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The Rice Farmer vs. the Multinational: Mali’s Winding Path Toward Food Sovereignty

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The rice farmer vs. the multinational: Mali’s winding path toward food sovereignty

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Abstract

Land grabbing by foreign investors is a growing problem for the Global South. Rice production in Mali is no exception. To counter this trend, there is a greater push from countries like Mali for food security and food sovereignty. Despite this push, decentralization and a lack of government funds have led Mali to sign multiple agreements with multinational companies. The Malibya Society, a partnership between Mali and Libya, is one of these investors that could jeopardize Mali’s autonomy. This paper will describe the details of the project, the reactions of government officials, peasant organizations, and farmers, and what Malians can do or are doing to combat the problems that put them in this situation.
Dedication

I would like to dedicate this report to Faliiry Boly. Without him, I would not have been able to complete this project. He stirred an interest in me for the plight of farmers around the world and I admire him for his courage and honesty. One day when we were chatting in his office, he shared a piece of wisdom with me that guided my research:

“If you see vultures picking on a body you shoo them away, not because it’s someone else’s body, but because one day it could be your body the vultures are picking on.”

Faliiry has devoted his life to making sure that all farmers in the region of the Office du Niger have their voices heard. He has shooed away many vultures and continues to ward them off every day.

Thank you

I would like to thank my family first and foremost for allowing me to come to Mali (thanks Mom!) and, of course, for loving me and always being there for me when I need them. Next, I would like to thank Modibo Coulibaly and Ibrahima Songoré for helping me to arrange meetings and accommodations for this project. Charlotte Sama, Bréhima Dembele and Lamine Coulibaly were all integral parts of this project and without their interviews, I would have been lost. I would like to give a special thanks to Faliiry Boly for telling me about his life and encouraging me to go home and tell others about what is happening in Niono and Kolongo. I would also like to thank my Malian family, the Karabintas, and especially Dada, for their willingness to include me and support me this semester. N b’aw fe kosebe!
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Methodology

After hearing about the joint agricultural investment project between Libya and Mali, Malibya, I became interested in the type of rice that would be used and how people in the area would be affected. I wanted to study varieties of rice grown in Mali and which aspects of local and enriched rice are beneficial in production and for consumption. The first few people I talked to about Malibya in Bamako did not know the specifics of the project, which only encouraged me to further explore the subject. Furthermore, when I researched the project for background information, I found that little information was available. I decided to go to Niono to meet farmers who are being affected by the project.

My first limitation surfaced when I realized that even people in Niono did not know the specific details about the project because it is still in its beginning stages. No one was informed of Malibya’s plans before they started and Malibya has not presented this information to the local population. Moreover, I could not go to Kolongo, the site of Malibya, due to security reasons. If I had gone, I would have been able to talk to families who were being forced to move as well as see the progress, or lack thereof, of the project. I also wasted time in Ségou waiting for an appointment at the Office of Niger and once I did interview someone, it was hard to get real answers about Malibya. Due to these limitations, I decided to expand the subject of my paper to food security and food sovereignty in Mali. When I returned to Bamako, I arranged interviews with professional farmer organizations and an agricultural research center. I had trouble getting additional interviews because people in government offices were too busy to do an interview.

Where literature is concerned, I found a lot of information about rice production in Mali and food sovereignty in Mali and West Africa. To create something unique from these sources, I decided to pull facts from rice production in Mali and food sovereignty documents and add to it my knowledge of Malibya for a new perspective on Malian agriculture. There
are some articles about the land grabs in Mali by private investors, but in-depth documentation does not yet exist. I propose to explain how land-grabbing is affecting Mali specifically, rather than the effects of all land grabs in the Global South. I also plan to explain various agricultural initiatives in Mali and analyze whether they are successful for achieving food security or food sovereignty.

**Agriculture in Mali**

Mali is one of the poorest countries in West Africa and is dependent on its agricultural production. Seventy five percent of its active population is involved in agriculture and agricultural production accounts for 43% of Mali’s Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and 30% of its exports.\(^1\) Cotton is the largest crop followed by those that require a rainy season—rice, millet, sorghum, corn, and fonio. The production of cotton, rice, and livestock contribute to 75% of Mali’s agricultural growth.\(^2\) In addition, the government spends 12-14% of its annual budget on agriculture.\(^3\) Despite this spending, over half of Mali’s farmers do not own a tractor.\(^4\) Increasing annual rice consumption puts pressure on Malian farmers to supply food for the entire population; however, most farmers are unequipped to fulfill this demand.

The Ministry of Agriculture is striving for food sovereignty by making agricultural production shift in accordance with the growth of Mali’s economy, implementing the Agriculture Guidelines Law of 2006\(^5\), beginning to use the National Agricultural

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3. Ibid
5. The Agriculture Guidelines Law promotes irrigated rice systems by developing hydro-agricultural technologies. It also provides strategies for helping workers leave subsistence farming to become cash farmers (“Mot du Ministre”).
Development Fund, and producing 10 million tons of cereals in the year 2012. Ten million tons will satisfy domestic needs and allow Mali to become a net exporter in cereals. In 2009-2010, Mali produced five million tons of cereals, the highest production rate Mali has ever reached. Food sovereignty, as defined by Via Campesina at the World Food Summit in 1996, is “the right of nations and governments to define their own agricultural and food policies.” The Ministry of Agriculture proposes to achieve these goals of food sovereignty by using modern agricultural techniques, equipping farmers with the machinery they need to increase production, and controlling the flow of water to irrigated land. These goals are especially important for the Department of Agriculture’s biggest and most influential subsidiary—the Office du Niger.

The Office du Niger was created in 1932 by French colonizers in the interior of the Niger River delta. Its goal was to irrigate 1,000,000 hectares of land to facilitate the production of cotton for exportation to France. The biggest project implemented by the Office was the dam of Markala, constructed between 1934 and 1945. The dam exists today on the Niger River 35km from the city of Ségou and is 816m long. The dam irrigates 86,000 ha each year, leaving many hectares undeveloped.

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Cultivation of Rice in Mali

The production of rice represents 5% of Mali’s GDP. Rice consumption was calculated at 57 kg/inhabitant/year, but Malian farmers cannot support this consumption; hence, 45% of rice sold on the national market is imported. There are many varieties of rice grown in Mali, each depending on the type of soil in the area. There are two types of rice farming in Mali which correspond to location: irrigated systems and river flood plains. Government officials, professional peasant organization leaders, and exploitants (agricultural workers) themselves all have different opinions on which types of rice are the best to grow. This diversity could be the result of varying soil around the country, allowing different varieties to work well in different regions.

