

Decentralization and Local Governance
Support Program

(Strategic Objective 2)

Program Success Stories

November 2003

Prepared by DGL Felo for l'ARD, Inc.
Under Contract N° 685-C-00-00-00037-00
With l'USAID/Sénégal



Attendees of an Information Day session showing images of community projects used in the workshop.

Information Days Equip New Community Officials with a Roadmap to Effective Local Governance

An emerging leader in rural Senegal finds his footing thanks to technical assistance from USAID

Challenge

In May 2002, 44-year-old Mor Mbaye Samb fulfilled a longstanding dream as he stepped into his new role as locally elected Rural Collectivity President of Pété Ouarack. A rural, northern Senegalese collectivity spanning 187 square kilometers, fourteen villages and a population of around 4,000, Pété Ouarack had known only one other president since 1976 and had seen very little change in that time. Although Samb, like his predecessor, lacked formal education, he had grown up in a local village and was viewed as a leader among a new generation of citizens who were passionate about bringing positive change to their community. National decentralization reforms had accorded a broad spectrum of new governing powers to collectivities beginning in 1996, and Samb and his supporters hoped that his leadership would help bring roads, electricity, new health clinics and other crucial improvements to Pété Ouarack.

The hurdle of the elections at last successfully behind him, Samb turned to take stock of what tools he had inherited for the task ahead. He was not encouraged by what he found: a crumbling government building lacking closeable doors and windows, a complete dearth of archives or even basic records on past activities, and a handful of returning council members without institutional memory because they had never been included in the decision-making process. The national government had seen to it that each collectivity, Pété Ouarack included, now had a newly elected president and council, an array of council committees, and printed extracts of the decentralization laws, which alluded to the budget process and the rural tax. But what role were the council and committees intended to play? Which local decisions required the participation of central government representatives? How did the budget process work? What was the purpose of the rural tax? And with whom could Samb communicate as such questions arose?

Initiative

Shortly after Samb and his council embarked on their uncertain path, USAID's decentralization and local governance program (DGL Felo) offered to provide technical assistance to the elected officials of Pété Ouarack in the form of "*Journées d'Information*," or *Information Days*. These two-day, on-site sessions were designed by USAID to jumpstart fledgling collectivity governments in Senegal by supplying new local officials with a road map of the specific actors, processes and responsibilities associated with local government administration under new national decentralization laws.

Information Days bring together all the local actors concerned with the collectivity's administration – including council members, women's and youth groups, and non-governmental organizations – as well as key representatives of central government administrative and technical services. The sessions impart practical information and effective management techniques via colorful illustrations, interactive skits, and project planning and implementation exercises. *Information Day* "graduates" leave with a package of concise governance manuals, including several in local languages, for ongoing reference. Mor Mbaye Samb and the collectivity of Pété Ouarack welcomed and engaged in one of USAID's *Information Days* with enthusiasm in July 2002.

Results

Samb found the *Information Days* vital to the successful start of his leadership in Pété Ouarack, saying, "USAID provided us with very pertinent information on managing a collectivity in Senegal... because of them, we now know how." In addition to gaining practical information on topics such as the budget process, record-keeping, council committees and promoting popular participation, Samb explained that merely bringing people together to meet face-to-face was invaluable. Due to the size of the collectivity, the relative isolation of its villages, and the lack of perceived need to collaborate, many key actors and counterparts had never met. As a result of the *Information Days*, an accessible network was created, barriers between local and regional officials were removed, and a collaborative tone for their future interactions was set.

Now just over a year later, the active governance of Pété Ouarack is well underway. In the collectivity's first open, participatory budget process in October 2002, two million FCFA (approximately \$3,600) was dedicated to the now complete replacement of the old health clinic's sand courtyard with more hygienic stone tiles. Three new health clinics are slated to open by the end of 2003, and an ambulance has also been budgeted. Moreover, Samb has continued to tap USAID for ongoing technical assistance and training, which he has leveraged to provide striking leadership in reviving the collectivity's civil registry and facilitating the renewal of national identity cards. "Members of the population themselves say that things are going better, that there are changes," states Samb.

Mor Mbaye Samb and Pété Ouarack comprise just one example of the impact that USAID's *Information Days* are having on the reinforcement of local governance and leadership in Senegal. Since the local elections of May 2002, USAID has held *Information Days* in 50 collectivities like Pété Ouarack, attended by more than 3,250 participants, and reaching indirectly – via word of mouth and the distribution of practical guides – at least 6,000 more, in over 100 neighboring collectivities.

Pullout Quote

"When we were elected, we started bringing changes to the community, but the population, who didn't understand the changes, criticized us and considered us inflexible intellectuals. Through these Information Days, all of the participants have gained a better understanding of the laws and the functioning of the community, and that reassures us in the road we have chosen."

– President of a rural collectivity and *Information Days* participant



Key participants in Ziguinchor meetings in front of Town Hall (left to right): Souleymane Diédhiou (Africare), Moussa Diédhiou (3rd Deputy to Mayor, Municipality), Cheikh Ndiaye (Associate Municipal Receiver, Treasury), Moustapha Diedhiou (2nd Deputy to Mayor, Municipality), Benjamin Diatta (Chief, Municipal Revenue Division), Magatte Diattara (DGL Felo).

