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# QUARTERLY REPORT: Q1 FY 2014 MALI CEREAL VALUE CHAIN

**OCT 17, 2013 – DECEMBER 31, 2013**

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## **DISCLAIMER**

The author's views expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the views of the United States Agency for International Development or the United States Government.

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# LIST OF ACRONYMS

BDS	Business Development Services
CRS	Catholic Relief Services
COP	Chief of Party
COR	Contracting Officer's Representative
CVC	Cereal Value Chain
DCOP	Deputy Chief of Party
EMMP	Environmental Mitigation and Monitoring Plan
FtF	Feed the Future
G FORCE	Groupe de Formation Consultation et Etude
ICRISAT	International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics
IFDC	International Fertilizer Development Center
IICEM	Integrated Initiatives for Economic Growth in Mali
INTSORMIL	The International Sorghum and Millet Collaborative Research Support Program
IR	Intermediate Result
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MDS	Moulins du Sahel
PMP	Performance Monitoring Plan

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

ACDI/VOCA, Nyeta Conseils, G FORCE and d intl are pleased to submit the Quarter One (Year One), Fiscal Year (FY) 2014 Quarterly Report (QR) of the Mali Cereal Value Chain (CVC) project, successor to Integrated Initiatives for Economic Growth in Mali (IICEM) in the Feed the Future (FtF) intervention zones. CVC builds on achievements of IICEM in terms of actors, organizations, and infrastructure to bring established dynamics in production, processing and marketing to a higher level of performance. Our facilitative, private-sector-led approach will contribute to improved food security and reduced poverty through agriculture-led growth, greater competitiveness of rice, millet and sorghum value chains and inclusive market access by smallholder farmers. The project will improve agricultural production, expand markets and trade as well as increase the resilience of vulnerable households and communities while strengthening local systems and capacities for enduring impact. Furthermore, half of the targeted population and actors of the CVC project will be female.

During the first quarter, efforts have been concentrated on the project start-up and the preparation of a workplan proposal for the first year.

Project start-up included an onboarding training for the COP, contract preparation and negotiation with subcontracting consortium partners, opening of a bank account, selection and contracting of personnel, identification of office space and establishment of an office, and preparation of a personnel manual and field security manual for the project.

Workplan development included a team orientation workshop, handover-meetings with IICEM, orientation meetings with USAID's Economic Growth team, contacts with potential partners, extensive information exchange among new staff and between ACDI/VOCA's HQ and field staff. A draft workplan, accompanied by EMMP and PMP, was submitted within the contractually set deadline.

Staff training on Value Chain Analysis was prepared and was planned to start early January 2014.

## I. PROGRESS TO DATE

### START-UP

The Mali CVC project was awarded on October 17, 2013 and immediately following, CVC field and HQ staff from ACIDI/VOCA began work on project start-up. Chief of Party, Willem van Campen, and Project Coordinator, Ms. Ashley Dean, worked to establish the ACIDI/VOCA presence in Bamako. The COP and the Project Coordinator met with local subcontractors Nyeta Conseils and G FORCE, reviewed potential locations for office space, and met with the IICEM team, including COP Jean-Francois Guay. They also looked at potential locations for the work planning sessions with the CVC team, made a selection, and finalized logistics. The two met with a local labor lawyer to review and finalize the local employment contract and begin working on the Employee Policy Manual that will be relevant for all local staff working on the CVC project.

Also during Q1, ACIDI/VOCA's Senior Contracts Administer, Ms. Leigh Hartless, traveled to Bamako to support start-up activities and to discuss and finalize local subcontracts with CVC's two local partners. While the COP traveled to ACIDI/VOCA's HQ in Washington D.C., Ms. Dean and Ms. Hartless attended the IICEM two day closeout event, to take note of lessons learned, major achievements, and contribute to information sharing between the IICEM and CVC teams. The two also took the opportunity with attendees from Abt. Associate's HQ to discuss matters related to handover, in an effort to ensure a smooth transition. Upon return from onboarding in Washington, D.C., the COP and Ms. Hartless also set up and attended a meeting with IICEM staff, specifically to discuss the transition of technical activities, as well as administrator matters such as vehicle transfer.

