



Feed the Future Country Fact Sheet

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Helping Feed the Future, One (Fortified) Rice Grain at a Time



Kate Gage, USAID

Salif and Mohamed Niang (far left) join fellow marketplace participants in speaking with President Obama in Senegal.

In 1977, our father earned a USAID scholarship to leave [Mali](#) and pursue graduate studies at Purdue University. As one of the first Africans to benefit from an effort to identify and train the next generation of agriculture experts, he earned his doctorate and went on to work for the United Nations for the next three decades as a food security and sustainable development expert.

In the 1980s, he was stationed to work in [Ethiopia](#) during the height of the famine, which made a lasting impression on our family. Almost four decades later, [USAID brought us together with President Obama](#) to share our idea for transforming the rice industry and combating farmer [poverty](#) and malnutrition in Mali.

Taking part in [Feed the Future's Agricultural Technology Marketplace](#) during President Obama's visit to Senegal was a great honor for us. The struggle against food insecurity and malnutrition forms a fundamental part of our identity due to our father's work and our experiences growing up in Ethiopia and Mali. We are acutely aware of how fortunate we are. Our father—the only child in a family of 14 to finish high school—instilled a deep sense of obligation in us from a very young age.

And about four years ago, while still in college in the United States, that sense of obligation turned into action.

A [spike in rice prices](#) in 2008 captured our attention. We were angered to witness how the increase in prices led to even greater food insecurity in Mali. We committed ourselves to tackling food shortages and malnutrition in Mali, in part by producing a locally grown vitamin-fortified rice.

We had almost no knowledge of the rice plant, rice production or rice processing, so we had to do a lot of homework. We searched online for studies by USAID, picked the brains of professors, emailed our business model and financial projections to seasoned entrepreneurs to deconstruct, and video chatted with technology providers in Argentina and China to put together a business plan that won over \$130,000 in prize money and awards. With these funds, we returned to Mali in 2011 to conduct a pilot study that culminated in the marketing of locally-produced fortified rice in Africa for the first time, selling 10 tons despite the new entry of this product into local markets.

Today, we are the founders of [Malô](#), a Malian social enterprise that produces high quality, fortified rice to address the twin problems of farmer poverty and malnutrition. We work in partnership with a 30,000-member farmer cooperative in Mali's biggest rice producing zone.

Our first processing and fortification facility, with the capacity to meet the needs of more than 25,000 people per year, will be up and running by the end of 2013. And plans for a processing center to feed a million people a year are back on track after a period of political uncertainty. Next year we will begin production of [fortified rice kernels](#) in Mali so other rice millers in West Africa can offer affordable fortified rice to their customers.

In our brief chat with President Obama, we were impressed by his desire to understand the details of Malô's business model as well as what it meant for farmers and consumers. Hearing him [articulate](#) his philosophy for achieving food security, in person, was powerful. He stressed that economic growth as a result of improved performance in the agriculture sector was most effective in reducing poverty. He also said that food aid was no longer sufficient and that by leveraging investments by companies, the impact will be deeper and broader. And finally, he argued that bolstering African agriculture should not be seen as a burden or waste, but a remarkable opportunity for all.

After [our experience in Senegal](#), we are convinced more than ever that helping nourish the future is our life's calling. Together with our partners, we are excited about the promise of African farmers and consumers—and meeting their aspirations will be a fun and rewarding journey.

This post originally [appeared](#) on the USAID blog. It is part of a series of posts by marketplace participants who met Obama in June 2013.

Additional Resources

- [Learn more](#) about President Obama's trip to Africa
- [View an infographic](#) of the agricultural technology marketplace
- [Read the first blog post](#) in this series, by Nimna Diayaté
- [Read the third blog post](#) in this series, by Anna Gaye