

Newsletter 10, Winter 2015

Min Dartima

**In Peul, the native language of the farmers in Mali:
„We got up again“**



www.promilchmali.ch
info@promilchmali.ch

- **Support us to create more local jobs in Mali by building a cow farm**
- **Serious health problems of our partner in Mali led to major difficulties in 2015**
- **Visit our new homepage; Now including more articles, an English version, and a shop**

Earlier this year in April, I have already written the draft of this newsletter. I gave the edition the motivated title "we are building our future". At that time, after a successful 2014 and new investment options, we were very excited about the expansion of DJOM KOSSAM¹, creating more cooperatives for farmers, and executing our medical support project for families of farmers. However, everything happened differently; since early May, our local partner and CEO of the small-scale dairy DJOM KOSSAM, encountered serious health issues. Another local friend from Mali substitutes him today due to his difficult and unfortunate health conditions.

Despite the issues happened in this year, the year 2015 marks the tenth year milestone of my activities in Mali. In the following, I will summarize our activities in 2015 and review my 10-year experience in Mali.

Building a farm in Mali

The objective of our association is to develop the local dairy sector in Mali based on economic principles. The improvement of the value creation of local milk in Mali will create local job opportunities along the dairy value chain from rural farmers to urban consumers, provide a healthy and reliable protein source for local diets, and may once reduce the dependency on imports of milk powder.

With your support we have already helped DJOM KOSSAM to increase the cow herd, to build a silo to store feed, and to expand the water well (pictures 1-3). In a next step, we plan to improve the farmstead by building a wall and a proper rooftop (picture 4 and 5). We haven't yet completely funded these next steps and you can support our activity. One way could be to donate a name for a newborn calf or to pull together with friends to sponsor a cow.

¹ DJOM KOSSAM is Peul, the local language of farmers, and means corresponding to local traditions „Woman, please sell me milk“. Stephan Wullschleger and a local partner founded the small-scale dairy DJOM KOSSAM in 2005.

New homepage: www.promilchmali.ch

I'm very happy to inform you about our newly created homepage, now including more articles, an English site, and a shop. We aim to keep you regularly updated on our activities in Mali and share with you impressions from a place in this world you may be not very familiar with. At this occasion, I want to thank everyone, who spend her / his free time to create this new site. I hope you enjoy it and please don't hesitate to share any feedback.



Picture 1: Construction worker producing bricks to construct the silo. The silo is needed to store feed.



Picture 2: Finish built silo before it got filled with feed.



Picture 3: Construction workers finishing up the last work for the expanded water well.

Outlook

Indeed, there is still a lot to do to get closer to our dream of a self-sustaining and profitable dairy company. Short-term we need to improve our cold-chain and transportation capabilities in Bamako and Siby. We then gradually expand our farm and means of feed collection. Subsequently, we want to transfer newly gained knowhow to local farmers. For this we help farmers to organize themselves in cooperatives. In addition we want to conduct other support programs such as the medical support of farmers and their families (see newsletter IX, 2014).

We will reach our objectives with your support – Thank you very much!

The objective of our association is to develop the local Malian dairy sector (farmers, processors, sales organizations) and thus to improve the standards of living of local people. This objective can only be realized with your support. Why you don't become a member of the association pro milk Mali (annual membership fees: individual CHF 100, student CHF 40, company CHF 1.000) or donate a smaller or larger amount?

For more details please visit our homepage or contact us via email.

Odyssey in hospitals

Our good friend, local partner in Mali, and CEO of DJOM KOSSAM undergoes with his family difficult times. Earlier this year, without any symptom, he lost his consciousness when he was driving his car. He regained consciousness after 3 days of treatment. In a separate event, he fell and broke his arm. He was operated in a hospital in Mali. A post-surgery infection was treated in a hospital in Tunisia where he was also diagnosed with epilepsy. He recovered well. Two months later, he lost his consciousness again. After 10 days of hospitalization, he was tested positive on meningitis, a bacterial infection of the nervous system. He regained consciousness after some treatments. Yet, very unfortunate, he cannot hear, has limited vision on one eye, and can't keep his balance. He is now home and his family is taking care of him. Do you know any way to improve his health situation? Please let us know in case you have any suggestions so we can pass them to his family.

In the mean time, a friend of us, we knew from joint-work during my PhD time, was able to take over the activities of DJOM KOSSAM. During the vacuum of no one leading the activities of DJOM KOSSAM some challenges with suppliers and employees occurred and we couldn't proceed as planned with the construction of our farm. In the mean time we are solving one challenge after the other.



Picture 4: Our herder Guèladio feeds the cows. At this place we plan to build the new farmstead and to replace the fence with a stable wall.



Picture 5: The three employees at the dairy of DJOM KOSSAM in Siby; left to right: Nama our guard, Bintou our site manager, and Guèladio our herder.

