



Misola's flours combine grains, oil-rich legumes, vitamins and trace elements, and are designed to prevent and combat child malnutrition.

Réseau Misola

Many companies in the Sahel are marketing locally produced infant flours in order to make food supplements for young children accessible. These flours are produced by small and mid-size companies, or very small facilities managed by women's groups. They face a number of challenges when it comes to traceability, quality and procuring raw materials. One potential solution is to strengthen partnerships with farmers' organisations.

Promising partnerships in the infant-flour sector: the story of Misola

The sector for local infant flours is promising. According to a FILAO study entitled *The sector for locally produced infant flours in six Sahel countries*, conducted jointly by Gret, IRAM and IRD, global demand for infant flours on the commercial market could reach 10,000 tonnes a year by 2025, which is five times higher than now. Providing the raw materials needed to produce infant flours is therefore a real opportunity for farmers' organisations (FO), particularly in terms of volume and security of outlets for certain agricultural products. To seize this opportunity, they need to overcome two challenges: guaranteeing the hygienic and organoleptic quality of the products they deliver to companies, and guaranteeing traceability from field to factory. Quality must also be managed and traceability ensured within the companies producing infant flours from local raw materials.

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Ensuring quality and traceability

Controlling product quality at production-facility level is still a major obstacle for the sector. Conducting quality analyses on a regular basis through local or sub-regional laboratories is very expensive, and production facilities have very limited capacity to perform quality controls internally. Because

of their limited financial resources and low storage capacity, they tend to purchase their supplies through traders. Purchases are made as needed, and the traceability and quality of the raw materials cannot be certified. Getting FOs and production facilities to team up would not only provide companies with a stable supply of high-quality raw materials, it would also give FOs access to a secure and lucrative market.

Difficult contractual arrangements

Currently, raw materials are rarely sourced directly from FOs because the contracts are difficult to comply with in terms of deadlines, quality, quantity and traceability. FOs also propose prices that are higher than market prices and want to be paid in cash promptly after delivery of the order, whereas many production facilities are not in a financial position to do so. FOs are still hesitant to get involved in lending systems, which they see as risky and dangerous.

FOs and production facilities also face major difficulties in terms of coordination, and an unorganised, improvised and temporary system for procuring supplies on the market. In order for this relationship between FOs and production facilities to be successful, they both need technical assistance: FOs need help gaining access to high-quality inputs and improving current post-harvest practices, which leave impurities in the raw materials; and production facilities need help structuring themselves more effectively, anticipating their needs, strengthening their method of distribution and developing the promotion of their products. Contractual arrangements need to be set up that are precise and flexible, and that include frameworks for dialogue to ensure that all actors in the chain are remunerated fairly.

Supporting the development of a local value chain through labelling

Although the commercial market is promising, local infant flours are still not available enough, visible enough or attractive enough at country level. There is a considerable lack of awareness about local infant flours, and they face competition from cheap imported products. Demand for local flours is still very low and largely dependent on institutional markets. Communication initiatives encouraging the incorporation of infant flours into eating habits should be initiated in order to help promote the longevity of the sector. States and private companies



In order to incorporate the flour into the preparation, it must be sifted. The Misola Mali network currently employs more than 600 women.

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both have a role to play in this regard. Legislative and regulatory frameworks at national level for the infant-flours sector are not very clear, and are sometimes non-existent. State bodies therefore need to draft legislation to help ensure the longevity of locally produced infant flours, for instance by encouraging farmers to move towards labelling. Promoting high-quality labels could be a solution if farmers sought and obtained a certificate of conformity.

How Misola Mali has responded

Production facilities for infant flours can be isolated or organised into distribution networks, such as the “Misola” network of production facilities for fortified infant flours in Burkina Faso, Niger, Benin and Mali. That network is managed by the Misola association with support from Gret, Afrique Verte and various technical entities in the countries where Misola operates. The network’s production facilities in Mali generally acquire raw materials on the conventional market as needed. It is therefore impossible to know their origin or the conditions in which they were produced or stored. To improve raw-material traceability, Misola is currently working on an innovative encoding system. Upon completion, it will no longer be necessary to indicate the name of the production facility on the packaging. The code will contain the location, facility, manufacturing company and raw-material suppliers for a given final product, the entry number in the Misola country network, and the entry number in the Misola Africa network. This work is currently in progress and will likely be adopted by the entire network to ensure traceability. Sourcing raw materials from FOs would create a short supply chain and would have a positive impact on the local economy, particularly with respect to jobs, as the network currently employs more than 600 women. But local quality has a cost. Misola often had to buy cleaned pearl millet

at a higher price thanks to the partnership between Sasakawa Global 2000, Misola, and local farmers in the Ségou region. The funds raised by the network through decentralised cooperation were used to purchase raw materials from those local farmers. The creation of Fédérations d’Unités Misola also allowed them to focus more on marketing through contractual arrangements with farmers. The production facilities do not have sufficient guarantees to access institutional contracts for large quantities of flour. In such cases, Misola coordinates group supply with farmers. Farmers also have an interest in grouping together, so that they can gain access to larger contracts through better decision-making and stronger influence. ■

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FOR MORE INFORMATION:

IRD, Gret, Iram, Unicef, La filière des farines infantiles produites localement dans 6 pays sahéliens : Burkina Faso, Mali, Mauritanie, Niger, Sénégal, Tchad, 2020, 164 pages.

<https://bit.ly/3oPkIE7>

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For videos visit: <https://bit.ly/3oPr2f0>