

In Mali, many children prefer eating rice for lunch and school cooks find rice easier to prepare and cook than other grains. For these reasons, school canteens typically buy and use rice for school meals. But, in the regions of Koulikoro and Sikasso, due to agroecological conditions, farmers do not produce rice - most produce millet, sorghum and maize. In these areas, almost all the rice used for school feeding is imported from Senegal. How can Procurement Governance-Home Grown School Feeding (PG-HGSF) in Mali include more local Malian farmers in the school feeding value chain? The PG-HGSF Mali team hopes to work with farmers in the Ségou region to link them to school feeding markets in Koulikoro and Sikasso. Located along the banks of the Niger river between Koulikoro and Sikasso, Ségou is notable for its potential to produce quality rice in large quantities. L'office Riz Ségou (the Rice Office of Ségou) recorded that in 2013, the region produced 64,400 tonnes of rice. The Mali team also met a group of rice producers called Faso Djigui that store rice and currently have a stock of over 1,500 tonnes. The ready supply from Ségou could be linked to schools in Koulikoro and Sikasso, bolstering domestic production and decreasing the need to import rice from abroad.

The PG-HGSF Mali team developed a three-part strategy to effectively link rice producers organisations in Ségou to traders in Koulikoro and Sikasso by removing problems related to access to finance, quality control, and local perceptions. The team is collaborating with microfinance institutions to provide credit to traders, who can then buy rice from producer organisations and sell the rice to school canteens. PG-HGSF Mali is also working with producer organisations to ensure the production of high quality rice for traders in Koulikoro and Sikasso. Finally, the team is joining forces with local authorities to inform school canteens about the benefits of domestic rice to increase procurement of locally produced rice.

Recently, the PG-HGSF team hosted a meeting in Bamako for stakeholders involved in the strategy. Local authorities of communes, rice producers and traders came together to discuss their plan and ways forward. PG-HGSF is also considering other interventions to target smallholder farmers in areas that do not grow rice, including introducing schools to local grains that can be used in their menus. Keep watching this space for updates on the progress of these exciting interventions!

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