

PROJECTS ADOPTED BY 4CITIES4DEV

ACCESS TO GOOD, CLEAN AND FAIR FOOD: THE FOOD COMMUNITIES' EXPERIENCE

Dogon Somé Slow Food Presidium



© Paola Viesi

Slow Food Presidium adopted by the city of Torino



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PROJECTS FOR THE SAFEGUARD OF BIODIVERSITY

Slow Food Presidia safeguard small-scale, endangered local productions, promote specific areas, and recover traditional trades and processing techniques. Currently, there are over 300 Presidia projects around the world, which involve more than 10,000 producers: farmers, shepherds, fishers, artisan processors... To safeguard these products also means to preserve high-mountain pastures and tropical forests, to ensure a sustainable future for small-scale producers - from the Andes to African coastlines -, to preserve hundreds of animal breeds, and to give future generation a clean planet with a rich biodiversity. Presidia are promoted and coordinated by Slow Food. The association is active all over the world, but has a specific focus on developing countries, where the safeguard of biodiversity is not only important to improve the quality of life, but to ensure the very survival of local people.



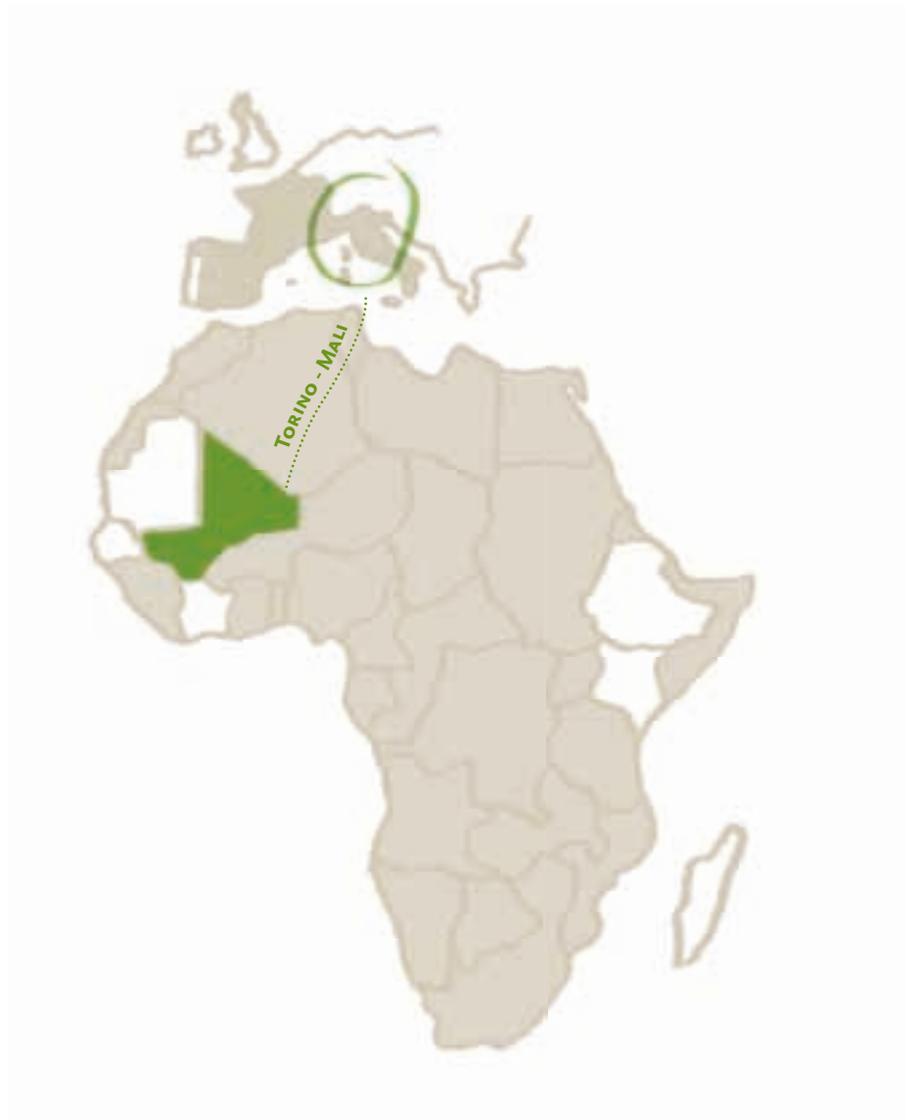
THE CONTEXT

BANDIAGARA ESCARPMENT, MALI

The historic Dogon ethnic group has lived for thousands of years in the harsh, awe-inspiring environment along the Bandiagara escarpment between Mopti and Timbuktu in Mali, a chain of red sandstone cliffs running from north to south across the plain. The Dogon have carved houses out of the rock and built low huts from mud. Their fields are located near *barrages*, small dams built in the 1980s to provide more water and increase the production of shallots, the only product sold in any quantity. Dogon shallots are famous throughout Mali due to their unique sweetness and flavor, which comes from the rocky soil. They are eaten fresh or dried. The shallots can be dried using a traditional method that involves grinding them in a stone mortar, shaping the resulting paste into pellets and drying them in the sun. More modern methods (introduced by various NGOs, particularly Re.Te from Piedmont), involve cutting the shallots into thin slices and drying them for a week or two on racks in the sun.