In early November 2013, CVC's Project Director from ACIDI/VOCA's HQ, Ms. Penelope Hucker and ACIDI/VOCA's West Africa Regional Monitoring and Evaluation Specialist, Ms. Nirinjaka Ramasinjatovo also traveled to Bamako to participate in the work planning sessions and support the CVC team during start-up. The COP, along with the traveling ACIDI/VOCA HQ and regional staff also took the opportunity, to meet with USAID/Mali on November 7, 2013 for an award orientation meeting in Bamako.

Additionally during Q1, the Field Security Manual was drafted by ACIDI/VOCA's Security Director, Dave Jegier and shared with the field staff for their review and adherence. The final Field Security Manual will be updated and finalized once the Security Director is able to travel to Mali to make a full assessment of all three project offices in Q2.

During the start-up period, the team rented a temporary office at the Private Sector Centre until mid-December. While the technical staff were able to use this space to work on writing the first year work plan, the operations staff continued the search for permanent office space. In December, the permanent project office location in Bamako was selected and the lease finalized. With the finalization of the lease, the team began transferring equipment from IICEM and moving into the Cite UNICEF office. The CVC team received a significant amount of equipment from the IICEM project. The CVC team accepted all equipment in reasonable and working condition from IICEM. This allowed for rapid mobilization as vehicles, office furniture, printers, photocopiers etc. were immediately available for CVC use. Once moved into the permanent office, the operations staff focused on multiple procurements to set up office cabling for internet and telephone service, partitioning for offices, and laptops.

With the inheritance of equipment from IICEM, the CVC operations staff renewed the insurance of all vehicles inherited from IICEM and followed the necessary procedures to ensure proper transfer of IICEM vehicles in Mali. With support from ACIDI/VOCA's HQ, CVC successfully opened a bank account with Ecobank in Mali, and received their first wire transfer. The Director of Operations, Mrs. Adrienne Keita, in collaboration with, Mr. Gallo Sidibe (Senior Accountant from January onwards) set up ACIDI/VOCA's chart of accounts and assumed responsibility for maintaining the project's field finances. Mr. Sidibe

previously worked for ACDI/VOCA, so he was familiar with the accounting system and was able to support a smooth start-up of the field financial system.

During Q1, the team also drafted a Branding Implementation and Marketing Plan and brainstormed ideas for a potential new project name. The draft document will be submitted to USAID/Mali for approval in early January 2014.

Also of note, the COP traveled to ACDI/VOCA’s headquarters’ in Washington, DC from October 26-November 2, 2013 to participate in on-boarding trainings<sup>1</sup>. As Mr. van Campen had not previously worked for ACDI/VOCA, this allowed him to meet colleagues and become oriented with ACDI/VOCA’s policies and procedures, as well as become familiar with the company’s history and current technical resources.

## MOBILIZATION & RECRUITMENT

As soon as the CVC project was officially awarded, ACDI/VOCA’s HQ Recruitment team reached out to those staff identified and approved during the proposal phase. The COP candidate was still available and interested and with USAID’s approval, Mr. van Campen began working immediately starting October 1, 2013 as he was already in Bamako. After meeting with a local labor lawyer, Ms. Dean and Mr. van Campen finalized the local employment contract and made official offers to those who were still available that had been identified during the proposal phase. Having the COP and the Project Coordinator on the ground allowed for both face-to-face and telephone conversations with these individuals to finalize the terms of their employment and to ultimately attain fully executed employment contracts for CVC staff to begin work on the project.