Effective Communication Leads to Increased Municipal Revenues

Strategic technical assistance in southern Senegal defuses a tug-of-war between national and local government bodies

Challenge

“The municipality of Ziguinchor is far from seeing the end of the tunnel in the acute, two-week-old crisis involving its conflict with the public treasury.... No municipal taxes have been collected in the city... representing a loss, according to municipal authorities, of 1.5 million FCFA (approximately \$2,500) per day.... The situation is increasingly alarming since no solution has been found to date.”
– Excerpt from *Walfadjri* article, February 19, 2003

At the time that this article appeared in one of Senegal’s largest dailies in February of 2003, the fiscal crisis in Ziguinchor – the important “capital” city of the *Casamance* region – had already reached a fever pitch. On the surface, this seemed an irrationally acrimonious dispute about the replacement of a few dozen municipal tax collectors and the bureaucratic details of depositing municipal proceeds with the treasury. Not much deeper lay the Mayor’s contention that the old tax collectors, favored by the treasury, had been depositing fewer proceeds than they collected. But on a more profound level, the conflict over tax collectors represented a severe lack of communication and cooperation between a powerful regional treasury, which had long held the reins when it came to managing local financial resources, and a municipality, which was seeking to exercise its new rights under the national transition to decentralized local governance.

Despite the reported stonewalling on both sides, none of the hundreds of thousands of *Walfadjri* readers could have guessed that this situation would force the city to continue operations without receipt of municipal taxes for another five months, shutting down key services and deferring payment of public salaries. By the time municipal tax collections resumed in July 2003, Ziguinchor had lost an estimated 178,088,455 FCFA in nonpayment of taxes. But perhaps more astonishing than the conflict itself was the fact that by July 2003, the persistently bitter relationship between the two vital parties in

Ziguinchor's mobilization of public funds – the municipality, headed by locally elected leaders, and the regional treasury, representing the financial arm of the national government – had somehow evolved into a cooperative working partnership.

Initiative

USAID's decentralization and local governance program (DGL Felo) had been working with the municipality of Ziguinchor since September 2002 to increase local citizens' participation in the community budget process and sharpen local officials' understanding of their new rights and responsibilities as a result of national decentralization laws. These laws call for the municipality to assume responsibility for developing its annual budget, collecting local taxes, depositing tax proceeds at the regional treasury, and drawing down funds through the treasury according to its approved budget. USAID's technical assistance in these areas had earned the organization a local reputation as a valuable, well-informed partner who supported healthy local governance. Therefore, when municipal revenues began to plunge in February 2003 as a result of the collectors conflict, USAID was well-positioned to play the role of neutral third party in bringing the municipal and treasury officials together to communicate about working together effectively.

In March 2003, although the two sides were not on speaking terms, USAID convened a special meeting of key municipal and treasury officials in Ziguinchor, to discuss what actions could be taken to recommence the flow of municipal taxes into the treasury and generally improve local financial management. Rather than attacking the conflict head-on, the two sides were invited to cooperate in identifying current weaknesses in the municipal financial system and brainstorming solutions. The fruits of this discussion were a formal definition of the actors in the municipality's financial department and their respective roles, suggestions for revisions to the departmental structure, and a plan for future communication among actors involved in the mobilization of resources. Part of the communication plan entailed monthly reunions to evaluate progress and set next steps, which USAID hosted in conjunction with Africare, a sub-contractor, in April, May and June.

Recognizing that the tendency for friction as powers formerly accorded to the state or region devolve to the local level is not limited to Ziguinchor, and perceiving the vital need for local-state collaboration in the successful mobilization of community financial resources, USAID now conducts preemptive workshops in partner collectivities around the country. As in Ziguinchor, these workshops focus on improving communication among all actors involved in the flow of resources, but especially between collectivity officials and those at the local branch of the national treasury.

Results

Since USAID's intervention and the resumption of municipal tax collection in Ziguinchor, the relationship between the municipality and the treasury has continued to improve. Municipal revenues have increased from 20,930,037 and 12,203,138 FCFA respectively in January and February 2003 (prior to the conflict) to 53,021,106 FCFA in August 2003 and an unprecedented 153,375,180 FCFA in September 2003. Explaining the positive change, Benjamin Diatta, Director of Revenues at the municipality, stated, "The role of USAID was a determining factor in the return to normalcy between the municipality and the treasury in Ziguinchor." He went on to say that USAID's early workshops had helped the municipality identify the potential for greater revenues, and that subsequent collaboration with the treasury – whose staff is now effectively fulfilling its role as financial adviser to the mayor – had led to the achievement of increases.

Other USAID partner collectivities have seen similar improvements in local-national communication and revenues. Since receiving technical assistance, 21 out of 37 collectivities have reported receiving at least one monthly financial statement per quarter from the local branch of the national treasury. Moreover, 73% of DGL Felo's 37 partner collectivities increased local revenue generation in 2002, some by more than 25% (e.g. Nguekhokh 58%, Koungeul 39%, and Kanel 32%). USAID will continue to offer on-demand technical support to all of these partners through 2004.

Pullout Quote

“USAID’s most important contribution was improving the collaboration and information exchange among the partners involved in mobilizing the collectivity’s financial resources. It was helpful to have all the actors together around the table.”

– Cheikh Ndiaye, Associate Municipal Receiver, Ziguinchor Treasury



Images of steps of the budget process used in Budget Forums.