Traditional food gardens are planted with fruit trees (mango, orange, shea) and include an area for grain (rice, corn, millet, fonio) and peanuts, and another for vegetables and legumes. The women process the flowers, fruit and leaves of different plants (wild, like baobab, or cultivated) into seasonings called *somé* in the Dogon language.

The Dogon Somé Presidium unites several products: *kamà* (ground dried sorrel leaves), *pourkamà* (ground dried leaves from *nerè*, a local tree), *djabà pounan* (dried shallot pellets, slightly toasted in peanut oil and ground), *gangadjou pounan* (ground dried okra), *oroupounnà* (ground baobab leaves) and *wangué-somé* (ground local chili pepper, garlic and salt). These condiments are basic ingredients in Dogon cuisine, used in sauces and soups and on vegetables or meat.



THE PROJECT

The Presidium unites several villages and is working on the whole chain, from cultivation, harvesting, and processing through to packaging. The work on cultivation will involve selecting the most suitable land and encouraging the use of native seeds (self-produced) and sustainable methods (manual weed control, organic fertilizers). Processing will have to become more careful and attentive to food safety. Packaging will be adapted to local, regional and international markets. Work on the supply chain will be accompanied by awareness-raising activities, communication and education to inform shopkeepers, families, cooks and restaurants about the use of traditional seasonings.





OBJECTIVES

Working on such a characteristic traditional product, so significant for local gastronomy but so far from Western tastes, has been decisive in the development of the concept of good, clean and fair in developing countries and in calibrating Slow Food's actions in these contexts. Through the protection of the typical Dogon seasonings, Slow Food has realized that food quality cannot be defined everywhere in the world by the standards of Western gastronomy, but must be understood and measured on the basis of local

communities' parameters, culture and tastes. Additionally, when a food has such a strong cultural value, we can take into consideration the product's potential, seeing quality as a destination rather than a starting point.

This Presidium has therefore turned the focus on improving the quality standards of a traditional product and promoting and supporting it on the local market. The seasonings are increasingly struggling to compete with Western industrial stock cubes and other imported products with little nutritional value, which are very harmful in terms of local culture, environmental sustainability and health.

SOCIAL IMPACT

Thanks to the Presidium, the women from the Dogon villages involved in the project have acquired an awareness of the value of one the main ingredients in their cooking and its cultural significance.

CURRENT BENEFICIARIES

61 producers, coordinated by the NGO P.D.Co. (Project de Développement Communautaire)

PROJECT SUPPORTED BY

European Union





PROJECT STAGES

2008

The Presidium is established following a Slow Food mission in July 2008. The objective of the visit to the Dogon country was to get to know more about the production of the typical local shallot, which has been the focus of various development projects.

During the mission, it becomes clear that the shallot had become overly popular, and that it is instead the traditional Dogon seasonings, known as *somé*, that are best suited to the creation of a Presidium. Not only do they include shallots as an ingredient, they represent the heart of the Dogon people's cooking and gastronomic traditions. Several members of the Dogon community participate in the Salone del Gusto and Terra Madre.

2009

The women who participate in the Presidium organize themselves into six cooperatives (one per village) and begin working to create a local network of Presidium producers. With the support of the Brescia con Gusto Convivium, a booklet is published called *Bien Manger: cuisine, culture et tradition maliennes*, edited by Mariam Diallo and Awa Diarra and exploring the country's cooking and traditional products, including *somé*. A student from the Agriculture Department at the University of Turin looks at *somé* as a case study for her degree thesis, "Promotion of local resources in northwest Africa (Sahel): The example of Dogon *Somé* (Mali)."

2010

A training course on good practices is organized to guarantee quality at all levels of processing, and the women are given a manual produced by Slow Food in collaboration with the Turin Chamber of Commerce Laboratory which uses words and images to illustrate some fundamental food-safety rules.

In October, some producers participate in the Salone del Gusto and Terra Madre, exhibiting and selling their products at a stand.

A draft production protocol is drawn up for each of the different seasonings (*kamà*, *pourkamà*, etc.).

2011

In May 2011, a new Slow Food mission is organized in Mali. Thanks to a project co-funded by the FAO (with the aim of mapping food biodiversity in Mali and three other African countries), a booklet is published in French on the country's typical recipes and products, including Dogon *somé*. Some of the producers participate in the World Food Day and Festival International des Masques in Bandiagara.

FUTURE PLANS

The current unstable political situation in Mali, riven by internal conflicts, is making it very hard to plan activities in the country in the short term. Nonetheless, various initiatives are being planned, including a literacy course for the Presidium women, the creation of a communal workshop and training for the Presidium coordinator on international sales.





4CITIES4DEV FOR THE PRESIDIUM

The 4Cities4Dev project involves various activities to support the Dogon Somé Presidium, which will be implemented by Slow Food in collaboration with the City of Turin.

1

Construction of a workshop for processing the Dogon somé, giving the women a reference point in town (in Bandiagara) where they can process, sell and publicize the product.

2

Organization of literacy courses for the 61 women who belong to the Presidium.

3

Promotion of the product, through communication material (photostory, brochure, website), labeling and packaging.

4

Presidium participation in Slow Food's main international event, Salone del Gusto and Terra Madre, to be held in Turin from October 25 to 29, 2012.





Slow Food Presidium adopted by the city of Torino as part of the *4Cities4Dev* project



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