As of the end of Q1 of FY14, the Mali CVC project had mobilized the following staff:

Employee Name	Position Title	Start Date
BAGAYOKO, Sékou	Driver	December 09, 2013
CAMPEN, Willem van	COP	October 17, 2013
CISSE, Mahamadou	Training and Capacity Building Director	November 04, 2013
DAGNOKO, Brehima	Millet/Sorghum Value Chain Manager	November 04, 2013
DIABATE, Boubacar	Driver	December 09, 2013
GNANA, Ousmane	Market Linkages Manager	December 02, 2013
KANE, Boubou	Driver	December 09, 2013
KEITA, Adrienne	Director of Operations	November 18, 2013
KOUYATE, Djiguiba	Rice Value Chain Manager	November 04, 2013
MAIGA, Youssouf	Driver	December 13, 2013
SIDIBE, Fatimata	Gender and Vulnerable Groups Director	November 04, 2013

While many of the staff identified during the proposal phase were available and eager to begin work on CVC, some of the key staff proposed in the technical proposal were no longer available once the contract was awarded. These positions included the DCOP, the MEL Manager, and the Value Chain Competitiveness Director. ACDI/VOCA proposed alternative candidates for the DCOP and MEL Manager positions while continuing their search for a Value Chain Competitiveness Director. For various

<sup>1</sup> The onboarding training included introduction sessions with Agribusiness Director, Recruitment office, M&E Senior Director, Human Resources Director, Internal Auditor, General Council, Director of Operations, Chief Operating Officer, Senior Director of Staff Learning and Development, Deputy Director in Community Development, Director of Project Accounting and project accounting staff, Senior Director in Awards and Compliance, Senior Technical Director in Enterprise Development, Chief Financial Officer, Vice President of Information Technology, Public Relations and Communication Team, Nutrition Technical Director, Training team.

reasons these candidates, as well as d intl's candidate for the Financial Services and Business Development Services (BDS) Director position were not approved by USAID/Mali, so the team continued their extensive recruitment efforts. In support of the replacement of the MEL Manager, Ms. Ramasinjatovo held intensive in-person interviews while in Bamako, with multiple candidates before selecting the approved replacement, Mr. Abdoulaye Sidibe. Mr. van Campen and Ms. Hucker also held both in-person and extensive telephone interviews with potential DCOP and Value Chain Competitiveness Director candidates.

By the end of the quarter, the situation was as follows:

- **DCOP:** Mr. Zoumana Doumbia was submitted as a Deputy Chief of Party candidate.
- **Value Chain Competitiveness Director:** A potential candidate was identified and was submitted and approved by USAID/Mali for a short term technical assistance assignment (Value Chain Analysis Team Leader) to lead the value chain training and value chain analysis in January 2014. By using this candidate as STTA, the team was able to get a better sense of the candidate's experience and qualifications and ultimately vet the candidate before submitting him for the longer term position.
- **Monitoring Evaluation and Learning Coordinator:** Mr. Abdoulaye Sidibe has been selected and approved. He will start in January 2014.
- **Senior Accountant:** Mr Gallo Sidibe will start on January 2, 2014
- **Receptionist:** Ms. Eugenie Keita has been selected and will start in early January 2014.

The following long-term positions are still pending and are under recruitment for the Bamako office:

- **NRM and Water Manager**
- **Communications Manager**
- **Financial Services and Business Development Services Director**
- **Investment Fund Manager**
- **Security Director**
- **IT Manager**
- **Junior Accountant**

Recruitment for the Sikasso and Mopti satellite offices are underway; however, final staffing decisions will be made early in the Q2, once the work plan has been finalized/approved and office space identified.

## **WORK PLANNING**

CVC's first year work planning sessions were held November 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup>, 2013 at the Radisson Blu Hotel in Bamako. There were 18 participants in total, including ACDI/VOCA HQ, regional, and CVC local staff; as well as representatives from all subcontractors d intl, Nyeta Conseils, and G FORCE.

The work planning sessions were highly interactive and focused on using the PMP as a management tool. The CVC team looked through each Intermediate Result (IR) of the project and brainstormed activities based on the relevant indicators. After the two day work planning sessions were complete, the team concentrated on writing the draft Year 1 work plan. During the work plan development process, the team continued to meet and discuss with USAID/Mali in an effort to ensure that expectations and priorities were well established and understood. In addition, the CVC team kept in regular contact with the remaining members of the IICEM team and reached out to local stakeholders and partners.

