

# WOMEN LEAD THE WAY IN RURAL ENTERPRISES

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“Quality is what we need – and the quality of our new relationships helps us with the quality of our cereals”

For many years, rural women have been creating their own food processing companies that promote local agriculture by bringing to the market original foods in products that are accessible to urban populations. The aim of CDAIS is to support these companies' development by strengthening their capacities to experiment and learn together, as well as to negotiate and make contracts with suppliers and traders. And Dakoupa in Bobo-Dioulasso is one of many small family businesses supported by CDAIS through the women-led agri-food processing micro-enterprise innovation partnership.

The courtyard of the house is clean, calm and orderly. Outside in the streets, the soil is a red, dry clay, that blows away at the slightest gust of wind, and settles in every corner of every room... Apart from a few bags of maize that can be seen under the porch, nothing appears out of place, and it looks like any other traditional well-kept house. But appearances are misleading. Who would believe that this courtyard is a food-processing factory and the hub of a company that employs six women? Catherine Gnoula has been the manager of this processing unit for more than ten years, and her experience – most recently with support of CDAIS – has allowed her to grow her business, network and build trust with producers and traders.

## Women lead the way

Bobo-Dioulasso in the Hauts-Bassin region in the south-west of the country has fertile soils and relatively high rainfall. It is a large cereal-producing area, but there are few outlets. The food processing sector supported by CDAIS is therefore fundamental for the support and development of the various actors, including producers, processors, intermediaries and resellers.

The CDAIS project supports Gnoula in her role as a food processor to achieve success in her business. One of the main difficulties for women entrepreneurs is building trusting

relationships with producers. So, CDAIS facilitators assist by organising arrangements whereby women entrepreneurs can work regularly with producers. For example, Gnoula explained, “with the support of CDAIS we had a workshop with grain producers during which we were able to discuss our needs in terms of variety and quality.” Another participant added, “producers were also able to explain their constraints, and they could also talk to each other about production techniques, because many were from different regions.”



*Dambélé Ouandé dries maize flour on tables in the courtyard of her house.*

## Creating a space to share views – the CDAIS approach

The support team conducts training and exchange activities between grain producers and women entrepreneurs. Never done before, these innovations have allowed the various actors in the sector to work together, enabled the exchange of contacts for future collaboration, and helped to increase the efficiency of agricultural value chains.

An example of this CDAIS-supported exchange was a workshop in Bobo-Dioulasso on 7 December 2017 that brought 15 producers together with five women processors, members of the Réseau de Transformateurs de Céréales du Faso. Facilitated by Adama Traoré from the national agricultural researcher institute (INERA) and Raymond Kiogo, National Innovation Facilitator for the family micro-business partnership, the day focused on sharing information for better collaboration. Adama Traoré also introduced different high-yielding and high-quality cereal varieties, some previously unknown to the producers.

The women had the opportunity to explain the challenges they face in having to work with poor-quality cereals, highlighting the need for becoming involved in the process. And, as Traoré explained, “such exchanges are really important. We have connected producers and distributors before, but have not really linked producers and processors. And the results are amazing.”



*During the producer and processor exchange workshop, Catherine Gnoula could show off the many and varied goods produced by her family micro-enterprise.*

“Us processors are not simple people!” exclaimed Gnoula, President of the Dakoupa unit in Bobo-Dioulasso that makes maize, fonio, sorghum and millet into couscous and other products. “Food processing units are traditionally run by women because we are the ones who manage food in our homes – but setting up a processing business is different.”

A second pillar of CDAIS support for processors is to help the drawing up of business contracts. Dambélé Ouandé

manages the Wendmanegda processing unit, a few streets away from Dakoupa. Since she first became involved with CDAIS, she has felt more confident in negotiating with producers, because she now knows what she wants and how to express it better. “The quality of the cereals we process is fundamental for us – to make good millet couscous, we need good cereals!” she explained. “So the contract should not necessarily fix the price in advance, but it should assure the quality and quantity of cereals that we expect.”





