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Haggling for Soap Restores Confidence of Rape Survivors in Mali

(The names of survivors in this article are fictitious. Photos are used with permission)

Bamako, Mali: Fatimata S, 18, has still not fully recovered from the way she was mistreated in 2012 after rebels and jihadists overran the town of Kidal in northern Mali. She still suffers from nightmares and bursts into tears when she is left alone.



Preparing labels for Sini Soap

But today, Fatimata is on a mission. She is leading a team of four young women - refugees from the north like herself - to sell soap in a Bamako market. They helped to make the soap and they stand to gain 60% of whatever they sell. Some look nervous, but not Fatimata. She flashes a big smile and can't wait to get started.

Fatimata's mission lies at the heart of an ambitious program to empower women who suffered sexual violence during the 2012 conflict. Managed by [Sini Sanuman](#), a leading advocate for women's rights in Mali, the program has trained 330 survivors to produce soap, clothes and embroidery at two centers since June 2014. Sixty women are currently

enrolled in the program. To see soap being made [watch this video](#).

Siaka Traore, the program director, said the goal is to help beneficiaries regain their sense of self esteem. "The best way for this to happen is if they sell something that they make."



Mama Konte applies the smell test

The Advocacy Project (AP) partners with Sini Sanuman and is on hand as Fatimata and her team pack soap into boxes and attach *Sini Savon* labels (photo above). Each box contains 16 bars and is priced at 2,250 CFA (\$3.7).

Fatimata and her team then depart for the nearby Djelibougou market, where they encounter Mama Konte (left), who sells soap at her stall. Fatimata turns on the charm while her colleague Saliha C, 16, produces samples. Mama Konte likes what she sees - and smells - and orders three cartons. "I need to see if it is creamy and will sell," she says. "If so, I will probably buy more."

After watching this exchange, Aissata Coulibaly, a shopper, quickly buys two cartons (photo below). Fatimata's team has sold their entire consignment in under an hour. Elated, they celebrate by buying ice-cold water and head back to the center.

Fatimata and her friends each receive 1,350 CFA (\$2.3) from their sales and earnings have risen as production has increased. The centers produced 780 bars of *Sini Savon* in 2014 and 4,253 bars in 2015. They are on track to produce over 11,000 bars this year.



Aissata Coulibaly, right, buys two cartons of *Sini Savon* from Fatimata's team

More important even than money is the growing confidence of trainees. Program managers say that Fatimata has become a real leader and source of inspiration for the others.

Sini Sanuman's program is funded by the German Foreign Ministry, through [IFA/Zivik](#), by the Government of Liechtenstein and by scores of individuals who have donated to fundraising appeals by [Luigi Laraia](#) and [Rose Twagirumikiza](#). Rose served as an AP Peace Fellow at Sini Sanuman this summer and introduced several innovations which have

spurred productivity. [Read her blogs here.](#)

Sini Sanuman would like to make it possible for talented trainees like Fatimata to continue working after their training ends. With this in mind, AP and Sini Sanuman will invest \$1,000 in a community women's group, Moussou Kalanso, which meets each week in Bamako to make soap (photo at the top of this page). In return, the group will engage several former trainees from Sini Sanuman's Bamako center.

* To donate to this program [click here](#) - and thank you!

* Read more about Sini Sanuman's work with SGBV survivors in Mali [here](#)

* Watch shea butter oil being made for the centers [in this video](#)

* Read the blogs of Peace Fellows who have worked for this program: [Giorgia](#) (2014); [Refilwe](#) (2015); and [Rose](#) (2016).

Thanks to Humanity United for supporting our 2016 program and to the Peace and Collaborative Development Network for re-posting our bulletins.