A personal 10-year review

In February 2005, when I just started as a PhD student in food biotechnology at EHT Zurich, I travelled the first time to Mali. My mission was to develop an adapted starter culture for a local spontaneously fermented dairy product. The first challenge that I faced was not a scientific, but a cultural shock! Mali is one of the poorest countries in the world. In my first evening, I ordered half a chicken for dinner in a restaurant in Bamako, the capital of Mali. I finished the meal and left the bones on the plate. Undernourished kids sneaked in and stole the chicken bones! When I started to feel sorry for them, the restaurant owner screamed and chased the kids away. The next episode of cultural shock came in the next morning. Tem-Association pro milk Mali c/o Stephan Wullschleger, Lehni 1560, CH-8873 Amden, Switzerland; Migros Bank Zurich, IBAN: CH4508401016193642100, SWIFT/BIC:MIGRCHZZ80A; National tax registration number state of St. Gallen: 60408

peratures were at 30°C and I wore a ¾ shorts and a t-shirt. That was what I brought! Unexpectedly, locals expected a European guest to wear a shirt and formal trousers. Well, I wanted to be polite and kept wearing my only shirt many times during the six-week stay.

I quickly learned about the culture and started well. I met young, curious, and motivated Malian that helped me in my research work, encountered welcoming farmers in rural villages from whom I could collect my samples, and made friends with athletes from the local athletic club. I struggled when I realized that a bottle of bacteria growth media is more expensive than the monthly salary of a laboratory technician and that it will not be that easy that a poor country turns into a rich one.

Nevertheless, I was convinced that there is a lot of room to do better and the best way will be to create business, which is build by locals. During my work, I met a local, who had just graduated as veterinary from the university of Bamako. We saw the unmet market of healthy local milk in the capital. 95% of milk demand is met by imported milk powder. Milk farmers are generally too far away from areas with high demand and transportation infrastructure is often inadequate. I then decided to build a milk selling point with my local friend. My initial investment was CHF 4'000. The sum was very significant to me as a PhD student, yet, looking back, the significance was actually that I started an adventure. From the project, I developed my business skills, learnt the basics of accounting, wrote business plans (awarded with a special price at Venture 2008, the Swiss business plan competition), registered a company in Mali, acquired funds, exported equipment to Mali, and founded the association Pro Milk Mali in Switzerland.

Looking back, I'm amazed what has been made possible in Mali with CHF 4'000. We have built a value chain for milk from rural farmers to urban consumers and in 2008 the minister of agriculture officially inaugurated the dairy of DJOM KOSSAM as the first privately held small-scale dairy in Mali.



Picture 6: The agriculture minster Mme Diallo Madeleine Ba inaugurated the small-scale dairy DJOM KOSSAM on July 18th, 2008.



Picture 7: A local group performed traditional dances on the occasion of the inauguration ceremony and the Malian TV ORTM broadcasted the event in the daily news.

All adventures come with setbacks. At multiple times we thought to stop our activities. Early on we started the non-for profit project “buy your cow in Mali”. The objective was to enable farmers with little live-stock to participate at the newly created market in rural villages and to increase the supply of milk. Close

to 100 cows were sponsored and we sadly needed to stop the project after 3 years, as we were not planning to build an administration to control the project on site.² We also faced many operational hurdles such as training employees (FYI: literacy rate in Mali is below 40%) in transformation of milk, quality standards, daily bookkeeping, and issuing monthly reporting. In addition to the operational hurdles, external challenges came up: There was a moment with no gas supply in Bamako so that we had to pasteurize milk on fire, significant price negotiations with farmers reduced collection of milk greatly (our activities triggered a higher demand in rural milk and milk prices increased 50% in certain villages), the political unrests in 2012 forced us to close our activities for two months, and limited health infrastructure put our co-founder into serious health issue so that we need to build a new local management team.

After all we achieved to run the operations above break even, created local jobs that resulted in over 700 paid monthly salaries, generated over CHF 100'000 additional income for local farmers, and conducted over 10 non-profit related projects (such as the medical support we provide to farmers) in the last 10 years. The next steps are to generate a sustainable benefit and to expand DJOM KOSSAM.

I am still very excited about the impact we can make in Mali. Also, I am convinced about its potential. I always look for possibilities that I can invest more time in our activities in Mali given all other activities in life. Maybe, I will be able to spend more time in this adventure in the next 10 years, who knows?

With this I would like to thank you for your generous and continuous support and hope you enjoyed reading this newsletter and the 10-year review.

Kind regards



Dr. Stephan Wullschleger,
President, Association Pro Milk Mali.

P.S.: The cantonal tax office of the canton of St. Gallen excluded the association Pro Milk Mali from its liability for taxation. The exclusion for taxation was declared on harmonized national taxation law and is valid in each canton of Switzerland. The deductibility of donations is regulated on cantonal taxation law.

² We reorganized the project "buy a cow in Mali" based on the gained experience. Please check our homepage for further information.