



**Senegal: the road
to opportunity**

When the seasonal rains came to some regions of south-eastern Senegal, the flooding used to cut off the inhabitants from the rest of the country. But that has changed with the IFAD-supported project known as PADAER – *Projet d'Appui au Développement Agricole et à l'Entreprenariat Rural*. Thanks to the projects' work on rebuilding roads, rural people have new possibilities to make a living, they can access health services and education, and bring their products to markets.

A new lifeline; a new way of life

For poor rural people, lack of infrastructure often translates into lack of options and alternatives. The project is changing that.

“Before, we remained cut off during the rainy season. We couldn't get to the market or to the health centre,” said Ouri Baldé, the Village Head of Afia. “Today, we no longer have these problems.”

The project has also helped construct a dam, which provides residents with water to grow enough rice and corn so that they no longer have to buy these staple foods. There are other benefits as well, according to Ouri Baldé. “The water from the dam also allows us to farm fish, so we don't have to go hunting anymore in the National Park. In this way, we help protect the environment. All of this is thanks to PADAER.”

The road and dam have led to a number of other changes, both economic and social. It is now much easier for farmers to access their plots and for children to get to school by using the new road. What's more, the dam has allowed water points to be built to water cattle, sheep and goats – a huge time saver, given that previously villagers had to walk for miles. The new infrastructure is transforming the communities in the project area and the way people see their livelihoods and their future.





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Māimouna Barry,
El Hadj Ba’s wife





The choice to stay

Often, the absence of economic opportunities and social and financial services in rural areas drives rural people, especially the young, to migrate to urban centres in search of work. This robs rural areas of their most important asset – dynamic people – thus weakening the social fabric of rural communities.

Before PADAER, El Hadj Ba had been convinced that leaving the village was the only option to provide a living for his family. Despite working as a builder and spending the winters growing crops on his plot, the 43-year-old had still found it impossible to make ends meet. So, he had decided to leave his village and take up mining at Kédougou, 40 kilometres away. The work was hard and dangerous.

Then, one day he heard about the PADAER-financed dam that was being constructed in his hometown. The construction company was looking to hire workers. El Hadj saw an opportunity and quit his mining job. The gamble paid off. With the extra income, he invested in a mule-drawn plough, a cow and seven goats.

Despite the poor harvest this year, El Hadj was still able to produce enough peanuts, which, with the income from his livestock, allowed him to feed his family. Furthermore, the income from the sale of his peanuts is now guaranteed since the new road allows the wholesalers' trucks to come directly to the village to purchase. When the harvest is good, he calculates he will be able to afford the school fees for all four of his children.

“I’m happy he’s returned,” his wife professed. “He’s earning more and our situation has improved. We can now raise our four children together.”

Young entrepreneurs

Creating new opportunities in rural areas, particularly for women and young people, is a key objective for IFAD. In another IFAD-supported project known as PAFA – *Projet d'Appui aux Filières Agricoles* – in the central and northern regions of the country, the opportunity of turning farming into a thriving business is one that young people have embraced.

Seydou Ba is a member of a young producers' organization, which was supported by the project. The cooperative brings together 1,200 young farmers.

“We started working with PAFA in 2011,” he said. “Thanks to the new agricultural methods which we learned through the project, our production has doubled and even tripled in some fields. The prices [we secured] at the beginning were around 200 CFA francs/kg. Today, they're around 400-800 CFA francs/kg. Today, we have national and international partners with whom we work. Thanks to support from PAFA, you [IFAD] have saved the lives of 1,200 young people.”



A young man with short dark hair, wearing a dark jacket over a blue shirt and a blue lanyard, is speaking into a silver microphone. He is looking down and to the left. In the background, another man in a suit is partially visible. A silver teapot is in the foreground on the right. The background is a light-colored wall with horizontal blinds.

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Massigna Sène



The project is creating a new generation of entrepreneurs, some from more unlikely backgrounds. Massigna Sène, a married 32-year-old with an MPhil in banking, found it hard to find work in Dakar. So, he decided to return to his village, in the Niakhar district, to start farming.