The draft annual work plan was sent on December 16, 2013 and USAID/Mali's comments were received by the CVC team on January 6, 2014.

## **VALUE CHAIN ASSESSMENT AND TRAINING**

The initial value chain assessment (which will guide project activities for the LOP) as well as the value chain facilitation training for all CVC staff was planned for early January 2014. During Q1, the training was prepared by Olaf Kula and Dr. Ahmad Jazayeri. Mr. Olaf Kula is ACIDI/VOCA's West Africa Regional Representative who is currently based in Ghana. He provided value chain technical assistance to both Mali CVC and Mali3 (USDA-funded project) due to his technical expertise and French language skills. The training will present different value chain approaches, the ACIDI/VOCA's value chain methodology, and formulate the analysis. While both CVC and the Mali3 teams collaborated on this training and study, Mr. Jazayeri will ultimately be responsible for driving Mali CVC's activities and learning, ensuring that the project will gain as much as possible from the training and from the value chain assessment, completed through desk research and field work.

Another HQ staff member, Ms. Rachel Mahmud assisted Mr. Kula and Dr. Jazayeri in designing and facilitating the training. She also supported the Gender and Vulnerable Groups Director, Mrs. Fatimata Guindo Sidibe, in the preparation of a short gender integration training for staff—with the objective to include gender aspects in value chain analysis and project implementation.

## **MONITORING AND EVALUATION PLANNING**

ACIDI/VOCA's West Africa Regional Monitoring and Evaluation Specialist, Ms. Nirinjaka Ramasinjatovo, worked with the CVC team to develop the Performance Monitoring Plan (PMP) and indicators in the absence of a Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Manager during the work planning sessions in November 2013. This PMP was submitted with the draft Annual Workplan and will be updated based on comments received from USAID/Mali. Ms. Ramasinjatovo also spent a full day in Bamako working with the team on understanding and setting appropriate targets for all CVC indicators, including the FtF indicators. She also led a brainstorming session with CVC staff regarding the possibility of custom indicators.

## **ENVIRONMENTAL MONITORING AND MITIGATION PLAN**

ACIDI/VOCA hired Environmental Specialist, Ms. Karen Menczer, to provide technical assistance in preparing the Environmental Monitoring and Mitigation Plan (EMMP) in October 2013. Ms. Menczer reviewed and assessed the planned project activities and provided environmental guidance based on the potential risk of damage of the proposed activities, to the environment.

Additionally, the COP and CVC's Training and Capacity Building Director participated in a USAID-organized training on environmental compliance on November 14<sup>th</sup> at the Hotel Salam in Bamako.

## **2. CHALLENGES**

Simultaneously ensuring rapid start-up (office selection, recruitment, equipment purchase, bank account etc.) and quality work plan development, while at the same time lacking some key technical staff, was a

significant challenge in Q1. Additionally, the CVC team brings together people of various backgrounds, experiences, and understanding of value chain development, so the team needed to spend time to discuss and develop a common understanding of this concept that is central to CVC implementation. Extensive technical discussions with the term were required to ensure that everyone understood that the CVC project will apply a market oriented approach to development.

Another challenge in Q1 was the need to respond to USAID/Mali's expectations that CVC will not only build on IICEM's achievements but also expand, right from the beginning, the level of its interventions in terms of people to reach, production to realize, area to cover, etc. This will need more extension capacity at a grass root level than originally planned and will have some budgetary consequences. The CVC team hired several former IICEM staff, which will help maximize the transfer of knowledge and lessons learned regarding working methods, intervention areas and partner network between the two projects.

USAID/Mali also requested that the CVC quickly respond to a need to collect data on production, yields and marketed volumes of the 2013 growing season after the end of the IICEM project. Not having planned this during the proposal or initial start-up phase of the project and not having the necessary technical staff mobilized yet to lead the data collection, CVC decided to hire a former IICEM staff member on an STTA basis, to coordinate data collection through IICEM's network of subcontractors and produce a report regarding the 2013 season.

