



NEWS BULLETIN 276
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Soap Speeds the Recovery of War Rape Survivors in Mali

Bamako, Mali: Three years after she lost her husband and newborn during the rebellion in northern Mali in 2012, Agna, 34, still suffers from nightmares. But last October her mind was on soap.



Grinding work: Sini Sanuman's soap uses shea oil which is produced by village women from karite nuts. [Watch the video!](#)

Agna had just completed three months of training at a center for women in Bamako, where she learned how to make soap, clothes and embroidery alongside 29 other survivors of armed sexual violence. The center is run by [Sini Sanuman](#) (Healthy Tomorrow), a leading advocate for women's rights in Mali, in partnership with The Advocacy Project (AP).

Following her training, Agna returned to the center with fellow trainees to continue producing soap. She took away 12 boxes of soap which she sold for the equivalent of \$41, helping to supplement the \$25 that she earns each month as a waitress.

More important, Agna's confidence was soaring at having acquired a skill and sold her own soap. Even the memories of violence were starting to fade. "I learned a lot. It was also a chance to forget what happened in the north," she said during a meeting with AP at the Bamako center.

Agna is one of thousands of women who were subjected to extreme violence in 2012, when Tuareg rebels linked up with jihadists and took over northern Mali. Women were raped,

flogged, forced into marriage, and expelled from their homes. Many saw their husbands killed.



The shea butter soap is taken from the mold and smoothed by hand

Survivors are still coming forward to seek help. The UN Population Fund (UNFPA) reported over 800 new cases of sexual violence between March and September of this year, almost all dating back to 2012.

Sexual violence leaves a complex legacy of injury, fear, insecurity and poverty. As a result, restoring the confidence of survivors is almost as important as services.

Sini Sanuman starts by reaching out to women and identifying those who are most in need. So far this year, ten "animators" (community outreach workers) have met with 44,800 women in Bamako and the northern town of Bourem.

The next step is to provide support. Since the program began in July 2014, Sini Sanuman has taken in 240 women at its two centers, in Bamako and Bourem. Here they receive a meal, psychosocial counseling, training, and - most important - the friendship of other survivors. Beneficiaries are so motivated that some cross two rivers to reach the Bourem center.



Ready for the market: each bar of shea soap comes with its own hand-made sachet. [Watch the video!](#)

Soap has emerged as a centerpiece of the program - part therapy and part income-generation. Under the watchful eye of Aissata Toure, a professional soap-maker, the program perfected the ingredients in 2014 and tested the market by selling 750 bars under the brand of Sini Savon.

The target for 2016 is to sell 5,000 bars of shea butter soap, while spreading the benefits to poor village women. Instead of buying through middle-men, Sini Sanuman will purchase shea oil directly from a village association of 40 women who produce oil from the shea nuts (top photo). AP has produced two videos that show [shea oil being produced](#) in the village, and [oil being used in making soap](#) at the Bamako center.

With soap production under control, the next challenge will be to find new markets. The program is hoping to sell shea soap to a Bamako hotel, while AP will market soap in the US at events featuring the [Mali advocacy quilts](#). AP is opening a new fundraising page for Malian soap on Global Giving, while Refilwe Moahi, this year's Peace Fellow in Mali, will also launch a crowdfunding page.



Effective team: Peace Fellow Refilwe Moahi (left) and Awa Sangare from Sini Sanuman

Ms Moahi, a national of Botswana and graduate of Brandeis University, has promoted Sini Sanuman through her [photos](#) and [blogs](#); helped survivors produce squares for a [new advocacy quilt](#); managed receipts with accountant Sitan Konate; helped program officer Awa Sangare to launch a [project newsletter](#); and assisted techie Sayon Konate in developing a [new website](#), which went live earlier this week.

"We are very pleased with Refilwe's work," said Siaka Traore, the president of Sini Sanuman.

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- Agna is an alias. Her real name is being withheld
- Visit the [new Sini Sanuman website](#)
- Watch [shea oil being made here](#) and [shea butter soap \(Sini Savon\) made here](#)
- Read [Refilwe's blogs](#)
- View the [Alafia Mali \(Peace in Mali\) quilts](#)
- Read about [Sini Sanuman on the AP website](#).

Read past AP news bulletins about Mali [here](#)!

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



The Advocacy Project (AP) supports advocates who work for human rights and social justice at the community level. AP is based in Washington, DC. Phone +1 202 758 3328. For more information [visit our website](#) or email us.

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