

STORIES
OF CHANGE

Photo courtesy of IFAD

Mali: Sowing the Seeds of Success



In Mali, nearly 68 percent of the population is considered poor. They are mostly smallholder farmers. Women here, as in many parts of Africa and Asia, are particularly vulnerable due to limited access to capital, land and training. Increasing opportunities for women can have a powerful impact on productivity and agriculture-led growth.

Smallholder farmers with less than 2 hectares of land contribute to almost 90% of agricultural production in Mali but have very low yields, mainly due to low seed quality.

The USAID supported Seeds project is part of a regional initiative, the West-African Seed Alliance (WASA), which aims at increasing local production and access to high quality-certified seeds of major staple crops for farmers.

The Seeds project trained women, such as Aissata Konaté, to become seed producers, improving their incomes and helping to fill the yield gap in the farms buying these locally-produced improved seeds.

Konaté is seen as a pioneer in Koporo-Na near Mopti, Mali. Being one of the first women to start producing certified seed independent to her family farm, she is now the leading seed producer in her village.

Three years ago, the International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT) and the Malian national agricultural system offered Konaté a high yielding cowpea seed variety along with technical support in soil, water and pest management from WASA's regional office in Mopti. She has since doubled her cultivated plot from 1 to 2 hectares and was able to certify the seeds produced.

Konaté now supplies many other women farmers with high yielding seeds. Given her good reputation, she easily sells her improved seeds during seed fairs.

*“Now the
community can
see how women
can provide for
their families too.”*

Improving incomes, and lives

These high quality cowpea seeds drastically increased her yield from 2 bags of 100kg to 8 bags of 100kg per harvest. “I invested my extra earnings from the certified seed production into better food, schooling and health care for my three children,” Konaté says, when asked how the project has helped her. She points to the healthy crop covering her field. “The seed quality also increased the price of cowpea seeds from 300 CFA francs to 600 CFA francs,” she adds.

“My higher income meant I could save up and build a new house for my family,” Konaté says proudly standing by her children in front of their new house. “This has changed my status in the village. Here housing is normally the responsibility of men. Now the community can see how women can provide for their families too,” she says.

USAID's Seeds project looks at the whole seed value chain, from training farmers to become producers to building capacity of rural agrodealers. It also supports active rural marketing (demonstration plots, farmer field days, seed fairs) to develop local demand for better seeds and organize the seed production from farmer's cooperatives.

WASA will be reinforced by a regional strategy of harmonization of seed policies making the local seed industry a sustainable agriculture growth tool in the 6 target countries, Mali, Burkina-Faso, Ghana, Niger, Nigeria and Senegal. This means Konaté's success will be followed by many others across the region, having a real impact on poverty reduction and food security.

Story prepared by



a CGIAR
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Research Center

ICRISAT is a global research partnership for a food secure future. Its address is carried out by the 15 research centers of the CGIAR Consortium in collaboration with hundreds of partner organizations.
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