Popular Participation in the Budget Process Paves the Way to Rural Development in Senegal

The idea of teaching illiterates about community finance struck skeptics as ridiculous; thousands of villagers are proving them wrong

Initiative

In rural communities across Senegal, USAID's decentralization and local governance program (DGL Felo) is offering a series of interactive workshops that demystify the state-mandated local budget process and put decisions about community finances back into citizens' hands. The first workshop in the series, called the "Budget Forum," is geared toward the largely under-educated and illiterate populations of rural areas. The Budget Forum transforms the concept of a 'budget' from something obscure, complex and unrelated to daily life, into a practical tool that citizens and local officials can use to improve their communities. Follow-up workshops and handbooks target locally elected government officials to further illuminate their responsibilities in the process, which essentially funnels local tax revenues to a regional or departmental treasury that in turn directs the proceeds back to the collectivity level to fund the community's approved annual budget.

Led by professional Senegalese facilitators, each Budget Forum takes place in a local language over the course of two days at a location within a target collectivity. Members of the general population participate alongside the collectivity's president or Mayor, elected local councilors, and community groups, for a total of about 70 attendees. Using visual aids that warmly depict average citizens engaged in the budget process, the Forum begins with a discussion of household finance – a subject to which everyone can relate – and proceeds by drawing a parallel to the finances of the community as a whole. The Forum concludes with an open exchange in which citizens and local officials share their respective expectations surrounding the budget process, and agree on realistic ways of addressing one another's needs. Their resolutions commonly involve better communication and transparency on the part of the local government in exchange for the population's greater respect for taxes and community laws.

By the end of the Budget Forum, citizens have gained a new understanding of the purpose of a community budget and its relevance to their lives, the value of their participation in planning the annual budget, the role that taxes play in developing their public infrastructure, and the responsibilities of local and regional officials in the community budget process. Over the course of subsequent workshops, elected officials are likewise empowered with straightforward, authoritative and practical information on the chain of actors and steps in the budget process, potential sources of local revenue,

the laws governing decentralized fiscal management, and the legal rights and responsibilities of their communities.

Challenge

Prior to the introduction of these budget workshops, the vast majority of collectivities experienced no popular participation in community budgeting, abysmal rates of tax collection, and difficulty in obtaining financial information and assistance in revenue mobilization from the local branch of the national treasury. The root of the problem lay in communication; sweeping national reforms enacted in the 1990s had devolved the budget process to the collectivity level, but neither the populations nor their elected officials were adequately informed of the chain of actors, responsibilities and steps in the process.

Budgetary stagnation ensued. In many cases, collectivity mayors or presidents – possessing little information on developing an acceptable budget – either continued to rely on local representatives of the central government to perform this basic function, or developed a budget without input from local citizens or the elected councilors. Their submitted budgets, moreover, were frequently not in keeping with proper guidelines, and were rejected, thereby stalling the process. Meanwhile, some citizens mistook the “approval” of the annual budget to mean the receipt of actual funds by their local leaders. Seeing no evidence that their leaders were spending this ‘budget’ wisely, and not understanding the role that their contributions played, many people refused to pay taxes, and perceived meetings about the community’s finances as a waste of time.

This chain of misunderstandings created a withering cycle of decline and mistrust. While tax revenues dwindled and budget approval remained in a holding pattern, the collectivities lacked public resources with which to address vital community needs – such as instituting a basic public sanitation system or rebuilding a decrepit public market. Many local leaders wasted considerable time revising their incorrectly formulated budgets or chasing delinquent taxpayers. And citizens, who had no effective say in community finances or decisions, became increasingly suspicious of corruption. Thus even a determined, well-informed and honest local leader faced steep obstacles in communicating with his fellow citizens about the budget and taking steps to change the status quo.

Results

As a result of USAID’s budget workshops in Senegal, thousands of citizens now understand and feel included in their community’s financial planning for the first time; local officials have the community trust and support they need to carry out their mandate; and communities are better able to collect local taxes, access those funds, and apply them to democratically established community needs. Among the 37 collectivities in which USAID has held Budget Forums and provided follow-up technical assistance, 89% organized preliminary community budget debates in 2003, respecting a key legal provision aimed at ensuring popular and council participation in the budget process. 59% had their budgets submitted and approved by January 31, two months before the legal deadline. These are excellent results since few Senegalese collectivities are able to respect either of these procedures.

Clarification of the budget process has also led to a dramatic change in citizens’ attitudes toward contributing to the public coffers. Rather than refusing to pay the market tax, as they had in the past, recent Budget Forum participants in one town marketplace rushed to the aid of a tax collector, urging a fellow vendor to contribute his part for the sake of the community. And instead of waiting for collectors to arrive at their doorstep, merchants and heads of villages in numerous communities are proactively making their way to the treasury to pay their rural and income taxes on time. This behavior shift not only results in greatly increased community revenues, but it also means that local officials can devote less time to tax collection and more time and resources to planning and executing an effective budget. In 2002, 73% of USAID’s 37 partner collectivities improved local revenue mobilization. 18 of those partner collectivities achieved increases of at least 50%.

