

# STORIES TO INSPIRE



## MALI: CASE STUDY



### Cereal Bank

Life in Mali is punctuated with recurring droughts and food shortages. More than one in five children will die before their fifth birthday. Those that survive to adulthood can only expect to live until their mid-forties, partly due to poor healthcare and a growing HIV problem.

In a country where 72 percent of the population live on less than \$1 a day, women make up the majority of the poor but often find it the hardest to provide for their families. Against this hostile environment, many women are working to make positive changes for their communities.

Usaba, Fatimata and Halimatou help to run a cereal bank in the village of Benguel in Ghourma Rharous.

Most people here are nomads and live off their animals. There are few opportunities to make a living and regular droughts mean that people often struggle to feed their families.

Islamic Relief set up the cereal bank in response to the drought and subsequent food crisis that gripped Mali during 2005. Women were trained on how to organise the management committee and Islamic Relief provided them with 33 tonnes of millet to establish the bank.

Fatimata, 35, explains how the management committee decides when to buy and sell the cereal. They fill the bank during the harvest months and sell it in the lean months between June and September.

“The prices at the bank are affordable for rich and poor. The bank does not make any money, and so the prices are much lower,” she added.

Before the cereal bank was established, women would travel to the town of Rharous, 30 kilometres away to buy cereal for their families. If they didn’t have money for transport they would make the journey on foot.

“We had to buy cereal from traders in the town and the cost was often very high, especially when food was scarce and the prices rose beyond our means” explains Halimatou. “With no way to get food, my children would often become sick.”

Today, the cereal bank ensures that grain is available all year at a stable and affordable price. For around 200 women in this region, the cereal bank is a cheap and convenient alternative to the expensive cereal traders of Rharous.

“We have security because we have food in the village and we are living in peace” says Fatimata. The cereal bank has made a real difference to the lives of women in Benguel. They now have the security of knowing that they can feed their families, and are able to take responsibility within their families and community.

Importantly it has also given them the inspiration and confidence to do even more.

“We want to be strong and independent, and microfinance allows us to provide for our families,” Halimatou said. “We are very poor but the cereal bank has shown that we can work hard. We will continue to work and struggle together to help our families.

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## HOW YOU COULD USE THIS MATERIAL



1. You could just use a quote, or tell the basic story of the impact the cereal bank has had upon the Benguel community in a talk.
2. Alternatively, you could involve a number of people in presenting this story to an audience.

For this you would need:

- a narrator, who could introduce :
- Fatimata, and she could introduce:
- Halimatou and Usaba
- an interviewer to ask the questions
- round off with a discussion of what, universally, people hunger for

You could think about some of the following:

- security
- food
- health
- family
- community