Oumar Koné of the Department of Rural Advice at the Office du Niger advocates the use of enriched rice in Mali. He says that not only does it produce more tons of rice per hectare than local varieties, but the taste is also better for cooking, though it can prove resistant to the local climate. Enriched rice takes less water when there are good conditions for cultivation, according to Koné. The adapted rice used in Mali comes from Africa or Asia,

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12 Ibid 5
13 Ibid 6
specifically China or the Philippines. If local rice could be developed with modern agricultural techniques, Mali could guard its local varieties while also increasing yields. Alas, Koné says that this proposal could work in theory, but the condition of the soil is not good enough.\textsuperscript{15} Ibrahima Songoré, a professor at ISFRA (Institut Supérieur de Formation et de Recherche Appliquée) says that traditional rice has more nutrients, has a better taste, and is more sustainable than enriched rice. Unfortunately, local rice is not popular with the Malian population. The majority of Malians believe that enriched rice is better.\textsuperscript{16}

It is essential for Mali to increase its productivity in order to achieve food security without outside aid. If Mali can set its own rules and regulations of food production, it could also achieve food sovereignty. Koné confirmed that Mali has had to import rice recently because the amount it produced annually was not sufficient for the population. In the past, not all Malians ate rice in their everyday diet, but now they do.\textsuperscript{17} Koné hopes that within the next ten years, Mali will achieve food self-sufficiency. The plan by which this can be achieved is first, to improve plots of land, and second, to intensify production with modern techniques, technology packets and government programs—all of which will improve individual farmers’ yields, thus augmenting Mali’s rice yields on a national scale.\textsuperscript{18}

The Institut d’Economie Rurale (IER) is the principle agricultural research structure in Mali. They focus on food security and increasing production to combat poverty. The IER has national, regional, and community level organizations for transferring their research results to farmers.\textsuperscript{19} Though Dr. Lamissa Diakite, an agro-economist and researcher at the IER, favors enriched rice, he values the importance of local types as well. “Even though local varieties have a weak production rate, we must not completely destroy them because we still have a

\textsuperscript{15} “The Office of Niger and its Goal of Food Sovereignty.”  
\textsuperscript{16} Songoré, Ibrahima.  
\textsuperscript{17} “The Office of Niger and its Goal of Food Sovereignty.”  
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid  
\textsuperscript{19} “The Rural Economic Institute and Rice Research in Mali.” Interview with Dr. Lamissa Diakite. Bamako, Mali. April 29, 2010.
Diakite is most concerned with food security for Mali, which means he supports those varieties that can adapt to Mali’s climate and produce at the highest rate. “The problem we have today with rice at a sub-regional market and international market is the quality,” Diakite says. Mali cultivates some forms of Nerica (New Rice for Africa), of which there are more than 40 types and which was first developed at the African Rice Center in Benin. There are also many varieties of Gambiaka which originally comes from Gambia, but has since been modified by multiple countries.

**Foreign Agricultural Investment in Mali**

After Mali adopted its policy of decentralization in 1993, the government has encouraged foreign investments in all sectors of its economy. Though many factories have been closed down after privatization due to poor management, the country continues to make agreements with multinationals and foreign governments. In the agricultural realm, the government has recently signed away its farmland in three major agreements: 100,000 ha to the Malian and Libyan joint project called Malibya, 11,288 ha to the Economic and Monetary Union of West Africa (UEMOA), and 16,000 ha to the U.S. funded Millennium Challenge Account.

The biggest of these agreements, Malibya, was signed in 2008 and covers 10% of the land under the control of the Office du Niger. Though Malibya’s size makes it the project with the most potential to positively affect the growth of Mali’s economy, the dissemination of information has, at most, left the Malian population confused. Villagers in the Kolongo

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20. “The Rural Economic Institute and Rice Research in Mali.”
region, the site of Malibya, had no information about the project when they were suddenly
told that some of their houses would have to be torn down.26 Government officials and
agricultural specialists know the basic goals of the project, but no specifics about the villagers
who will be displaced. The information does not fit together. Mali is vast and has a lot of land,
but if the Office du Niger continues to sign land to foreign investors, farmers in Mali will only
experience more and more problems.27

The Official Document of the Malibya Society

The official document for Malibya was signed at the Convention d’investissement
dans le Domaine agricole entre La République du Mali et La Grande Jamahiriya arabe
Libyenne populaire et socialiste. The dossier produced is short (six pages), vague, and gives a
lot of leeway to Libya. The preamble states that this project constitutes a “reinforcement of
the economic integration of the two countries…by the realization of strategic projects in the
common interest of the two countries.”28 The goals of the project are self-sufficiency and food
security, the development of agro-industry, and the development of the livestock industry.29
Article 4 states that if the land allotted is unavailable for any reason, the Malibya Society may
choose multiple sites in the region as long as they do not exceed 100,000 ha. The land grant
lasts for 50 years but is a renewable contract.30 The use of water, one of Mali’s most valuable
resources, is given freely to the project in Article 8: “The Republic of Mali is engaged to offer
the Malibya Society all the permits of water usage of the Macina canal as well as underground
water or both according to the needs of the project determined by the economic feasibility

28 Mansoury, Aboubacar and Tiémoko Sangare. “Convention d’investissement dans le Domaine agricole entre
La République du Mali et La Grande Jamahiriya arabe Libyenne populaire et socialiste.” Bamako.
2008. 1
29 Ibid 1
30 Ibid 2
study.” The article continues to say that Malibya may use the quantity necessary and without restriction in the months of June through December. During the dry season, the society will cultivate products that take less water such as wheat, millet, corn, and other vegetables. 31

Water sources are limited in Sahelian countries like Mali; yet Malibya is able to use any and all sources of water. In addition, the original canal in the region of Macina is already subject to water-access problems throughout the year, according to Bréhima Dembele, the Coordinator of the Association des Organisations Professionnelles Paysannes (AOPP). Now, the new 40 km canal of Malibya is going to take more water from this small canal. The water will now flow into the new canal before the old one, leaving the region of Macina in dire straits. “These plots of land already have problems with water because of traditional reasons,” Dembele says. Now Malibya will make life in the Macina Circle more difficult. 32

Malibya can build this canal because in addition to unlimited access to water, the convention also allows the society free reign of the land for infrastructural purposes such as canals, water pumps, electricity networks and “all necessary elements for a better-functioning project,” as long as they are deemed necessary for access to the project site. 33 There is a one-sentence statement in Article 10 that says that the Republic of Mali has the right to inspect the work of Malibya to confirm the usage of the best techniques for the development of land and water. 34 The oversight abilities that Mali has are somewhat limited in the document.