Now that public monies are accessible to their collectivities, and citizens have a say in how those funds are used, thousands of Senegalese villagers are witnessing the difference that the participatory community budget process can make. One recent Budget Forum participant stood up at a meeting with this comment: “I would like to make an apology to our collectivity president. I always thought that the term ‘budget’ meant that he had received a large sum of money, and I accused him because I saw that nothing was changing in our community. Now I understand that the budget is a plan, and that we all need to contribute financially and plan together to realize our community goals.”

Pullout Quote

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– Rural citizen and Budget Forum participant



Khady Top, Kougheul resident and kola nut vendor at the now much cleaner town market.

The “Clean Town of Kougheul” Sets an Example for Public Sanitation in Senegal

Leadership and popular participation lead to cleaner streets, better health

Challenge

Public sanitation has been an intractable problem in Senegal for years. In far too many communities, litter is scattered everywhere – scraps of paper and plastic blowing in the wind or protruding from the deep sand that makes up public fields, roads and sidewalks. Small piles of rubbish accumulate in front of homes and emit sharp, black smoke as residents attempt to incinerate them. A widespread lack of plumbing means that wastewater – from the washing of dishes or laundry for instance – is also tossed nearby, creating permanent wet breeding grounds for insects and bacteria. Rain gutters running along main roads frequently harbor a noxious mix of refuse – mango pits, a milk carton, meat bones, leftover rice, an old shoe – and, in the rainy season, standing water. Marketplaces pose a particular sanitation challenge, given their high concentration of people, restaurants, meat and vegetable vendors, livestock, product wrappers and plastic bags.

Many of the 16,000 citizens of the central Senegalese town of Kougheul have long been troubled by such conditions. Forty-year-old Khady Top, who has sold kola nuts and other small products in the local market for over twenty years, expressed her frustration with the unsanitary conditions both in the marketplace and at home prior to recent assistance from USAID’s decentralization and local governance program (DGL Felo). “The market has always been very dirty,” she said. “We vendors tried to keep our area clean, but the [nearby] gutter always smelled from the refuse, and there was nowhere to put our trash. At home, I used to burn our garbage, or pay someone to take it away from time to time. The children were sick a lot, and every rainy season, half of them would get malaria.” Khady’s experience was common in Kougheul. In early 2003, the town had no formal sanitation

system, nor even a designated community garbage dump, so waste disposal was a haphazard, individual affair.

Despite the population's concerns about community sanitation, numerous past efforts to effect change in Koungheul were thwarted by a lack of coordination, communication and leadership. Deficient public revenues led the municipality to appeal to aid organizations for donations of the sophisticated sanitation equipment they thought the job required; but even with a modern garbage truck in hand, the local leadership was unable to coordinate the public participation, labor and maintenance to institute a sustainable system. Neighborhood health committees were established to handle the problem at one point, but without authority and a clear mandate, they too foundered. The local youth group carried out periodic clean-up days, but within a few weeks, the relentless litter would reappear. Meanwhile, individual households or groups of citizens created informal dumping grounds wherever convenient. There was no effective collaboration among actors, and no one was satisfied.

Initiative

By mid-2003, however, the combination of a new local administration and a timely package of assistance from USAID's decentralization and local governance program was beginning to have a positive impact on the sanitation situation in Koungheul. USAID was working with the Koungheul collectivity to build capacity in the area of local governance when public concern over sanitation issues rose to the fore as a governance priority. In response, USAID collaborated with the local leadership to organize a series of diagnostic meetings on the subject. For the first time ever, all of the actors involved in Koungheul's sanitation came together to discuss their isolated efforts, review past failures, identify key needs and obstacles, and exchange ideas for solutions. Elected officials, neighborhood chiefs, educators, doctors, market vendors, representatives of youth and women's groups, and common citizens worked with sanitation experts brought in by USAID to develop and vote on a detailed plan of action for a realistic, sustainable sanitation system in Koungheul.

The first phase of the community's resulting "Clean Town of Koungheul" initiative focused on practical steps that would have an immediate impact. The municipality allocated land at an accessible distance from the town center for use as an official landfill site, and contracted with neighborhood sanitation committees to regularly pick up household waste and transport it to the site. USAID helped enclose the site and plant a perimeter of trees to hide it from public view. USAID also contributed six donkey-drawn carts for household waste collection and 115 public trash barrels for use in the market area. Each household, in turn, agreed to contribute 500 FCFA (just under \$1) per month for the collection service, and to follow certain procedures for proper litter and waste disposal.

In addition to these basic steps, Koungheul created a community-wide sanitation management structure to assure the sustainability of its long-term plan. The new management system bestows new, clearly defined responsibilities on groups of actors such as the defunct health committees; expands the periodic clean-up program to involve women's groups, neighborhood chiefs and the health committees in addition to the youth group; and establishes a system of communication and monitoring that includes all of the actors in community sanitation. Assistance provided by USAID since 2001 has enabled the municipality to engage the public in a democratic community budget process, which will help mobilize revenues needed for the maintenance of sanitation equipment, as well as larger infrastructure investments down the road.

With USAID's support, the community launched the "Clean Town of Koungheul" initiative with a special four-day event in July 2003. The event began with a conference on public sanitation and culminated with a community-wide clean-up. Representatives from nine different collectivities around Senegal convened at the conference in Koungheul to learn about the town's new initiative and exchange their own sanitation challenges and solutions. The event thus served not only to raise awareness and public commitment to the initiative in Koungheul, but also to stimulate similar practical, democratic steps to improve public sanitation in other communities.