Another challenge that emerged during Q1 related to the transition between IICEM and CVC; notably, the situation of improved-seed production and outstanding credit. It became evident that the CVC team must make quick inventories in order to keep the produced seeds available and to manage relationships between farmer organizations and the banks. These relationships were built through the IICEM project, so the CVC team will need to strategically intervene to ensure that past achievements are not lost, rather they are further developed.

Another challenge encountered during Q1 related to the baseline study. The baseline study will allow for an assessment of the current socio-economic-situation of the CVC target populations and institutions and is necessary for the team to be able to set realistic targets and ultimately evaluate achievements. In the original design of the FtF effort of USAID/Mali, it was planned to have an independent third party conduct a baseline study for the CVC project. At present, USAID/Mali is in the process of identifying and finalizing and agreement with a third party organization to provide M&E services to the mission; however, the anticipated results will most likely not become available for use until late 2014. Given this delay, USAID/Mali has agreed that the CVC project should move forward with conducting its own project baseline survey as soon as possible. As of December 2013, supported by ACDI/VOCA's Regional M&E specialist, a baseline SOW was under development, potential consultants were identified and a request for proposals was being drafted—to be made publically available to solicit qualified and interested candidates in early February 2014. Additionally, data collection and field work are planned for March 2014 and results should be available in April 2014.

### 3. MEETINGS AND FIELD VISITS

During the reporting period no field visits took place, however several important meetings with USAID and potential partners took place in Bamako. Below is a list of meetings that took place in Q1:

Date	Place	Name	Organization	Subject
Oct 21	Domicile COP	Dr. FOFANA	Rice researcher at IFDC North & West Africa Division	Collaboration on Urea Deep Placement technology

Date	Place	Name	Organization	Subject
Oct 23	CRS Office	Sean GALLAGHER, resident representative	Catholic Relief Services	Collaboration, MYAP
Nov 5	CVC temp. office	Mrs. COULIBALY Nantene COULIBALY	DADO Production	Nov 5
Nov 6	USAID/Mali	Amadou CAMARA and resilience study team (E Dallas, R Eddy, Susan Thomson)	USAID/Mali & USAID/Washington	Discussion about resilience
Nov 7	USAID/Mali	Aaron Ruble, Gaoussou TRAORE and Economic Growth team	USAID/Mali	Start-Up
Nov 12	CVC temp office	Prof John H Sanders	Purdue University	Introduction of sorghum and millet varieties; collaboration with INTSORMIL follow-up
Nov 12	CVC temp office	Aminata DIARRA, Ngorom N'DIAY, Dr. Steven ROMANOFF	USAID/Mali	Environmental compliance
Nov 14	CVC Temp office	Sébastien COUASNET Simon DIOH	Directeur Général ELEPHANT VERT Tel : (212) 5 38 00 48 70	Promotion of organic fertilizers produced in the Segou production plant
Nov 15	CVC temp office	Dr. Denis COULIBALY	PLEA eV, Gottingen, Germany Tel 00 49 551 50 76 63 92 Mali Tel : 72 33 05 39	Irrigation channel improvement technology ; Introduction Vietnamese rice production technologies
Nov 27	ACDI/VOCA HQ	Dennis Knecht and Marika Olson; Stephanie Diakite	USAID/Mali and intl	Overall discussion of the CVC project and particularly the financial services component of the project
Dec 12	CVC temp office	David Yanggen and Economic Growth team	USAID/Mali	Orientation of first work plan
Dec 15	CVC temp office	Dennis Knecht	USAID/Mali + USAID Washington	Financing needs and access to financing. Guarantee fund.

#### 4. PLANNED ACTIVITIES FOR QUARTER TWO

Activities in Quarter 2 will concentrate on: finalizing recruitment of personnel, set-up of offices in Sikasso and Mali, preparation of collaboration with partners, field inventories of IICEM financed infrastructures, inventory of improved seed availability and outstanding credits of IICEM supported producer organizations, initial contacts with targeted population and organizations in intervention areas, analysis of the seed sector and value chains, training needs assessments and development of training programs.