In Article 11, the text declares Malibya’s main objective as the production of agriculture and livestock; however, the society can also develop “a part of the land for other objectives in accordance with Mali.” This vague statement indicates that though it looks as though Malibya is going to produce rice, wheat, millet, and corn, and develop the livestock industry, they have the option to use the land for their own interests. One hundred thousand

31 Mansoury, Aboubacar al and Tiémoko Sangare. 3
32 “The AOPP’s mission to help farmers.”
33 Mansoury, Aboubacar al and Tiémoko Sangare. 3
34 Ibid 3
hectares is a large amount of land to give away without specifying the exact purpose for which it will be used. Furthermore, the next article, Article 12, discusses the chance that precious stones, coal, or petroleum are found in the region. The article begins by saying that with the discovery of any of the aforementioned resources, the land would immediately return to the hands of Mali, and Malibya would receive new land and be compensated for any work it has started. Then it says that “the Republic of Mali has the plain right if it wants, to share participation in the development of these resources with its Libyan counterpart.” If any of these resources are found, the Malian economy could benefit tremendously. Nevertheless, Libya also has a stake in extracting these resources. Just as the rice produced by Malibya is supposedly destined for all of West Africa, the resources would also supposedly be shared between the two countries. In reality, Libya will benefit most from this rice production and now has the opportunity to benefit from potential resources found in the area.

Nowhere in the convention is there a mention of villages that are already in the area or houses that will need to be demolished. Article 13 says that Malibya is entitled to exploit “the sand, stone, mud and anything that results from the land excavations in order to continue the lakes and irrigation canals or the construction of roads.” Sand, stone, and mud are not the only things standing in the way of Malibya’s project. Farmers have been cultivating the land in West Macina for centuries and yet the document makes no mention of these people whose lives will be forever changed. Twice, the verb “compensate” appears in the document. Both times signify the Libyan party being compensated by its Malian counterpart.

Article 16 is materializing in the region today. It states that Malibya has the right to hire foreign experts, use enriched rice and modern agricultural techniques, and use fertilizer.
products. The Chinese contracting company, China Géo-engineering Corporation (CGC Mali) was the first to land on the scene to start the construction of roads and the canal. They also have test fields for experimenting with the different types of hybrid rice that will adapt to Mali’s climate. This section fails to include any environmental hazards that may accompany the enriched rice and fertilizers used by the Malibya Society. Article 20 generally states that Malibya will respect the laws of Mali that govern the protection and preservation of the environment. It fails to mention the fact that many families are finding their environment destroyed by this project.

The technical and economic feasibility studies to see what precautions and measures need to be taken for the project to be successful are first mentioned in Article 5. Lamine Coulibaly, Director of Communications at the Coordination Nationale des Organisations Paysannes (CNOP) says that these studies were not done before CGC arrived and began work on the infrastructure for the project. The document mentions the studies again in Article 21 saying that they will have a timeline between three and twelve months.

Article 22 says that the law of Mali is the law followed by Malibya, yet families have been uninformed about the amount of their compensation and misinformed about when they will be compensated. Finally, the document ends by stating that any disputes between the two parties will be settled outside of court. It is signed by Dr. Aboubacar al Mansoury, Secretary of Agriculture and Herding Industries of Libya, and Pr. Tiémoko Sangare, Minister of Agriculture of the Republic of Mali. Ideas for this project began as early as August 30,

38 Mansoury, Aboubacar al and Tiémoko Sangare. 4
39 Ibid 5
40 “The CNOP’s push for food sovereignty.”
41 Mansoury, Aboubacar al and Tiémoko Sangare. 5
42 Ibid 5
43 Ibid 5
44 Ibid 6
1993 when an investment protocol was signed between the two countries; however, the “Plan of Action” was signed in Bamako on May 9, 2008.45

Government Organizations’ Opinions on Malibya

When Mr. Koné of the Office du Niger was asked about the project, he said Malibya has not yet started except for the CGC constructing the canal and testing hybrid varieties of rice to see which type adapts best to the land. He had little to say on the subject besides the fact that it is a government project and land should be given to those who have “the means to produce.”46 He said that the project is going to increase the food supply for the Malian population by exploiting many new varieties of rice, and women will benefit from the project because Libya is planning to bring new techniques for gardening, a profession dominated by women. Koné is unsure whether Malibya will create jobs for Malians, something Mali desperately needs with an unemployment rate of 30%,47 but he doubts that Libya will bring its own workers to the area.48

According to Koné, the villagers in the region are happy about the project because it is a dry piece of land and Malibya will irrigate it. There have been no problems with the villagers. When asked about those who will be displaced, he simply stated that no one has had to move yet, and he does not know when that will be, but they will all be compensated when that day comes. Meanwhile, Malibya set the date of April 26, 2010, only five days after the interview, as the day on which the houses would be demolished. Furthermore, he said that the villagers had no reaction when they heard of the project because it does not concern them personally; Malibya is on a much larger scale.

45 Mansoury, Aboubacar al and Tiémoko Sangare. 5
46 “The Office of Niger and its Goal of Food Sovereignty.”
48 “The Office of Niger and its Goal of Food Sovereignty.”
Malibya could disrupt the rice market for local sellers, but Koné said that villagers have no say in the matter because Mali is a capitalist country and whatever happens to the rice industry as a result of Malibya will be an outcome of capitalism. “It’s Mali who wins,” Koné said, “and Mali would not sign an agreement in which it would not profit in some way.” He added that the Office du Niger was content because “no one has ever tried to cultivate 100,000 hectares in five years!” Koné thinks highly of the project and Mali’s part in it. The land stays with Mali. Libya invests to make a profit, yet Mali profits as well. The project brings money into the country because Libya must pay Mali to use water, a resource of which the Malibya Society is going to need a great amount. 49

Dr. Diakite of the IER has a similar opinion. He says that Malibya and the Millennium Challenge projects are, “some very good initiatives, some very good development projects.” 50 He adds that there is a lack of agricultural investment in Mali. Everything that has been done and is going to be done is “fantastic” and everyone appreciates it, even the villagers in the area. 51 The branch of the IER in Niono works on researching different aspects for the project such as water management, but outside of this research, the IER is not involved. 52

The Local Response to the Malibya Society

In Niono, the atmosphere is a bit different. At the Union for Agricultural Workers in the Office du Niger (SEXAGON), farmers meet from five regions once a month to discuss issues afflicting them due to natural or unnatural factors. On April 15, 2010, the SEXAGON had a heated debate about Malibya and what to do to help the villagers in the area.

