



## **PRESS RELEASE: Jatropha based Bio-Fuel powering Malian villages**

On October 16<sup>th</sup> 2006 a ceremony was held in the rural commune of Garalo, in the Sikasso region in the south of Mali to celebrate the implementation of a bio-fuel project based on jatropha. A delegation of people engaged in the project attended to offer their support including His Excellency Hamed Diane SEMEGA, Minister of Mines, Energy, and Water. Mr. SEMEGA laid the first brick of the facilities that will help bring bio-fuel generated electricity (245 KW) to approximately 8000 residents of the Garalo commune and possibly later to the rest of the people in the surrounding villages.



The dynamic atmosphere was set by live music, performances, traditional dances, and empowering speeches. Village young and old attended the ceremony along with the mayor and five chiefs of the village districts, giving appreciation and celebrating the hope inspired by this project. For the 70% of Malians who live in rural communities this project shows that living rurally does not have to mean an only cash-crop reliant economy, no running water, or that the only alternative to not having electricity is fossil fuel generators.

This jatropha project has been facilitated by Mali-Folkecenter, a Malian NGO, aiming to develop rural capacity in a sustainable way. The organization is currently involved in three other jatropha projects in other parts of Mali. The Malian Agency for the Development of Household Energy and Rural Electrification (AMADER) made a contribution of €293, 000 that will enable the Malian company ACCESS to manage the project. Another €300, 000 was contributed by financiers in

the Netherlands (SHGW Foundation) to the Mali-Folkecenter for the development of the jatropha plantations in Garalo and to support ACCESS in its project with AMADER through the procurement of the generator and part of the building. Technical support for the project is being provided by the FACT Foundation (Fuels from Agriculture in Communal Technology), founded by a group of biofuel specialists, which wishes to make a contribution to income generation, social development and the improvement of quality of life among rural communities in developing countries through promotion of biofuel technology.

In the first phase of this project participants were engaged in training, orientation, awareness, assessments, and technical designs. With enormous collaboration between the villages, the Malian government, financiers, private companies and Mali-Folkecenter the project has now moved into its second phase. This phase includes the planting of 1000 hectares of jatropha, 115 of which have already been planted. The Mayor of Garalo projected another 900 hectares will be planted over the next three years. Building facilities and bringing in the appropriate machinery is also part of the second phase. The facilities that will produce and distribute the electricity are expected to be built by March 2007. Mali-Folkecenter will help form a committee in the commune responsible for the management of the Jatropha component of the project including the processing of the oil, while ACCESS will deal with the electricity generation and distribution in the village.





Mali depends largely on the import of fossil fuels to meet a large part of its modern energy needs, which has perverse effects on the economy and lives of Malians. Bio-fuel, especially jatropha-based, is a viable alternative that has the potential, if properly managed, to improve quality of life on a national scale. Standing in a jatropha field, His Excellency, Minister SEMEGA encapsulated the feeling of hope inspired by this project by stating: “Energy independence for Mali starts right here, in this field.” The Malian environment is fragile and arid, yet jatropha is resilient and can grow under these harsh conditions. Jatropha can reclaim Mali’s difficult land and restore eroded areas, effectively generating environmentally friendly energy, helping reduce CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, and helping revitalize local ecosystems.



In the struggle for sustainable poverty alleviation this project is a shining example of an effective strategy. Garalo will see improvements in health, education, agriculture, and communications, as well as in the local economy in general. The project touches on many of the objectives and priorities reflected in Mali’s national Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP). One of the main objectives expressed in the PRSP is the “development of infrastructure and support for key productive sectors” an issue which this project deals with directly. More than addressing the political rhetoric of development work, this project will have real results on the ground in the villages, homes, schools and businesses of Garalo.

This project will stimulate the economy and create disposable income. There will be training provided

to village residents on the maintenance and operation of the oil processing machines to ensure the longevity of the project and to create jobs for youth; an important consideration since according to the UN’s 2005 Human Development Index approximately 50% of the population is under the age of 15. Some of the jatropha project’s added benefits could include the ability to use jatropha-derived material to make soap, fertilizers, or biogas. Extra income being earned can in turn be used to develop healthcare, education, small-business needs, living conditions, and much more. This project demonstrates that there are local solutions for local problems. From the outset, there is particular attention being paid to putting local needs first. This contrasts many bio-fuel programs elsewhere in the world that are export-driven, and can have negative impacts on local livelihoods. The project will be closely monitored and documented, so others interested in similar initiatives can learn from this experience. As Winfried Rijssenbeek of the FACT Foundation noted “This is a project that can potentially see 1000 replications in Mali and 10 000 in other developing countries.”



There will surely be challenges that arise, but Mali-Folkecenter and the other stakeholders approach with an attitude to confront problems as they come. They will find solutions, move forward and learn from their experiences, collaboratively. Jatropha is expected to transform Garalo, offering residents greater opportunities and a chance to sustainably build a still more vibrant community.