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“My family and my factory survived the violence, no one was hurt and nothing was damaged,” reflects Marie Konaté, CEO of a GAIN partner company in Côte d’Ivoire. “Yet the apartments above and below where I live caught fire and bullets ripped through them - these have been difficult times for me, the company and our country.”



Marie Konaté,  
PKL

Despite the recent violence and unstable political situation, the CEO stood by her employees and continued to run her cereal food business that, in partnership with the GAIN and the non-governmental organization [Helen Keller International](#) <sup>[1]</sup> (HKI), aims to meet the nutritional needs of close to one million infants 6 to 24 months of age across Côte d’Ivoire. [The 1,000 day](#) <sup>[2]</sup> period from pregnancy through age two is critical in shaping a child’s future. GAIN caught up with the fearless leader to find out about how her company, Protein [Kisèe-La](#) <sup>[3]</sup> (PKL), is faring in the fight against child malnutrition.

### **Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN): How has the recent political turmoil affected the effort?**

*Marie Konaté (MK):* I was really lucky as both my family and my factory survived the violence, no one was hurt and nothing was damaged. While banks were closed, I was preoccupied with continuing to deliver client orders and pay my employee’s salaries. I asked my clients to pay me in cash and they essentially became my ‘bank’. During the Battle of Abidjan, I hid the cash and buried it in my garden. I was overwhelmed with emotion when a delegation of employees came to my office to tell me that we were practically the only factory in the industrial zone that was open. They were so grateful that I had been able to continue to pay them despite the difficult circumstances that they said they would work extra hours for one month without getting paid. I had tears in my eyes. I told them to take the money and use it to respond to the needs of the people who didn’t have the same chance as us.

### **GAIN: We understand you have been helping to respond to the needs of displaced people through donations of your products. Tell us about that.**

*MK:* The country is suffering from a serious humanitarian crisis. People have lost everything including their homes. We donated 3,000 kilos of Farinor Nutribon® to reach about 600 displaced people. Our non-governmental organization partner on the ground, Helen Keller International, which is focusing on increasing public awareness of nutrition, began distributing the sachets in camps for displaced people and informed us that the sachets have been well-received. We’ve also started selling Nutribon® for a reduced price of US\$ 0.25 per sachet to groups and institutions who want to give the product as a donation to infants in need.

**GAIN: What progress has the company made in fighting child malnutrition over the last couple of years?**

*MK:* Since we partnered with GAIN in July 2009, we've changed the packaging of Farinor® one of our instant infant cereal products made with local soya and maize and fortified with essential nutrients for a child's healthy growth, so it is clear that only infants at least 6 months old should be given our products, and, as a complement to breast milk. Despite the recent political turmoil in the country, we've also managed to release a similar product but with powdered milk and fruit and vegetable flavorings like strawberry, apple, potato and spinach. Farinor Nutribon® comes in 50 gram sachets or boxes of 250 grams and families mix it with boiling water. To our surprise, people took to the new flavors and tastes right away. We sell a sachet, enough for 2 meals, for US\$ 0.36 cents, half the price of our competitors. As a result of the financial and food crises, which have increased our production costs, we have had to increase the price by US\$ 0.11 since 2008.



*Nutribon®*

**GAIN: What other challenges does the project face?**

*MK:* We would like to be able to distribute our nutritious products throughout the country so even the most rural and isolated of areas can access them. But to do this, we need employees and vehicles to reach these areas. With support from GAIN, we plan to work through partners, whether multinational companies or non-governmental organizations, which have existing distribution links to these rural populations. We would also like to strengthen the exportation of our products to neighboring countries like Burkina Faso, Guinea, Mali, and Sierra Leone. We're currently exporting to Cameroon and Senegal. With now even more malnourished people than before and everywhere rather than concentrated in certain geographical areas, our job has become even more challenging. Before the crisis, about 1.6 million infants were malnourished. Now we expect there are many more.

**GAIN: What does the policy landscape look like for infant nutrition in Cote d'Ivoire?**

*MK:* The decree for the adoption of the International Code of Marketing of Breast-milk Substitutes has not yet been signed or published by the Government. It's important because it requires all companies to respect and support breastfeeding as key to fighting malnutrition and promotes optimal infant feeding practices. National legislative policies in place that support infant nutrition can only strengthen our efforts. We are also hopeful that our new President Alassane Ouattara will prioritize child nutrition. In his political campaign, and in his written program, he has said that he is committed to ensuring that all children suffering from severe malnutrition will receive nutritious food for free. This is a good sign.

Reporting by Karie Atkinson, GAIN

Read a previous interview with [Marie Konaté](#) [4]

Read more about GAIN's [Infant and Young Child Nutrition Program](#) [5]

**Country:** Côte d'Ivoire

Infant & Young Child Nutrition

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**Links:**

[1] <http://www.hki.org/>

[2] <http://www.thousanddays.org/>

[3] <http://www.pki-ci.com/>

[4] <http://www.gainhealth.org/country-stories/interview-marie-konat%C3%A9-ceo-leading-producer-fortified-infant-cereal-products-c%C3%B4te-d%27ivoire>

[5] <http://www.gainhealth.org/programs/gain-infant-and-young-child-nutrition-program>

[6] [http://www.addtoany.com/share\\_save?linkurl=http://www.gainhealth.org/country-stories/%E2%80%9Cthese-have-been-difficult-times-me-company-and-our-country%E2%80%9D-marie-konat%C3%A9-ceo-gain-p&linkname="These have been difficult times for me, the company and our country," Marie Konaté, CEO of a GAIN partner company in Côte d'Ivoire tells GAIN in an interview.](http://www.addtoany.com/share_save?linkurl=http://www.gainhealth.org/country-stories/%E2%80%9Cthese-have-been-difficult-times-me-company-and-our-country%E2%80%9D-marie-konat%C3%A9-ceo-gain-p&linkname=%E2%80%9CThese%20have%20been%20difficult%20times%20for%20me%2C%20the%20company%20and%20our%20country%2C%20Marie%20Konat%C3%A9%2C%20CEO%20of%20a%20GAIN%20partner%20company%20in%20C%C3%B4te%20d'Ivoire%20tells%20GAIN%20in%20an%20interview.%E2%80%9C)