49 “The Office of Niger and its Goal of Food Sovereignty.”
50 “The Rural Economic Institute and Rice Research in Mali.”
51 Ibid
52 Ibid
“Malibya is the stupidest thing that the president has done since he started!” Faliiry Boly said.\textsuperscript{53} Boly is the Secretary of the SEXAGON and works closely with all regions of the union to ensure that farmers are well-represented. He has read the official document of Malibya and thinks it is “too weak” and “not a real explanation.” It gives away Mali’s resources too easily for the betterment of Libya and the project.\textsuperscript{54} Charlotte Sama, a member of the SEXAGON who represents the Kolongo zone where the Malibya site is located, said, “We didn’t know what it was at first.”\textsuperscript{55} Now, she has some details at her disposal, but the village as a whole is still very confused. “Even if Malibya came to save us, someone has to inform us!” Sama said.\textsuperscript{56}

After the announcement of the Malibya agreement, people came from all over the world to see what was going on.\textsuperscript{57} Not only are houses being destroyed, but cemeteries are being moved or destroyed to make way for the canal.\textsuperscript{58} “What would the president think if his father’s body was going to be moved from its resting place? I don’t think he would be too happy,” Boly said.\textsuperscript{59} Boly believes that in order to combat Malibya, farmers, government officials, and all Malian citizens need to be made sensitive to the situation. Farmers need to know that they can fight against this decree. They can combat Malibya by having a united front, having solid documentation, and meeting people who can help them. Boly wants to organize a meeting with President Amadou Toumani Touré (ATT) so that the farmers can get straight answers. He also wants to work with lawyers or jurists who can tell him exactly what the laws of Mali are and how they affect the situation in the Macina region.\textsuperscript{60}

\textsuperscript{53} “Malibya from the Niono Perspective.” Interview with Faliiry Boly. Niono, Mali. April 16, 2010.
\textsuperscript{54} Ibid
\textsuperscript{55} “The State of Kolongo in the Midst of Malibya.”
\textsuperscript{56} Ibid
\textsuperscript{57} “Malibya from the Niono Perspective.”
\textsuperscript{58} Ibid
\textsuperscript{59} Ibid
\textsuperscript{60} Ibid
Boly adds that the people who are being forced to move have nowhere to go. Unlike the United States and other developed countries, most Malians construct their own houses and then families live in the same compound for generations. Thus, giving families money to move does not help them. They must find another piece of land; hopefully a plot similar to the previous one so that they can continue to cultivate the same crops and make a living. Then, they must construct the building materials, most likely mud bricks or cement blocks, and then build the house. On top of this effort, Sama and Boly say that the amount given to families by Malibya is not sufficient for this task.61

Because Sama lives in the region of Malibya, she was able to give a first-hand account of the situation. She said that Malibya brought machines and the Chinese started building roads. “We asked them what it was and they didn’t have an answer,” Sama said.62 No one could tell them what was going on. Then a team sent by the government came to the region to see which houses were going to be torn down and when the farmers realized this, they revolted, and the team had the military brought in to stop the revolt—Malians against Malians.63 The CGC began making the canal along 40 km in the Kolongo region. This is all they have done so far and the people of Kolongo and Macina do not have any idea of when the cultivation stage of the project is going to start.64 “We don’t even know if they’re only cultivating rice or if they are going to cultivate millet, corn and wheat too. Also, we don’t know if the rice is going to be for Mali, Libya, or the whole world,” Sama said.65 She explained that even if enriched rice is supposed to produce the most tons per hectare, the expected results may not come to fruition due to the different soil. Every field is different.66

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61 “The State of Kolongo in the Midst of Malibya.”; “Malibya from the Niono Perspective.”
62 “The State of Kolongo in the Midst of Malibya.”
63 Ibid
64 Ibid
65 Ibid
66 Ibid
Moreover, there are no Libyans there. There are only two Arabs, some Chinese people working on infrastructure, and Malians who have been employed by Malibya.\textsuperscript{67} During this work, the CGC destroyed a man-made bridge made by villagers which served as the only means of traveling between two neighboring towns. Cars, motorcycles, bikes, and kids going to school used this bridge every day and when the villagers asked the CGC to rebuild it, they said that the bridge was not in their contract. The villagers turned to the government for help, but they are still waiting for a response. It will cost 300 million CFA to reconstruct it, so the government is hesitant to do it, says Sama. “So for now, we wait.”\textsuperscript{68}

When the mayor informed residents that their houses would be torn down, the villagers were hesitant to believe it. They tried to work with the mayor to figure out exactly what was going on.\textsuperscript{69} Sama says that 58 houses will be torn down and the total compensation is 130 million CFA which she believes is not sufficient for reconstruction.\textsuperscript{70} She also stated that money is not enough for many people. She spoke of one man who worked his whole adult life to acquire 34 hectares of land and when Malibya came to pay him to move, the amount given to him could never equal the loss of his own fields. Others have lived there over 50 years and are “deeply saddened” by the situation.\textsuperscript{71}

Sama has the foresight to see that Malibya’s goals could potentially help Mali; however, she is disgusted with the way in which Malibya has started carrying out its plans. She believes that Mali had to decentralize and privatize because Mali has no money to finance these types of projects. As of our interview on April 15, 2010, most people had left their homes already. The only families who stayed are the ones still waiting to be compensated. No

\textsuperscript{67} “The State of Kolongo in the Midst of Malibya.”
\textsuperscript{68} Ibid
\textsuperscript{69} Ibid
\textsuperscript{71} “The State of Kolongo in the Midst of Malibya.”
one is staying to resist because as Sama stated, “once they accept the money, that’s it. They have to leave.” And no one wants to refuse “free” money.\textsuperscript{72}

The SEXAGON also meets regularly with the Association of Professional Peasant Organizations (AOPP) and the National Coordination of Peasant Organizations (CNOP) and many SEXAGON union members are members of all three organizations. The AOPP said that they would come to Niono to discuss strategies with the SEXAGON for combating the Malibya project. While Boly believes that farmers can fight Malibya’s decision to take their property, Sama says that the AOPP can only try to negotiate with Malibya for land other than houses that is going to be destroyed, i.e. fields, bridges, and cemeteries, because it is too late for the residents.\textsuperscript{73} The Malibya Society informed the village that they would be coming on the 26th of April to demolish houses. On May 5, 2010, Sama confirmed that on April 27th the houses were demolished.\textsuperscript{74}