Results

According to municipal officials and citizens alike, one of the most important results of Koungheul's efforts has been the emergence of a sense of shared responsibility for the community's sanitation. People don't litter as profusely; many households have begun bagging their garbage; people cover their used water puddles with sand; more and more households are paying the monthly garbage collection fee and report a willingness to continue paying for the service. Although citizens acknowledge that the system isn't perfect yet, their former sense of impotence has been replaced with active participation and resourcefulness in creating viable solutions. Further, Koungheul's local elected officials are proving themselves capable of effecting more successful change in the community now that they have the population's substantive input and support.

The improved sanitation of Koungheul also had a positive effect on community health during the 2003 rainy season. Khady Top explained, "I am so much happier now that the market is cleaner. The workmen keep the gutters clean, and we all use the trash barrels. We see a difference at home, too. The children haven't been sick as often, and when they are, it doesn't last as long. Only one out of our four children got malaria this rainy season." The president of a local women's group underlined the impact that Koungheul's sanitation initiative is having on women in particular. Since women are traditionally responsible for maintaining a clean living environment and caring for the children, improvements in public sanitation often make their jobs easier and benefit them most.

Her statements echoed those of the chief physician in Koungheul, who said: "African tradition delegates cleanliness to women, but to make sanitation sustainable, you need the commitment and participation of the entire population and its local officials, because the triad of garbage, flies and mosquitoes is a serious obstacle to any other development." In Koungheul, the whole population is pitching in to combat that obstacle with impressive vigor.

Pullout Quote

"African tradition delegates cleanliness to women, but to make sanitation sustainable, you need the commitment and participation of the entire population and its local officials, because the triad of garbage, flies and mosquitoes is a serious obstacle to any other development."

– Dr. Djiré Diagne, chief physician, Koungheul



El Hadji Woorá Baldé, chief of Saré Diaobé village in the collectivity of Ndorna, with local kosam.

Active Forest Management Restores a Cultural Symbol

Empowered by a clear understanding of their rights, Senegalese villagers are taking new responsibility for their natural resources

Challenge

For the Pulaar ethnic group of Senegal, “kosam” is a dietary staple, as well as a cherished symbol of health, purity and prosperity. *Kosam* is curdled milk, made from the yield of a community’s herd of cows, which graze on grass in the local forest. Eaten daily with millet and used in periodic traditional rituals, *kosam* was once a part of Pulaar society year-round, particularly in collectivities like Saré Bidji and Ndorna, whose villages are situated in the southern region of Kolda alongside some of the country’s most important remaining forest lands. In early 2001, however, no one in the area could remember the last time their cows had produced milk beyond the six-month rainy season. El Hadji Woorá Baldé, a local village chief, explained that, “The forest here used to be richer, there was more pasture, and the grasses grew back faster after forest fires. Each cow produced around four liters of milk per milking, whereas for many years now, even in the rainy season, we only get one liter at a time. The grasses they used to eat have disappeared.”

The degradation of the forest in this area is due to several factors. First, as the populations of the surrounding villages grew over the past generations, so did the number of unsustainable farming and extraction practices. A lack of widespread environmental awareness and coordination in the face of misuse overwhelmed the forest’s ability to regenerate itself. Natural and accidental forest fires also went unchecked, and preventive measures, such as firebreaks, were limited to the perimeters of individual villages rather than organized on a forest-wide scale. Moreover, the area has seen a relatively recent influx of farmers from northern Senegal, as well as Gambian and Guinean outsiders who recklessly exploit the forest in their quest to cash in quickly on products such as fuel wood and charcoal. This potent combination of factors has resulted in lower rainfall, soil depletion and erosion, the disappearance of healthy pasture, and a diminished supply of edible wild fruits.

Villagers in Saré Bidji and Ndorna recognized these problems and their impact on the population, but felt powerless to stem the damage. Natural resource management had long been the responsibility of the national government and its Forestry Service. Although national decentralization reform in 1996 devolved significant rights and responsibilities in natural resource management to the collectivity level, the majority of the rural communities and villages concerned lacked not only an understanding of their new roles, but also the management, training and equipment necessary to fulfill them. What steps could the local government take to protect its forest resources? How could citizens spread the word efficiently about a fire deep in the forest, and solicit help in extinguishing it? What techniques could villagers use to prevent and combat fires? How could the many isolated villages work together to create effective prevention and monitoring systems that would span wider areas of their forest?

Initiative

With support from USAID's local governance project in Senegal, representatives from more than 200 villages in the Saré Bidji and Ndorna collectivities came together beginning in early 2001 to discuss their most pressing needs and brainstorm about potential solutions. Forest management emerged as their number one shared priority. Although the villages each had a forest fire committee dating back to before governmental decentralization, these were long defunct owing to a lack of management, training and equipment. The population proposed that USAID assist them in rejuvenating these committees. Thus USAID organized workshops to inform local citizens about their environmental rights and responsibilities under decentralization, help re-establish active forest committees, and clearly define the tasks of the committee members – which would now extend beyond putting out fires, to include monitoring forest use and reporting infractions to the Forestry Service. USAID also provided grants totaling \$54,000 in the form of bicycles, motorcycles, fire gear, and committee uniforms and badges, to enable the committees to get to work.