### The constraints of women entrepreneurs

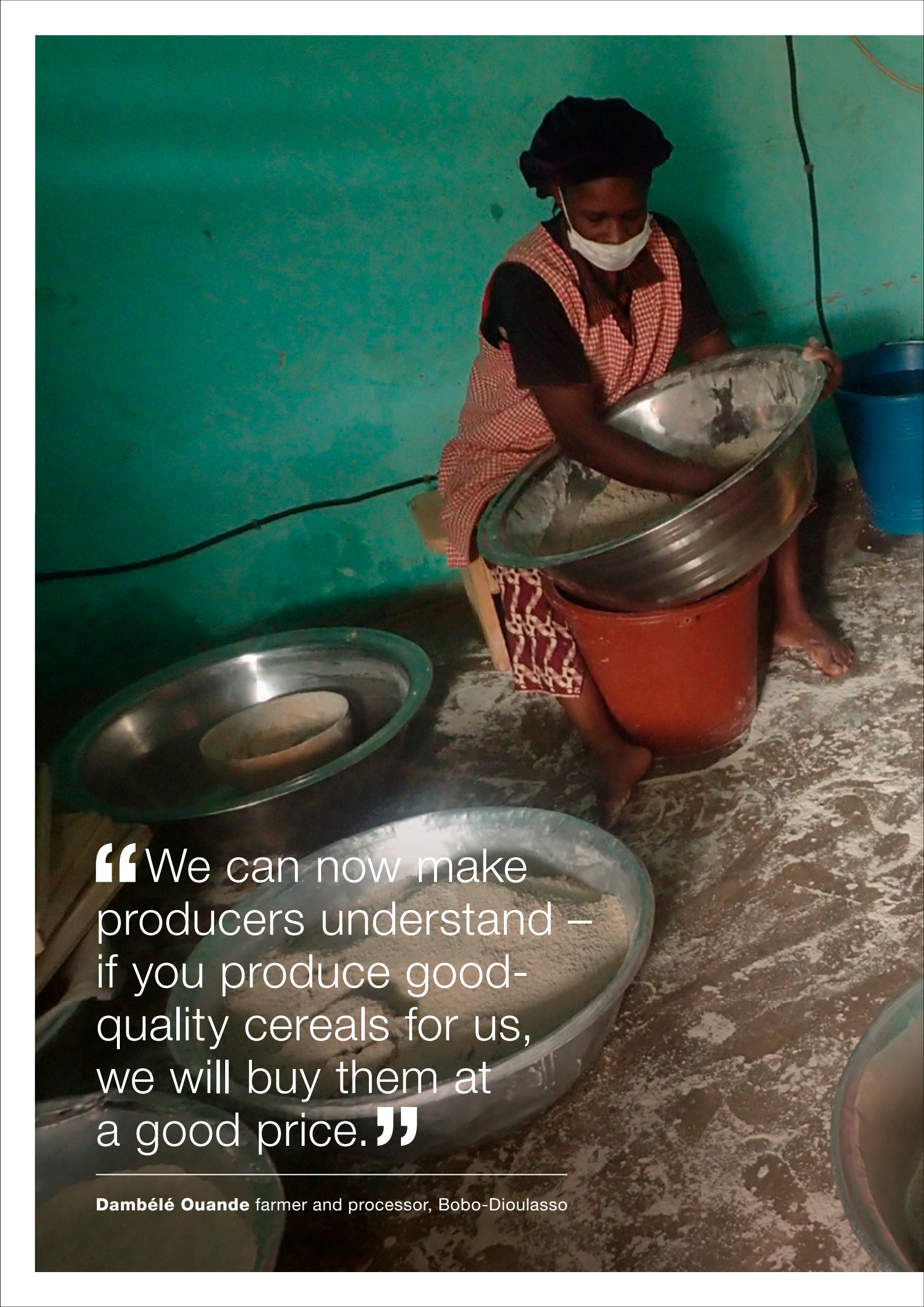
Gnoula and Dambélé face similar difficulties, with suppliers on one side and their employees on the other. Often, they find stones and plant stems or cobs mixed with the cereals, as farmers do not put enough emphasis on producing a pure high-quality product, or dishonest farmers mix them in to make the bags heavier. In these cases, employees must spend many hours sorting by hand, which is time-consuming, tiring and uncomfortable work. Dambélé added, “and it is difficult to keep women in this job for a long time because I cannot afford to pay them more for the extra work they do, and yet, this is essential work for the company.”

### Entrepreneurial dynamics supported by research

Gnoula has now integrated herself into various projects in Burkina Faso and, thanks to one of these networks, has acquired a grain drier, corresponding exactly to the needs of her business, and allows her to dry millet and fonio flour in just three hours, and the variety of foods that can be dried is wide. “The advantages of the drier are that drying is faster, quality is better and, above all, I can work in any season,” says Gnoula, “and so I don’t need drying tables any more, which cannot be used when it’s raining or windy.”

Complementing CDAIS, other applied research projects are also interesting for Gnoula, when they aim to improve the





“We can now make producers understand – if you produce good-quality cereals for us, we will buy them at a good price.”

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**Dambélé Ouande** farmer and processor, Bobo-Dioulasso





*Catherine Gnoula and her employees mix maize flour in their kitchen workshop.*





*Gnoula's new dryer, a much-needed addition to her enterprise.*

“The advantages of the drier are that drying is faster, quality is better and, above all, I can work in any season.”

**Catherine Gnoula** processor, Bobo-Dioulasso

sector in ways appropriate to the reality of entrepreneurs, and offer concrete answers to obstacles she sees for the development of her business. And she is very happy that, with support from CDAIS, she has been able to draw up grain-purchase contracts and also a lease contract for land they have rented for two years. Gnoula had never before signed a lease agreement, and this has helped her guarantee the stability of her business. The CDAIS support team made her aware of the importance of such contracts to reduce the vulnerability of the business and accompanied her in what proved to be a difficult but essential negotiation process.

## And on to the next stage...

Being a processor in a small family unit in Burkina Faso is a daily challenge, with insecurity in the supply of raw materials, ignorance of cereal prices, lack of contracts

governing trade, and unstable markets. CDAIS works in partnership with the entrepreneurs, but challenges remain. However, Gnoula is confident. On the door of the workshop there is a sign based on a quote by Martin Luther King: “If someone is called to be a street sweeper, they should sweep streets so well that all the hosts of heaven and earth will pause to say, ‘here lived a great streetsweeper who did their job well’”. Gnoula says she is carried forward by this quote, because “even if our work seems insignificant, we must do it with dedication, because all work is important at its level.”

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Family micro-enterprises is one of five innovation partnerships in Burkina Faso being developed as part of the CDAIS project. For more information, visit <https://cdais.net/home/pilots-countries/burkina-faso>. CDAIS is implemented in Burkina Faso by Agrinatura (represented by CIRAD), the Ministry of Higher Education, Scientific Research and Innovation (Ministère de l'Enseignement Supérieur, de la Recherche Scientifique et de l'Innovation, MESRI), and the local office of FAO.

