

When Rice Becomes Hope: How One Foundation’s Grain Defies Hunger

CHELSIE CARVAJAL x SEPTEMBER 5, 2025 x



Photo Courtesy of Saba Family Foundation

Beneath the clamor of global crises and the quiet struggles of displaced communities, a single commodity stands as both sustenance and symbol: rice. Even as global production hits record highs, 533.8 million tons harvested in 2024, more than 258 million people continue to face acute food insecurity. Against this backdrop emerges an extraordinary force: a self-funded humanitarian effort that converts corporate harvests into survival rations for the world’s most vulnerable.

For 23 years, [Saba Family Foundation](#) has transformed profit into purpose without relying on donor campaigns or fundraising galas. Its founder, Dr. Malini Saba, channels 50 percent of revenues from her agricultural ventures, spanning operations in 20 countries, into what she calls “emergency nourishment infrastructure.”

With a legacy rooted in humanitarian action, the foundation has spent decades delivering rice to communities affected by crises, from global health emergencies to the fallout of conflict and displacement. Powered by the Saba Group’s deep involvement in the trading and cultivation of rice, wheat, and corn, the foundation transforms agricultural success into life-saving aid.

Under the leadership of Dr. Saba, the company donates rice directly to the foundation, which rapidly distributes it to war-affected regions and refugee camps, an enduring testament to her commitment to supporting farmers, protecting livelihoods, and bringing hope to those who need it most. *“You don’t fundraise hope. You grow it. You ship it. You place it directly into the hands that need it most,”* she explains.

Crisis Response Through Agricultural Networks

Dr. Saba’s business empire provides the foundation with unparalleled access to agricultural resources. As chairperson of Saba Group, a conglomerate spanning rice, oil, and gas trading across 20 countries, she leverages corporate infrastructure to streamline aid delivery.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, this synergy enabled the foundation to donate 20,000 kilograms of dry white rice and approximately Rs 1.9 crore (equivalent to \$253,000) to Save the Children’s relief efforts, supporting 2 million children and families in India. The rice, sourced directly from the group’s partner mills, formed part of emergency food baskets distributed to homeless populations in Delhi and Mumbai.

“Having grown up the hard way, putting myself through school, working part-time and doing all sorts of odd jobs, I am aware of what it is like for the less fortunate,” Dr. Saba shares. *“At the end of the day, I do not look for glory or praise. My main goal is to make a difference in the world.”*

The foundation’s approach bypasses traditional aid bottlenecks. In 2020, it delivered 8,000 kilograms of rice to the Kalgidhar Trust’s community kitchens in Punjab, serving 5,000 daily meals to the families of COVID-19 patients. This direct-from-farm model ensures freshness and cost efficiency, with Saba Group absorbing transportation and logistics expenses.

Sustaining Impact Amid Global Market Shifts

While surplus production creates opportunities for aid organizations, price volatility remains a challenge. The foundation mitigates this through fixed-price contracts with Saba Group’s network of 2,000 smallholder farms across South Asia and Africa. These agreements guarantee a stable supply while providing farmers with above-market rates, a dual approach to humanitarian aid and agricultural support.

Dr. Saba’s initiatives intersect with broader food security trends. India, which accounts for 21.5 percent of global rice production, has seen exports fluctuate due to domestic stockpiling policies. The foundation navigates these complexities by prioritizing donations to non-exporting regions, particularly war-torn areas and refugee camps. In 2024, its operations expanded to Ukrainian border communities, where over 50 tons of rice reached displaced families within 72 hours of the escalation in hostilities.

Future-Proofing Food Security

The foundation’s 2030 roadmap includes establishing 50 community-run rice banks across sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia. These hubs will store surplus harvests from Saba Group’s farms, creating localized buffer stocks for crisis response. Pilot programs in Malawi and Bihar have already demonstrated a 40 percent reduction in post-harvest losses through improved storage techniques.

Partnerships remain central to scaling impact. Collaborations with Save the Children, CARE International, and the Kalgidhar Trust enable the foundation to leverage existing distribution networks. In 2024, these alliances facilitated the delivery of rice to 12 refugee camps in Bangladesh and Jordan, reaching over 200,000 Syrian and Rohingya refugees.

The Saba Family Foundation’s model redefines corporate philanthropy. Through the integration of humanitarian aid with agricultural trade, Dr. Saba demonstrates how business success can directly combat global hunger, one grain at a time.

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