The USAID-funded PAJE-Nièta (Support to Youth Entrepreneurs Project), implemented by Education Development Center, Inc., aims to provide 12,000 out-of-school youth with improved basic education, work readiness and technical training, social and leadership development, and accompaniment towards livelihood activities. Before commencing training and support interventions, however, PAJE-Nièta organized a study to analyze the labor market and value chains in three of its four target regions: Koulikoro, Sikasso, and Kayes. The purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding of the market context in these regions and identify potential opportunities for youth. The results of the study will guide the project’s selection of technical training skills to offer youth in the PAJE-Nièta program.

From January to March 2011, a diverse team of experts from the PAJE-Nièta project team and its partners, Swisscontact, Catholic Relief Services, and Association Jeunesse Action Mali conducted field research in the three regions, meeting with various stakeholders, from training providers to private sector entrepreneurs, to understand which sectors offered the most opportunity for growth.

PAJE-Nièta’s study findings highlight opportunities in the agro-pastoral sector and other more traditional vocational trades and artisanal services sectors, such as construction. The key agro-pastoral opportunities identified for youth are as follows:

- Rain-fed agriculture (e.g., millet, sorghum, corn, cow peas)
- Irrigated agriculture (e.g., shallots, onions, tomatoes)
- Processed agricultural produce (e.g., juice, fruit/vegetable purée, cashews)
- Export produce (e.g., mangos, sesame, shea butter)

The key sectors identified for more traditional vocational training include:

- Metal work (e.g., manufacturing of agricultural implements/tools, animal carts, doors, windows)
- Food service (e.g., restaurant/food preparation; meat processing/butcher shops; local juice processing, including bottling)
- Construction (e.g., brick-making, masonry, painting, construction material supply)

PAJE-Nièta will reinforce existing professional training centers to provide technical training for youth in these sectors.