\textbf{Accommodations for the displaced villagers}

Mohamed Daou of \textit{Echos} newspaper in Bamako wrote an article called “Touchees par les Travaux du Chantier Malibya” on April 27, 2010 about accommodations built for the displaced villagers in Kolongo. This is seemingly the only article in print that mentions accommodations and even here, it is mentioned briefly in the last paragraph of a longer article. It states that all local residents affected by the project will be moved to an area of 13 ha broken into 130 plots of land.\textsuperscript{75} “The 58 families affected by the project will be lodged without any problem,” First Deputy to the Mayor of Kolongo Mohamed Ouédraogo said. He

\textsuperscript{72} “The State of Kolongo in the Midst of Malibya.”
\textsuperscript{73} “Malibya from the Niono Perspective.”; “The State of Kolongo in the Midst of Malibya.”
\textsuperscript{74} “News from Kolongo after the Houses were Demolished.” Interview with Charlotte Sama. Bamako-Kolongo, Mali. May 5, 2010.
also expressed that two new cemeteries were arranged to replace the old ones. Ouédraogo uses this information as proof that any rumors that the local population would not be accommodated are not true and that, “all was made in the negotiation; all was done to minimize the damage.”  

If the accommodations for residents were negotiated at the beginning, they were neither included in the six-page document produced at the Convention nor announced to the effected villagers. Ouédraogo continues to say that the Office du Niger should be commended on its efforts for arranging these accommodations because, had they not, “half of Kolongo would have had to leave.” Many villagers moved away on their own when they received their sentence from Malibya, while others waited for their compensation so that they could leave to build another house. No one mentioned villagers who stayed in light of possible accommodations. Also, if the accommodations were made in the initial negotiations, then the Office du Niger would not have had anything to do with it because they were not a part of these meetings.

When Bréhima Dembele of the AOPP was asked about the contents of this article he had no information to confirm or dispute it. He said he had heard that this was happening, but was on his way to Niono on May 6, 2010 to meet with AOPP members in the Kolongo region about the situation. Charlotte Sama of Kolongo confirmed that some accommodations are in the process of being built. “They’re not for everyone though,” she said. She also confirmed that Malibya demolished the 58 houses on Tuesday, April 27, 2010, the same day that this article was written. She also mentioned her meeting with the AOPP in Niono on May 6, 2010.

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76 Daou, Mohamed.
77 Ibid
78 “The CNOP’s push for food sovereignty.”
80 “News from Kolongo after the Houses were Demolished.”
to discuss the situation. Finally, accommodations for multiple families on only 13 ha of land would not be sufficient for all of the land these families are losing. Many families owned five or even ten ha of land and thus, 13 ha would make living situations cramped and uncomfortable for these people.

**What Peasant Organizations Can Do to Help Farmers**

*The AOPP*

The AOPP, Association des Organisations Paysannes Professionelles, is an organization that takes care of producers of a variety of products including fruits and vegetables, cereals, and cotton. Bréhima Dembele, the coordinator of the AOPP, thinks the biggest problem for Malian farmers is the financing of the agricultural sector. Farmers lack access to credit because interest rates are too elevated. Without credit, producers have no access to better equipment which could increase their yields. There is also a lack of control of water; thus, farmers who produce during the rainy season do not have anything to do for the rest of the year.

“A producer has no power at the market,” Dembele says. There is no credit available to store products or make transfers of stock between farmers. These are the factors that separate wealthy farmers from the rest. Without access to credit, cultivators have little chance for success. There are also problems of formation. There is an absence of an agricultural policy that reaches the people. The government has recently set in place over 100 projects dealing with agriculture; however, the farmers were not consulted. Dembele believes that there is a lack of a vision for an agricultural politics: “If we had one,” he says, “maybe we could solve the ensemble of problems we have.”

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81 “News from Kolongo after the Houses were Demolished.”
82 “The AOPP’s mission to help farmers.”
83 Ibid
84 Ibid
Concerning the project of Malibya, Dembele says, “In principle, I can’t be against this project.” But Malibya is not running on good principles. “Those who are informed are generally for this project, but it’s those who are not informed who are against it,” he said. What Dembele means by this is that those who have read the official documents and proposals of Malibya see it as a positive investment for the country, while on the other hand, uninformed villagers who are being negatively affected by the project or even union members who understand the views of both sides are against it. Yet in reality, no one can truly be informed because the official document is inherently confusing. For example, the document states that by developing these 100,000 hectares of land, the inflated price for a sack of rice will finally become reasonable for the local population. As Dembele sarcastically put it, “Who can say no to that?”

If citizens were informed about the problems Malibya is creating, they would be against the project. Those most deeply affected by Malibya are the villagers in the Kolongo and Macina Circle regions. Malibya made no effort to inform villagers or even local authorities about what was going to happen to the land there. “People think it’s fields and forests that are going to be torn up, but no—it’s villages!” Dembele said. The AOPP believes that if the state proposes to bring investments like this, agricultural professionals must be informed. Before being able to combat powerful investment groups, people must be informed of both the basics and the specifics of the project—neither of which have been disseminated to the public. Dembele says, “We want to inform all Malians about what is going on. We want to do everything to stop Malibya in its current form.”

The fields that Malibya are going to develop are located in a popular millet-producing area. When asked if the project was going to disrupt the production of millet in Mali, he said

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85 “The AOPP’s mission to help farmers.”
86 Ibid
87 Ibid
that the question is not whether it will disrupt Malian millet production, but rather what the people who are there are going to become and where they are going to go.\textsuperscript{88} He is very concerned about the people, which is definitely the first problem to be discussed. Malibya has not started much of the project besides building a 40 km canal, testing hybrid types of rice in a few fields, and most importantly, evicting families from their homes.

