discuss the results of the Bamako NGO workshop. Although the NGOs in Bamako agreed to try to meet regionally every two years, an ongoing partnership with POLICY may be needed to help them achieve that goal.

***Sustainability.*** It is clear that it takes hard work and day-to-day involvement to bring civil society—in this case NGOs—into the policy process. Although the participatory approach used to create and build the NGO network has been effective, it will require a long-term commitment on the part of USAID and POLICY to maintain and sustain the network. With on-going support, the member NGOs and their network can become full partners with governments and international development institutions in driving the policy process on RH issues forward.

The small grants provided by POLICY have, in fact, been quite small—in general, between \$1,000 and \$3,000. However, the NGOs and POLICY have learned a lot by working together during the grant process. Because many NGOs are genuine engines of social transformation and because they are often consumed by their primary activities, it has taken them some time to develop their absorption capacities to handle broader efforts of the type supported by the POLICY grants.

Today, the POLICY Project faces a moment of opportunity with the Sahel NGO Population Network. Having helped build the network from its inception, both POLICY and CERPOD have learned valuable lessons about the strengths and weaknesses of the network as a whole and of the individual member NGOs. POLICY has developed a keen sense of what is needed to energize the participants in the coming years in order to continue FP/RH advocacy gains. In time, the network should be able to stand on its own as a leader with CILSS member governments and CERPOD in setting and implementing RH policy in a region of Africa where, indeed, the needs are the greatest.

What is evident from observing the network is that it holds great promise. It is a network with high aspirations and the ability to organize critical elements of civil society across a vast and diverse region. It is a network with the potential to develop solutions to critical problems and build partnerships between governments, NGOs, and the communities they strive to serve. It is a network with the potential to have a positive impact not only on population growth rates, but also on basic components of quality of life (like infant and maternal mortality). Most importantly, the network also has the potential to empower NGOs to participate more effectively in civil society and shape the destinies of the communities they serve.

## Appendix A

### Case Study Respondents

1.	USA	Nadine Burton	POLICY
2.	USA	Susan Homer	POLICY
3.	USA	Susan Richiedei	POLICY
4.	USA	Norine Jewell	POLICY
5.	USA	Danielle Grant	POLICY
6.	Gambia	Yankuba Dibba	Executive Director, GFPA
7.	Gambia	Momodou Jasseh	Assistant to Yankuba Dibba, GFPA
8.	Gambia	Lamine Nyabally	Director of Population Affairs, Office of the President
9.	Senegal	Alle Diop	POLICY
10.	Senegal	Badara Seye	POLICY
11.	Senegal	El Hadji Dioum	GEEP
12.	Senegal	Hawa Talla	ASBEF
13.	Senegal	El Bachir Sow	ASBEF
14.	Senegal	Yves Jaques Sow	Senegal Population Journalist Network
15.	Senegal	Momar Lo	Sahel Parliamentarian Population Network
16.	Senegal	Samba Ka	RADI, St. Louis
17.	Senegal	Mamadou Sen	GEEP, St. Louis
18.	Mali	Keffing Dabo	CERPOD
19.	Mali	Baba Traore	CERPOD
20.	Mali	Mayemouna Diallo Soumare	CERPOD
21.	Mali	Ossmane Traore	ASDAP
22.	Mali	Deputé Lahaou Traoré	Parliament of Mali
23.	Mali	Modibo Maiga	Group Pivot, Executive Director
24.	Mali	Lamine Diallo	Group Pivot
25.	Burkina Faso	Brigitte Thiombiano	Association Burkinabé des Sages-Femmes
26.	Burkina Faso	Dr. Koala	Burkina Faso National Television, Director
27.	Burkina Faso	Yousouf Sangare	National Assembly of Burkina Faso
28.	Burkina Faso	Adel Traoré	National Assembly of Burkina Faso
29.	Burkina Faso	Delphine Samandoulou	National Committee on Population
30.	Burkina Faso	Agniola Zinsou	UNFPA
31.	Burkina Faso	Alice Tiendrebeogo	Ministry for the Promotion of Women
32.	Burkina Faso	Saidou Kaboré	Ministry of Economics and Finance

**Appendix B**  
**Sahel NGO Population Network Members**

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Cape Verde	Association Cap Verdienne pour la Protection de la Famille Giordana Custodio Tel. +238 61 20 63 Fax. +238 61 20 63
Cape Verde	Organisation des Femmes de Cap Vert Maxencia Vieira Tel. +238 61 24 55 Fax. +238 61 25 39
Cape Verde	Association des Journalistes en Population Jose Tavares Gomes Tel. +238 61 64 94 Fax. +238 31 49 42
Gambia	The Gambia Family Planning Association Mr. Yankuba Dibba Tel. +220 39 14 73 Fax. +238 61 43 03
Gambia	Worldview International Foundation Mr. Jagne Musa Tel. +220 49 66 66 Fax. +220 49 60 42
Mali	Groupe Pivot/Santé Population Modibo Maiga Tel. +223 23 47 81 Fax. +223 21 47 81
Mali	Association Malienne pour la Promotion et la Protection de la Famille Mr. Sidiki Kone Tel. +223 23 77 55 Fax. +223 22 26 18
Mali	Association de Soutien au Développement des Activités de Population Ousmane Traore Tel. +223 22 27 69 Fax. +223 22 27 69
Mali	Action Couverture et Développement Moussa Yattara Tel. & Fax. +223 22 30 76

Mauritania	Association Mauritanienne pour la Promotion de la Famille Mariam Diallo Tel. +2222 50759
Mauritania	Institut Marieme Diallo (?? Not sure if this is really an NGO??) Marieme Diallo Tel. +2222 52173. Fax. +2222 53982
Niger	CONGAFEN Aissata Sidikou Tel. +227 74 19 09
Niger	Association Nigérienne pour la Bien Etre Familiale Kadiatou Ly +227 72 26 80
Senegal	Association Sénégalaise pour le Bien Etre Familiale Hawa Talla Tel. +221 824 56 61 Fax. +221 824 52 72
Senegal	Groupe pour l'Etude et l'Enseignement de la population El Hadji Dioum Tel. +221 824 48 77. Fax. +221 824 52 72
Thcad	Association Tchadienne pour l'Etude de la Population Issaka Palkoubou Tel. +235 52 35 48 Fax. +235 52 65 14
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