A detailed list of planned activities is below:

## **Sub-contractors**

- G-Force and Nyeta Conseils open offices in Mopti and Sikasso by February 1st and begin work. A first activity will be an inventory of IICEM's legacy (irrigation infrastructure, warehouses etc.);
- Common development of zonal programs based on findings and overall work-plan.
- D intl will support recruitment of financial services specialists and supports recruited financial services staff in formulation of specific detailed workplan;

## **Personnel**

- Completion of recruitment

## **Value Chain and Other Analyses**

- Initial value chain analysis training completed
- Value Chain Analysis of selected specific value chains conducted, finalized and submitted
- Five-year vision and upgrading strategy developed
- Initial environmental impact review drafted
- Staff and stakeholder training in environmental impact and compliance
- Gender analysis underway and drafted in collaboration with value chain analysis
- Baseline Assessment executed

## **Required reports**

- Final workplan submitted
- Monthly Feed the Future report submitted
- EMMP Plan and PMP finalized for inclusion in the final workplan
- Final Branding Implementation and Marketing Plan in place

## **IR 1: Agricultural productivity increased**

Subtask 1.1: Technology development, dissemination, management & innovation enhanced.

- Make inventory of available improved seeds; and connect farmers to the seed supplies
- Establish timing of key agricultural fairs, identify one for "business planning" assistance
- Develop collaboration (and MOUs) between CVC and selected mass media(newspapers, rural radio) for widespread dissemination of innovative technologies and approaches to improve productivity in sorghum, millet, and rice cultivation

Subtask 1.2: Access to quality inputs increased

- Establish contact with seed companies;
- Evaluate formal & informal input supply and distribution networks in CVC target areas
- Design and carryout agro-dealer trainings for dealers involved selected specific value chains;
- Facilitate the establishment of demonstration plots by private input dealers;
- Initiate a cooperation agreement with selected banks and microfinance institutions for the establishment of durable funding mechanisms (inventory credit, warrantage) for input supply;
- Analyze, for targeted specific value chains, eventual constraints in access to agricultural inputs and need for input shops

Subtask 1.3: Economically viable irrigation systems established;

- Assessment of water user group associations' training need and training designed
- Develop or adapt appropriate training modules on management of irrigation systems
- Train water user groups

Subtask 1.4: Soil and water management techniques increased;

- Establish contacts with CMDT to discuss possible collaboration in Southern Mali;
- Conduct a training-needs assessment of extension workers and producers for soil and water conservation and soil fertility management.

## **Intermediate result 2: Markets and Trade expanded**

Subtask 2.1: Market driven, value added products introduced

- End-market, investment potential analysis conducted (both desk and field research)
- Support and facilitate transactions between traders/wholesalers and targeted producers
- Identify wholesalers/traders and producers and train them on MDS's quality standards and delivery procedures for millet and sorghum
- Identify and collaborate with organizations involved in collection and diffusion of market information
- Identify financial structures and investors to facilitate financing of value chain actors
- Identify new products to be introduced;

Subtask 2.2: Sustainable Farm to Market Linkages, access strengthened

- Value chain network mapping exercise validated w/market intermediaries
- Commercially oriented partnerships between CVC and selected intermediaries formalized
- Make market assessment for new products that can be produced by local processing units
- Support mini mills, traders/wholesalers, and parboilers to develop specific quality standards for paddy rice, millet and sorghum
- Facilitate the signing of formal purchase/sale contracts
- Formalize commercial partnerships between value chain actors and selected intermediaries
- Adapt training tools on the SMFM approach to the local context and to local organizations identified
- Facilitate stakeholder participation in local, national and regional trade fairs
- Train marketing committees on cost calculation methods for production and processing, on trade negotiation and price setting
- Organize workshops collective price negotiation between wholesalers, retailers grouping and producer groups