The Millennium Challenge Account is in the process of implementing a similar project in Alatoona, a region also covered by the Office du Niger. They are taking fields with a lot of potential and turning them into high-yielding rice fields. Though they are only developing 18,000 ha of land, they are taking the displacement of villagers seriously. They built another village with nicer houses than the villagers had previously. They also gave them new plots of land and showed them how to grow rice instead of millet. After explaining this, Dembele compared the project to Malibya and said, “It’s the principle, or better yet the philosophy of Malibya that is immoral. It’s really not normal. We cannot engage ourselves in projects like that.”\textsuperscript{89}

According to Dembele, not all of the displaced families have been compensated yet and some are even trying to save as much of their houses as they can by breaking down their own houses to save the materials. This fear makes sense because, according to Sama, Boly, Dembele, and Coulibaly, the compensation is not sufficient to fund the construction of a new house. Depending on how much land a farmer had, the amount of compensation will be different. Some people, Dembele said, are not even capable of building a new house or even making mud bricks.\textsuperscript{90} “The project could never help the farmers,” Dembele said. He added that all farmers want is to have the means to live with their families in the best conditions possible. “We don’t want to be farmers for someone, but for ourselves,” he explained. They

\textsuperscript{88} “The AOPP’s mission to help farmers.”
\textsuperscript{89} Ibid
\textsuperscript{90} Ibid
do not know if the rice that will be produced will be sold in Mali or abroad; but, Malibya is
going to try to produce rice that is less expensive than that of local producers—so local
producers will lose.\(^{91}\)

The AOPP is planning to go to the area and create a forum to inform people, discuss
issues, and alert the national and international press. They want to negotiate with the state on
behalf of the villagers, but they, along with the villagers, must be informed of all that the
project is doing before talking to the state. Dembele said that if villagers are updated on what
is going on in the official document, then the AOPP can go to the government and say: this is
what we agree with and this is what we do not agree with. “Then the state will have to listen
to us,” he said.\(^{92}\) The question is how to inform the Malian population.

Though seeing the situation firsthand can be powerful, Dembele knows that he
“cannot bring all Malians to Ségou or Niono.” Because Malians are not in the habit of
reading, the “radio of proximity” will be the primary method for disseminating information.\(^{93}\)
There is a specific AOPP radio network that broadcasts in all regions of Mali. Earlier in April,
Dembele went to Gao to help rice farmers in the North and there were farmers from all
regions of Mali, including Niono and Kolongo, who had come to help support these rice
farmers. “It’s this synergy among farmers of Mali that we want to develop,” Dembele said.
Cultivators in one region should be aware of the problems of those in every other region of
Mali.\(^{94}\)

The CNOP

The CNOP, Coordination Nationale des Organisations Paysannes, works on
connecting farmer organizations and government officials to help make farmers’ voices heard.

\(^{91}\) “The AOPP’s mission to help farmers.”
\(^{92}\) Ibid
\(^{93}\) Ibid
\(^{94}\) Ibid
Their members include 11 regional organizations, each of which represents multiple local peasant organizations. The ultimate goal of the CNOP is to allow peasant organizations “to contribute to the definition of a clear vision of Malian agriculture and a coherent politics of agriculture centered on familial agricultural workers.”

Lamine Coulibaly, Director of Communications at the CNOP, believes that there are enormous problems facing farmers today, especially *speculation foncière*—investment in stock or property at high risks.

“Foreign investors are trying to shake our country,” Coulibaly said. This is becoming the biggest worry for peasants in Mali. Conversely, the biggest obstacle for the CNOP to help farmers concerns the Agriculture Guidelines Law of 2006. Because the CNOP played a major part in the law-making process, they are required to help implement it; but the application of the law is posing problems.

Coulibaly, who wrote an article, “Libyan Land Grab of Mali’s Rice-Producing Land,” which has been translated into four languages, is concerned about Malibya because the company failed to execute any preliminary studies on feasibility and environmental or social risks before it began working. The people in these villages saw the Chinese working and had no idea what was happening. When people started asking questions, only then did Malibya think to do a three-month study to decide how many houses, gardens, fields, and cemeteries should be destroyed to make way for the canal.

The CNOP asked the government for compensation for landowners in the area and the government replied that the prime minister had already passed by Kolongo to survey the area and that the money is available—but presently, nothing has been done. Coulibaly said that 160 families will be affected and 58 will have their houses taken. It is Coulibaly’s opinion

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96 “The CNOP’s push for food sovereignty.”
97 Ibid
98 Ibid
99 Ibid
that the taste of hybrid rice from China is not good. He worries that this hybrid rice will negatively affect local varieties of rice. Eight tons per hectare is excessive for Mali’s soil, and a local farmer who produces two tons per hectare cannot compete with those who produce eight tons per hectare. In addition, the consumption of rice has surpassed that of millet.  

“Mali is a country of familial agriculture.” By this, Coulibaly means subsistence farming—each farmer has his fields and produces enough for his family. If there is a surplus, they sell the extra in the market for a profit. Modern agriculture is not the norm. The official document of Malibya is not at all sensitive to these farmers in the region. Coulibaly cannot believe that neither the farmers nor the Office du Niger were implicated in the decision-making process. He even talked to an advisor to the Minister of Agriculture who was not included in the plans for Malibya until two months after the documents were signed. The first convention where Malibya documents were signed was very private. Now, details of the project remain hidden and everyone must wait and observe what is happening before further action can be taken. Coulibaly notes that even if the future of the project turns out as planned, it will not help Mali. “Imagine a farmer who only has one or two hectares on the side of a multinational who has 100,000 hectares. It’s clear that these farmers will be devoured by these investors,” Coulibaly said.

Furthermore, the Office du Niger director of the zone of Kolongo was completely against the project at first, but later he completely changed his opinion to favor the project. According to Coulibaly, the director said that Malibya was a fund that could help Mali to improve its rice production. Coulibaly understands why Mali made this decision: Mali does not have the means to convert farmland so they must look to foreign investors such as Libya. They employ Libya to develop the land and then at the end of the contract, the land returns to

100 “The CNOP’s push for food sovereignty.”
101 Ibid
102 Ibid
103 Ibid
the state.\textsuperscript{104} It is a “win-win situation” for the Malian government. But in reality, Coulibaly says, “It’s truly a production destined to go to Libya… If we don’t try to find a solution now, everything will fall apart.”\textsuperscript{105} The CNOP plans to organize a 400 km march starting in the zone of Malibya and ending in Bamako.\textsuperscript{106}

\textbf{Overview of SEXAGON}

If Mali could develop its own land initiatives by talking to the agricultural producers, the country would have a greater chance at achieving food security and food sovereignty. Though most Malian farmers are poor and cultivate on a small scale, they know what they need to improve their rate of production. Take the SEXAGON, for example. The SEXAGON, or the Union of the Agricultural Workers of the Office du Niger, is a union of agricultural producers in the region of the Office du Niger that started because farmers in the region felt they were not being well-represented.