“It wasn’t an easy decision to make for someone who’s studied what I have,” he explained. “Before PAFA, we had to buy the millet we consumed. Today, this is a thing of the past! With...[the extra income I earned], I bought a cow and I’m going to branch out into livestock production. My big hope is to be able to save enough money to set up my own agrobusiness and live here in the village because I can see the benefits of returning.”

Women with an eye for business

In both project zones, people now have enough to eat and are able to sell their surplus produce to generate cash income, which they choose either to reinvest in agriculture or to create new goods and services. This is providing the catalyst for change, especially for women.

Mama Awa Ndiaye, President of the Women's Association Takku Liggey, in Taïba Niaguène, described the difference PAFA has made: "Life for the women who belong to our association has changed tremendously... Today, each one of us is well fed and our pockets are full. We are very grateful to PAFA and IFAD."

With new resources, the women have also been able to reinvest some of what they earned to diversify their income. They constructed two ponds for fish farming, each powered by electricity generated by solar panels. The ponds also allow them to water their crops without the physical drudgery of having to walk miles to fetch the water.





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RESTAURANT

Ndèye Marième

Senegalais et Européens
transformés
conserves d'

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“Today, in my restaurant, I offer Senegalese and European dishes made of locally-grown products and earn a good living”

Ndèye Marième Cissé's,
Restaurant owner in
Sinthiou Malème





While most Senegalese prefer imported foods, the recent development in eating what you grow has fostered a taste for local cuisine, which is one that women in the project have taken advantage of. It has become the inspiration for new businesses. As traditional foods are often cheaper and more nutritious, one group of women from the central region of Kaffrine, decided to combine local cereals to create baby porridge which they sell locally and in Dakar.

In the village of Sinthiou Malème, local ingredients are also the secret to success in Ndèye Marième Cissé's restaurant business: "I received training and support in restaurant management and fruit processing through PROMER II [a previous IFAD-funded project]. Today, in my restaurant, I offer Senegalese and European dishes made of locally-grown products and earn a good living."

Investing in the future

Through PADAER and PAFA, people have come to realize the wealth of opportunities to be seized in rural areas.

Some, such as Mame Birame Sène, President of the Culture and Sports Association for the Niakhar district, have plans for the future: “Through the Culture and Sports Association, the project trained young women to make cakes and other pastries using millet flour. They, in turn, will train others. In the future, we’re thinking of constructing a bakery next door to our storage centre as well as an inn, which will provide the young people with employment. They’ll no longer have to go looking for work in the towns or mines...”





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Mame Birame Sène,
President of the Culture
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El-Hadji Thiam



El-Hadji Thiam, a 52-year-old welder from Sinthiou Malème, thinks likewise: “I hope to be able to set up my own large workshop, in partnership with [my friend] Ndongo Thiam, where we will train young people from the village. That way, they can make a better living for themselves.”

El-Hadji has already invested in his own children’s education. With the start-up grant kit and technical training he received through the projects, he has increased his income six-fold. He has been able to send his eldest son to university in Dakar. And, there are further opportunities on the horizon. “...[My son] received a partial scholarship to study in Germany,” he said proudly. “I bought him the plane ticket to get there and money to get started before he receives the scholarship. This is all thanks to both projects.”

It is clear that for the villagers in the project zones, the future lies with their youth. A thriving rural economy that offers opportunities – both economic and social – goes a long way in encouraging people to remain in rural areas. In this way, the IFAD-supported projects that financed the road, dams, entrepreneurial training and improved access to agricultural inputs and services, and markets have indeed contributed to providing a pathway to sustainable development and opportunity.

IFAD invests in rural people, empowering them to reduce poverty, increase food security, improve nutrition and strengthen resilience. Since 1978, we have provided US\$17 billion in grants and low-interest loans to projects that have reached about 453 million people. IFAD is an international financial institution and a specialized United Nations agency based in Rome – the UN's food and agriculture hub.







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