Recognizing that the new committees would not succeed in the long term without sound management and coordination, the elected officials, village chiefs, and representatives of women's and youth groups in Saré Bidji and Ndorna also worked closely with USAID to build their administrative capacity. Special budget workshops fostered an increase in local financial resources by teaching elected officials how to guide the budget process, and showing citizens the impact that their tax contributions could have on community goals. A community budget was established through a transparent, democratic process and included new provisions for the upkeep and replacement of the forest committees' bicycles, motorcycles and equipment. USAID also assisted the rural councils and committees in setting up a system for reporting and tracking infractions, as well as an inter-village communication strategy to ensure reliable coordination of preventive and emergency measures. Finally, USAID worked with local elected leaders and officials at the regional Forestry Service to help them cultivate a strong working partnership to protect their resources.

Results

In 2003, for the first time in years, the villagers of Saré Bidji enjoyed *kosam* straight through the dry season. Bomelle Baldé, a 46-year-old Saré Bidji resident and mother of nine said, "This year our rural collectivity has really seen the impact of USAID's local governance project. There was grass for our cows all the way up until the rains came, and we have had milk all year. We are more conscious of the environment now... and we understand the role that our whole community plays in protecting the forest." Bomelle was able to feed her children milk all year, in addition to using some of the profits from her sale of *kosam* to purchase fish and vegetables to supplement their diet. In this way, the improved management of natural resources in Saré Bidji has led to a year-round availability of *kosam*, which resulted in tangible impacts on the health, economy and culture of the community.

Perhaps the most fundamental impact of USAID's work in this area has been the change in attitudes to which Bomelle Baldé alluded. In Saré Bidji, Ndorna, nearby Pata, and other Senegalese collectivities, USAID's efforts to strengthen natural resource management through better governance have resulted

in a notable shift in both the value that citizens place on their environment and the level of responsibility that they take to protect their natural resources. By meeting all of the actors implicated in local natural resource management, participating in open, democratic discussions with their counterparts, and receiving clear information on their roles and responsibilities under decentralization laws, local citizens and elected officials are gaining the skills and confidence necessary to take active control of their communities' resources and futures.

Pullout Quote

“This year our rural collectivity has really seen the impact of USAID’s local governance project. There was grass for our cows all the way up until the rains came, and we have had milk all year. We are more conscious of the environment now... and we understand the role that our whole community plays in protecting the forest.”

– Bomelle Baldé, mother of nine and resident of Saré Bidji



The Diaobé market in action.

Cooperative Market Management Brings New Revenue to a Rural Community

*Residents of a small Senegalese town are working together
to capitalize on the financial potential of their popular international market*

Challenge

On market days, the small, southern Senegalese roadside town of Diaobé, in the rural collectivity of Kounkané, springs to chaotic life as thousands of visitors pour in from hundreds of miles around. Roving vendors wend their way through the crowd of eager shoppers, their heads piled high with colorful regional fabrics. The national highway is lined with mountains of locally grown onions and watermelons, buckets of central Senegalese peanuts and salt, tables of wristwatches shipped from Dakar, and barrels of bright red palm oil from Guinea Bissau. The scent of Guinean coffee beans and dried fish permeate the air, while the braying of donkeys, goats and sheep rises up over the din of people haggling in half a dozen languages.

Originally the home of a weekly market, Diaobé increasingly plays host to a daily influx of vendors and buyers from all over the region, including the neighboring countries of Guinea Bissau, Guinea, the Gambia and Mali. Upwards of 15,000 people exchange over 1,000 tons of products, worth approximately 250 million FCFA (\$450,000), per week in Diaobé.

But such abundance comes with drawbacks. Vendors and their goods vie with supply trucks and passenger busses for space along the highway, blocking the national route to would-be passers-by; there are no rules governing where people set up shop, unload their goods, discharge passengers, or park. Here and there, rotting watermelons and discarded plastic bags mingle with rusted car parts and animal droppings in muddy puddles of red earth; there is no organized sanitation system in Diaobé. The high concentration of people and money draws thieves and prostitutes, leading to violence and disease; but the police force is not mobilized to address these issues effectively. And when night descends upon Diaobé, the whole scene is plunged into darkness; electricity has yet to reach this poor, rural town.

Whatever burden this situation might place on visitors, it is the citizens of Diaobé and the Kounkané rural collectivity who pay the steepest price for their popular market. Despite the market's huge economic potential, until recently Kounkané received next to nothing in the way of market taxes, vending charges or parking fees. In 2000, total market-related collectivity revenues came to an average

of just 106,300 FCFA (\$190) per month, and a total of 1,275,200 FCFA (\$2,300) for the year, compared to an estimated 11.2 billion FCFA (\$19.9 million) in total transactions that year. Without decent tax and fee proceeds, Kounkané's rural council not only lacked any financial means with which to address the management, sanitation and security problems associated with the market, but it also lost the opportunity to capitalize on the market's success by applying resulting public proceeds to improvements in Diaobé and the surrounding area. When the passenger busses, vendors and customers left town with their truckloads of goods every week, the 10,000 citizens of Diaobé had little more than a gaping mess to show for their visit.

Anarchy, poor sanitation, security issues and paltry public revenues are not limited to the market in Diaobé. USAID's decentralization and local governance program (DGL Felo) has received requests from many of its partner collectivities across Senegal for assistance in improving the management and revenue mobilization of their local markets. DGL Felo selected Diaobé as a pilot case with the expectation that the lessons learned by this large, high-profile, international market – beset by the full spectrum of challenges experienced by other markets across Senegal – could be applied to other markets in the future.