The SEXAGON was created in 1997, and today it is the biggest union in the region of the Office du Niger.\textsuperscript{107} It represents farmers in five administrative zones within the Office:

\\textsuperscript{104} “The CNOP’s push for food sovereignty.”
\textsuperscript{105} Ibid
\textsuperscript{106} Ibid
Niono, Molodo, N’débougou, Kouromari, and Macina. It is composed of mostly rice producers, but also includes some cattle herders and market gardeners. The union acts to obtain the best services from the Office du Niger in terms of maintenance and conversions of irrigation systems and secure access to land for farmers. Their mission also expresses that, “the fight against the evictions of farmers was and remains an important fight.” For a union to be self-created to combat this trend specifically, it is clear that evictions are an age-old problem in the region. Additionally, the SEXAGON looks for ways to improve the lives of subsistence farmers through commercialization techniques.\(^\text{108}\)

To help combat the poverty of farmers in the region, the SEXAGON spent seven years devising a plan for cooperatives in the region to improve production, a much more thorough feasibility study than the three month study that Malibya is supposed to conduct.\(^\text{109}\) The SEXAGON created cooperatives because the proposed price of rice by the Office du Niger was, in the farmers’ opinions, too low, and “without a doubt made from the dominant position of the big producers who can impose their prices on unorganized farmers.”\(^\text{110}\) The principal objectives of the cooperatives are to resolve problems linked to water payments, supply mineral fertilizer at the best price and quality, good transformation practices of paddy or grain rice for a good production rate, and the commercialization of rice stock.\(^\text{111}\)

“Land is for all of us,” Boly says. As Secretary of the SEXAGON and Director of the Cooperatives, Boly played a major role in creating cooperatives in the region. Boly believes in his work and the fact that unions and cooperatives are the best way to increase the yields of farmers in a fair way.\(^\text{112}\) The cooperatives use small loans to operate, which also teaches farmers about paying back credit so that they can be successful. Boly started the cooperatives

\(^\text{108}\) Bureau d’Etudes et de Formation. \(^3\)
\(^\text{109}\) Ibid \(^3\)
\(^\text{110}\) Ibid 3
\(^\text{111}\) Ibid 7
for three reasons: to increase the development of plots of land, to allow producers to take part in the process, and to have access to credit for farmers. However, there is a problem with the way credit works in Mali because the interest rates are too high. Farmers would greatly benefit from having credit that they could invest for 20, 30, or 50 years before paying it back. They would also benefit if credit was renewable.\footnote{\textit{The SEXAGON and the Cooperatives Initiatives.}}

“We need to organize ourselves a lot more. We work harder, but we don’t win,” Boly says. He is referring to the difference between farmers who use modern agricultural technology and farmers who do not, i.e. the majority of farmers in Mali. Boly has faith that it is easy to profit as a rice farmer in Niono if you are well-organized. There is money to be made in the regions covered by the SEXAGON, but organization is the key. Molodo, the village Boly lives in which is a ten minute drive outside of Niono has a lot of potential, but is not organized in a productive way.\footnote{Ibid}

Accordingly, it took seven years to organize the cooperatives, but it is better to be thorough than to be fast and make mistakes (The SEXAGON made a 35 page report while the Malibya agreement is only six pages.). Now there are 70 cooperatives set in place with 48 that are working successfully, i.e. paying back 100\% of their credit. Some groups do not have the money to pay back the credit, while others simply do not understand the concept of credit, i.e. giving money back that was given to you.\footnote{Ibid}

“We have traditional ways of working, but people are starting to understand that, for example, putting things in writing makes it more official—it makes people listen to you and believe in what you are saying,” Boly says. The SEXAGON bought writing materials and messenger bags for everyone in the union to facilitate writing, though some people still arrive
at meetings without writing down what they have to say. But he believes that this attitude is changing in a positive direction and is willing to keep working until his goals are achieved.\textsuperscript{116}

The SEXAGON bought a rice-processing machine from China that they started using on Monday, April 19, 2010. The union members were very excited to start using it because it is their own machine that can increase production rates in their village. In many ways, these farmers want the same things as the government: to increase production and make a profit. If the government is able to give workers the tools to become cash-crop farmers, then everyone would profit and be working toward a common goal. The objectives of the SEXAGON are similar to those set by the SIAGRI (Salle Internationale d’Agriculture) at a conference in Bamako from April 24-30.

**Agricultural Goals of the Government**

From April 24-30, Bamako’s Palais de la Culture hosted a conference called “Food Sovereignty for a Sustainable Agriculture” and the use of modern agricultural technology was at the top of the discussion list. In an article from *Info Matin* on April 26, 2010 by Bertin Dakouo called “Cap sur la Modernization de l’Agriculture” (Course for the Modernization of Agriculture), Dakouo writes about the need Mali has for modern agriculture. Boubacar Ba, mayor of Commune V in Bamako, is quoted saying that, “as long as the prices of our products are higher than those of imported products, our country will not attain its objectives of food security.”\textsuperscript{117} Alas, Mali can achieve food security by importing cheap, left-over food from developed countries, a phenomenon known as export dumping, but to achieve food sovereignty, Mali will need to combat this trend.

\textsuperscript{116} “The SEXAGON and the Cooperatives Initiatives.”
The definition of food sovereignty developed by Via Campesina at the World Food Summit in 1996 is expressed as “the right of nations and governments to define their own agricultural and food policies.” This definition does not always correlate to producing your own food, but rather to policies that will benefit your country’s producers and consumers. On the other hand, food security exists “when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs, as well as to culturally acceptable food preferences for an active and healthy life.”

President of the Assemblé Permanente des Chambers d’Agriculture (APCAM) Bakary Togola believes that “Mali is not poor in natural resources, but rather it is poor in innovative ideas for valorizing its resources.” Togola also pleaded for banks to be on the side of producers with respect to reimbursing loans. He believes that the use of enriched seeds will aid Mali in its goal of food security. To attain its goals, Mali must make a distinction between food security and food sovereignty before moving forward. Togola’s goals are for attaining food security, but require food sovereignty. If Mali is able to provide food security for its own people, it will, at the same time, achieve food sovereignty.