Subtask 2.3: Post harvest handling and processing improved

- Identify and assess existing storage infrastructure in the "Feed the Future" villages
- Identify public and private economic operators for the financing or co-financing of suitable storage infrastructure

Subtask 2.4: Effective aggregation of production established

- Make an inventory of current storage capacity in FtF areas and identify constraints and opportunities
- Identify private operators and public funds able to invest in the construction of warehouses
- Train farmers on advantages and mechanisms of product aggregation and temporary storage

Subtask 2.5: Access to demand driven support services strengthened

Subtask 2.6: Access to market information expanded

## **IR 3: Increased resilience of vulnerable communities and households**

Subtask 3.1: Income streams diversified and asset building strategies employed

- Continue support to vegetable gardens, established by IICEM and PAJE
- Analyze selected specific value chains to identify opportunities and constraints for vulnerable groups

Subtask 3.2: Drought resilient cropping systems adopted at scale

- Identify most vulnerable communities and most adapted mitigation activities
- Identify potential partners for interventions
- Facilitate the introduction of improved drought resistant high potential seed varieties
- Introduce improved soil fertility management

Subtask 3.3: Appropriate food storage facilities available

- Identify existing infrastructure in vulnerable areas
- Strengthen capacities of vulnerable groups in improved post-harvest handling and storage techniques, with emphasis on household storage

Subtask 3.4: Community literacy, numeracy and nutritional practices improved

- Develop partnerships with organizations already working in these fields (CNRES, CRS, CARE, Save the Children, PAJE)

#### **IR 4: Local capacities and systems strengthened**

Subtask 4.1: local organization's capacity to receive USAID funding developed

- Initial capacity assessment of primary local implementation partners
- Develop capacity building plan
- Institutional/organizational training started for GFORCE and Nyeta

Subtask 4.2: Capacity of producer groups and water user associations improved

- Identify producer organization involved in targeted value chains and complete assessment using SMFM tools

Subtask 4.3: Capacity of Financial Service Providers Strengthened

Subtask 4.4: Capacity of extension and advisory services providers strengthened

- Develop a memo of understanding / collaboration with DNA/RNA to involve its technical staff in project implementation
- Establish partnership with IER, IPR, IFPRA to build their capacity to deliver extension services
- Establish partnership with universities to provide practical experience opportunities for students and integrate best practices in their curricula

Subtask 4.5: Local capacity to support continued learning enhanced

- Establish project M&E system
- Produce monthly and quarterly report about progress and measure change
- Organize monthly meetings with staff to discuss progress and results

## **5. GENDER**

Rachel Mahmud supported the Gender and Vulnerable Groups Director, Mrs. Fatimata Sidibe, in the preparation of a one day gender training for project staff in early January 2014. The main objective was to create a specific awareness on gender before the start of the Value Chain Analysis training in which gender aspects are to be integrated. Mrs. Sidibe was also connected to ACIDI/VOCA's Regional Gender Specialist and received and began going through ACIDI/VOCA's Gender Policy and Guidance.

## **6. COORDINATION AND COLLABORATION**

Many coordination efforts took place during Q1, mainly involving various handover meetings between the IICEM and CVC projects.

Short meetings with staff members from ICRISAT and CRS as well as other potential partners allowed for a first inventory of collaboration opportunities. CRS has stated their interest for collaboration of their emergency intervention areas (support to vulnerable groups). ICRISAT is looking for a possibility to promote at a larger scale, some of the developed millet and sorghum varieties.

The rice specialist of IFDC was also contacted to discuss possible collaboration on soil fertility management in rice production (especially about the Urea Deep Placement technology).

Informal discussions took place with CMDT staff to estimate potential collaboration in the cotton zones of southern Mali.

## **7. LESSONS LEARNED**

Notwithstanding a major effort to combine start-up with the work plan development, the start date of mid-October was late to have a work plan covering the financial year. Only with intensive support from ACDI/VOCA's HQ, was the field team able to prepare themselves to start field interventions on time.