Initiative

Using its signature participative approach, DGL Felo launched an initiative to improve the organization and management of the Diaobé market by bringing all of the concerned actors together to engage in a series of open dialogues. These actors included citizens, merchants and vendors, the elected local collectivity president and council members, the police force, and representatives of the departmental treasury and the central government. The initial meetings served to diagnose the current state of the market, identify the problems to be addressed and sort them into a number of manageable phases, and democratically establish leaders and committees at the local level who would drive the initiative to improve the market with DGL Felo's support. The assembly of actors decided that the first order of business would be to increase the collection of market-related revenues by the collectivity.

A comprehensive survey of the market's permanent and visiting merchants, vendors and vehicles was undertaken to establish an estimate of the earnings that the collectivity could expect if tax and fee collections were effectively handled. DGL Felo then helped the collectivity forge a valuable relationship with the police force, which agreed to partner with tax and fee collectors to reinforce their authority. New collectors were hired and trained, including several women for the first time in Diaobé's history, and DGL Felo outfitted them with uniforms and badges. DGL Felo provided the rural council with a computer and printer, and trained council members to record and track market revenues using a spreadsheet program designed for that purpose. Two toll booths were installed along the highway, at the entrance and exit of the market, to ensure a systematic collection of vehicle and parking fees. Finally, local officials instituted procedures to carefully monitor the performance of each collector, thereby guarding against fraud.

Each phase of the ongoing initiative has been marked by transparency, popular participation and a series of logical, attainable steps – characteristics that many in Diaobé find refreshing. Ibrahima Diallo, a vendor, Diaobé citizen and elected leader of one of the working committees, explained: "I was not the only one who was skeptical of USAID's program at first. There have been many efforts to fix the problems at Diaobé, and everyone becomes overwhelmed and gives up. However, the new, systematic approach of DGL Felo charmed the population. DGL Felo also had a way of making it seem like they needed us, and then once we had all worked together to accomplish the task, we realized it was actually the other way around."

Results

The results of the first several phases of Diaobé's market initiative are stunning. As of Aug. 2003, the collectivity had already collected 8,026,950 FCFA (\$14,000) in market revenues for the year, reflecting an average monthly income of 1 million FCFA (\$1,785) – more than four times the average

monthly amount collected in 2002 (238,933 FCFA or \$427). The boost in market revenues has helped the collectivity invest in new market stalls and three community schools.

A major factor in the increased revenues has been a shift in people's attitudes toward paying their market taxes and fees, brought about by widespread public participation in the initiative, as well as the organizational and cosmetic changes in the collection process. Whereas many merchants and vendors were once suspicious of market collectors, they feel more comfortable paying the new, uniformed collectors who operate in an organized, transparent manner. Furthermore, as a result of DGL Felo's approach, many more local merchants and vendors feel personally invested in the efforts to improve the market, recognize the role that their tax and fee contributions can have to that end, and – now that there is regular communication between the population and their elected officials – they are confident that they will have a say in how the collectivity's proceeds are spent.

The USAID-supported initiative to improve the organization and management of the Diaobé market will continue through 2004. Although there are still many hurdles to clear on the road to a well-organized, healthy and safe public market, Diaobé at last has the financial momentum, popular participation and management structures in place to succeed.

Pullout Quote

“I was not the only one who was skeptical of USAID's program at first. There have been many efforts to fix the problems at Diaobé, and everyone becomes overwhelmed and gives up. However, the new, systematic approach of DGL Felo charmed the population. DGL Felo also had a way of making it seem like they needed us, and then once we had all worked together to accomplish the task, we realized it was actually the other way around.”

– Ibrahima Diallo, Diaobé citizen



Halimatou Baldé in her village in Southern Senegal.

Popular Concern Over Civil Registry Spurs National Action

Government recognition of a veritable crisis in the civil registry system in Senegal unexpectedly permits a girl to continue her education

Challenge

As a 12-year-old girl in rural Senegal, Halimatou Baldé holds the rare distinction of having completed primary school and the honor of being one of the best few students in her class. Halimatou lives in a rural village of just 367 people, where few study beyond primary school and most girls stay home and marry young. So she was lucky also to have the support of her family when she made up her mind to continue her studies. As the school year drew to a close in the spring of 2003, Halimatou looked forward to sitting for the national examination that would gain her admittance to secondary school. But a few weeks before the exam, she and her family learned that Halimatou's registration had been rejected. Her birth had never been registered, so she did not have a birth certificate, which was firmly required to take the exam. Moreover, it was too late to apply for a certificate in time for the test, and taking the exam the following year would be impossible unless she "revised" her age – Halimatou would exceed the official age limit by that time.

Halimatou's case is just one example of the impact that the civil registry system can have on individual lives. In Senegal, civil registry documents include a birth certificate, which is required not only for entrance into secondary school, but also to secure a job in the formal business sector or obtain a national identity card. A national identity card is required to open a bank account, to apply for a passport, and to vote. Surviving family members also require death certificates to receive an inheritance or scholarship. Likewise, the government has a critical need for the data that results from an accurate civil registry for purposes of planning, development, international aid and national security. A functioning civil registry system that provides reliable population statistics, and ensures that citizens obtain essential documents in an orderly and timely manner, is a critical component of a democratic society.