The AOPP supports the notion of food sovereignty and Dembele understands the confusion between food security and food sovereignty, noting that many organizations are against sovereignty in order to achieve security first. The most popular approach to support food security is to buy the cheapest food—which most likely comes from the United States, Japan, or other developed countries. Engaging in export dumping in this way only exacerbates small farmers’ efforts to sell food in local, regional, or national markets. “If you

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118 Blein, Roger and Emmanuel Jeudy. 7
120 Dakouo, Bertin.
121 “The AOPP’s mission to help farmers.”
122 Ibid
really want to help us,” Dembele says, “come and buy rice from local markets. Give money to those who do not have the means.” Dembele says that the AOPP can defend what they stand for by helping farmers to carry out self-made initiatives. If the AOPP can help in this way, Mali can achieve food sovereignty.¹²³

Coulibaly of the CNOP says that, “We can’t achieve food sovereignty without improving familial agriculture.” He believes in creating a solid political campaign at the lowest level—a politics for farmers and their families. Coulibaly is right about improving familial agriculture: a recent Food and Agriculture Organization report stated that over 50% of Malian farmers do not have a plough. Without a plough, a farmer cannot start to harvest. One must wait for someone with a plough to finish cultivating so that he can use it.¹²⁴

Another obstacle facing farmers is the high price of fertilizer. Fertilizer is unavailable for rice cultivators at the moment. Sacks of fertilizer cost 22,500 CFA, but with subsidies it is only 12,500 CFA per sack, a price which has never been that low.¹²⁵ The government is in the process of enacting this subsidy which means that, “today is a great opportunity to help familial agriculture. It is initiatives like this that we hope the state will continue to develop.”¹²⁶ Farmers would benefit from plough and labor subsidies as well. It costs 50,000 CFA to hire someone to cultivate one hectare of rice fields plus other expenses outside of labor. According to Coulibaly, “There is a strong demand for land by farmers as well.” So he asks, “Why doesn’t the government give land to these farmers?” Coulibaly has hope for the government to follow through on agricultural initiatives because the three highest areas of state spending are on education, health, and agriculture.¹²⁷ If the government follows through on these initiatives, Mali can successfully acquire food sovereignty.

¹²³ “The AOPP’s mission to help farmers.”
¹²⁴ “The CNOP’s push for food sovereignty.”
¹²⁵ Ibid
¹²⁶ Ibid
¹²⁷ Ibid
Dr. Diakite of the IER believes that to achieve food self-sufficiency, food security and food sovereignty, Mali must increase its stock for export, allow farmers to have access to infrastructure, credit, and other resources, and support a good quality of rice that will augment the health of the population.\textsuperscript{128} When asked what the farmers can do to increase their yields, Diakite explained that they need to invest well and use organic materials, i.e. composting, to enrich the soil. Diakite acquiesced that farmers do not have the tools to cultivate enriched rice, but said that farmers “must have courage” to improve their lot.\textsuperscript{129} Concrete government projects would help farmers more than courage.

### A Glimpse into a Better Future for Malian Farmers

The SEXAGON believes that it knows best when it comes to rice fields, although the members are not against outside advice where needed. Boly goes to France periodically for conferences on agriculture and brings the knowledge back to Niono and the regions of the SEXAGON. He also seeks judicial advice from a professor at the University of Bamako for help with property laws concerning Malibya and other projects that have caused evictions in the past.\textsuperscript{130} Sometimes outside help is exactly what farmers need to produce higher yields. And helping farmers to increase production on land they already own does not violate their sovereignty.

A study done by the African Rice Center in Sikasso, Mali and Niono, Mali showed that with the proper training, farmers could successfully manage their own pest problems, thereby obtaining higher yields during the harvest season.\textsuperscript{131} “There is a growing realization that future agricultural growth hinges on smallholder farmers, who must be knowledgeable

\textsuperscript{128} “The Rural Economic Institute and Rice Research in Mali.”
\textsuperscript{129} Ibid
\textsuperscript{130} “The SEXAGON and the Cooperatives Initiatives.”
\textsuperscript{131} Nwilene, F.E., M.A. Togola, O. Youm, and A. Hamadoun. “Farmer participatory learning on integrated crop management of lowland rice in Mali.” \textit{Africa Rice Center} (WARDA), Nigeria, Mali. 2006. 35
and exposed to a learning process that involves continuous observation and feedback from the local environment.”

The study passed out training manuals in Bambara and made questionnaires to record farmers’ perceptions, constraints, and local knowledge. Before beginning training, those carrying out the study explained the farmers’ problems that were collected from the questionnaires. The farmers selected for the study were trained in many areas including using a field notebook for observations, planting different seed varieties, following a cultural calendar, using improved techniques, using natural and chemical pesticides, using mineral and organic fertilizer, and rotating crops.

After training, the farmers harvested more crops and were able to keep them healthy. The trained farmers improved or maintained their levels in all aspects of the study (see figure 1). In this case, outside help proved necessary for farmers to combat pests. The study also said that farmers in Niono were much more knowledgeable before the study than those of Sikasso. Perhaps that is because the SEXAGON takes the time to inform its farmers of solutions to their problems.

Fig. 1. Indicators to assess farmers’ knowledge before and after training, Sikasso and Niono, Mali, 2004 wet season.

132 Nwilene, F.E., M.A. Togola, O. Youm, and A. Hamadoun. 36
133 Ibid 37
Conclusion

Boly has many hopes for the future of agriculture in Mali. He would like farmers to be able to export within the region, be well-organized, have access to cheaper fertilizer and have a guaranteed fund. He says that there needs to be a change in mentality of rice farmers. The idea of credit is a foreign one to most farmers and they need to understand that they have to pay money back in order to be successful. Additionally farmers would benefit from better communication channels between farmers, credit organizations, and government so that all parties could work together to achieve a common goal. Likewise, the Office du Niger and the Ministry of Agriculture have optimistic aspirations for the future of agriculture. Abou Sow, Secretary of State in charge of the Office of Niger, advocates a mechanized agriculture, an increased exportation of products cultivated in the Office du Niger region, and microfinance for local producers to buy machines.

The Ministry of Agriculture, the Office du Niger, professional peasant organizations, and farmers unions all strive for a successful agricultural production in Mali. While the strategies implemented to achieve these goals change from level to level, the basic idea is the same: to help farmers to increase their production to feed Mali and become an exporter in the region. Projects like Malibya forget to keep the farmers first. As Boly says, “Only Malian rice farmers know what Malian rice farmers need.” To reiterate the words of Bréhima Dembele of the AOPP and Lamine Coulibaly of the CNOP, an agricultural policy for the people is greatly needed in Mali. It would facilitate communication channels between government officials and producers. Maybe then solid information would be passed to farmers in places like Kolongo and Niono. Maybe then houses would not be demolished, leaving people with nowhere to go. And maybe then the government would know how to fund that

134 “The SEXAGON and the Cooperatives Initiatives.”
136 “The SEXAGON and the Cooperatives Initiatives.”
which farmers need the most—things like fertilizer and access to credit. If the government and farmers worked together in this way, Mali could become a food sovereign country faster that it takes to sign another document with a foreign investor.
Appendix 1

Map of the five regions encompassed by the SEXAGON

(Note: Malibya is the big project on the far right of the map)


“News from Kolongo after the Houses were Demolished.” Interview with Charlotte Sama. Bamako-Kolongo, Mali. May 5,2010.