While Senegal does possess a civil registry system, it is widely regarded as broken. Blame lies on both sides of the supply and demand equation. On the “demand” side, many Senegalese citizens do not register for key civil records as a matter of course, but wait until something – the secondary school exam or impending elections – compels them to do so at the last minute. This is due in part to a widespread lack of popular awareness about the relevance of the civil registry, particularly in rural areas where only 46% of children aged 0 to 6 years have valid birth certificates. However, the problem is also linked to deficits on the “supply” side – namely, a poorly organized national system.

Senegal’s civil registry system is plagued by complex procedures, an inadequate number of centers, and poor service delivery. For rural citizens, reaching a principal civil registry center might involve a lengthy journey via public transport at a prohibitively high expense. Once there, it is not uncommon to find the center closed or unable to fulfill requests due to inadequate staff, or to discover that old records are no longer intact or legible, due to careless archiving. Although there are secondary civil registry centers at the collectivity level, even these can be far from rural villages, and they only keep their records for one year before transferring them to a principal processing center. Furthermore, since collectivity leaders receive little information on how to manage the civil registry, these secondary centers frequently lack the processes and materials – official registers, forms, stamps and seals – necessary to issue valid certificates. Fees for their services also tend to be inconsistent, and such proceeds are not always used to replenish stocks of materials, as intended. While it is true that until recently, few citizens in Halimatou’s village thought to apply for a birth certificate upon a new child’s arrival, their negligence becomes understandable in light of the system’s condition.

Initiative

USAID’s decentralization and local governance program (DGL Felo) is working in partnership with rural collectivities, the National Association of Rural Councils, the Minister of Local Collectivities and the Ministry of Justice, to help improve Senegal’s civil registry system. DGL Felo’s efforts to date have proceeded along two tracks: working at the local level to increase awareness about the registry’s importance and improve management procedures under the current system, and bringing the actors from every level together to improve the civil registry system on a national scale.

DGL Felo began its efforts in the national arena by conducting a grassroots analysis of the system. The analysis brought local citizens and elected leaders together in 37 separate collectivities to identify the system’s weaknesses from their vantage points and propose practical solutions. DGL Felo synthesized their feedback and then invited representatives from each collectivity to eight regional meetings to continue the dialogue. In May 2003, drawing on the conclusions reached in these meetings, DGL Felo produced a documentary on the status of Senegal’s civil registry, which was aired on national television. The film brought to light major deficiencies in the system, illustrated by powerful, candid testimony of citizens with cases similar to Halimatou’s, and was viewed by an estimated 275,000 people – from common citizens in rural areas, to top government officials in Dakar. The film shocked the general public and engendered a flurry of national newspaper articles demanding reform. The government was receptive.

In June 2003, DGL Felo hosted a national level workshop on improving the civil registry. Boubacar Baldé, a community organization leader from Halimatou’s village, attended the workshop and described it thus: “The national workshop included actors from every level of the system and around the country – there were citizens, local elected officials, regional magistrates, members of the national administration, and even the ministers. We all came together around one table to discuss the issues democratically. Everyone recognized how crucial the problem is and that it is not limited to one single level of the system.” It was a landmark meeting; for the first time, actors from each level of the civil registry system were able to meet, listen to one another’s difficulties, and begin to hammer out realistic strategies for their amelioration. Simple though it may seem, civil registry actors at the local and regional levels had in most cases never even met one another, let alone interacted with the national-level officials who could mandate real change.

Results

DGL Felo's efforts have helped catalyze a national campaign to overhaul the civil registry system. Since the national workshop, the president of Senegal has elevated the issue of the civil registry to the level of the prime minister, where preparations for change were said to be underway as of late 2003. In reaction to specific examples raised in the televised film and discussed at the national workshop, the government also took immediate steps in 2003 to address short-term problems.

One such measure changed Halimatou Baldé's future. As Boubacar Baldé explained, "Right after the national workshop all of the collectivities received a letter from the ministry stating that they would make an exception this year and permit students without birth certificates to take the secondary school exam. Special efforts were then made to process those students' certificates right away if they succeeded." Halimatou took and passed the secondary school examination the week after the national workshop. She received her birth certificate a month later and will begin secondary school in a nearby town in the coming term. "I am happy that I will be able to go to school this year," said Halimatou, "I hope to become a teacher." Thousands of children in her position in previous years were not so lucky.

Meanwhile, many local collectivities are busily registering their citizens' new flood of declarations. Armed with a clearer understanding of the relevant laws and processes, and sensitized to the problems that not declaring can create in the future, local leaders are seeing to it that those aspects of the civil registry system that they control are handled as efficiently and transparently as feasible. In several of the collectivities that received technical assistance from DGL Felo, the number of civil registry declarations has substantially increased between 2002 and 2003.

Pullout Quote

"USAID opened the eyes of local and national officials across Senegal and made us conscious of the weaknesses in the social management of our country. The issues raised at the national workshop on the civil registry came as a revelation to the administration, and I have confidence that the momentum that has been created will lead to effective reforms."

– Ahmed Saloum Boye, Vice President of the National Association of Rural Councils





*Décentralisation, Gouvernance
Locale, Progrès*

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