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**SENEGAL**

# SUCCESS STORY

## Scholarship Funds Girls' Aspirations

**Program shows women can succeed when given resources and mentors**



Photo: USAID/Senegal/Richard Nyberg

Oumou Ndiaye, a Senegalese scholarship recipient who has benefited greatly from USAID training and support, aspires to serve her nation as an attorney.

***“The program has done a lot for us. I have been able to improve my grades considerably, and I believe it is because of this scholarship,” said recipient Oumou Ndiaye.***

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Clutching her mobile phone, Oumou Ndiaye speaks with resolve. With technology and some assistance from USAID, she has reached far beyond her remote village of Koundel on Senegal’s eastern frontier. Clearly, she is poised to take on the world.

“I would like to study law in France, and then return to serve my nation,” said Oumou. Some would say it is amazing she has made it this far, when so many young women her age would have already been married. But after being chosen as a girls’ scholar in a program financed jointly by USAID and Sonatel, Senegal’s telephone company, Oumou, who is in her last year of high school, has become a role model in her school and family.

Her father, a retired automobile plant worker, is now ready to keep his other daughters in school. For generations, girls’ education was shunned or neglected in many part of rural Senegal. With interventions by local women’s associations, USAID, and other development partners, this is starting to change.

Through the USAID-Sonatel scholarship program, 300 girls receive leadership training, information on reproductive health, and about \$200 each year to help cover school fees, transport, school supplies, books, remedial tutoring, and personal expenses.

“The program has done a lot for us,” said Oumou. “I have been able to improve my grades considerably, and I believe it is because of this scholarship,” she said. Woman mentors, she added, “often take the place of our mothers who sometimes do not have the courage to discuss certain taboo subjects” such as early marriage, sexual relations, teenage pregnancy, and the menstrual cycle.

Education officials encourage the scholars to assume leadership roles to benefit their communities and their nation. “The impact of the program is visible,” said Alioune Sylla Seck, the education inspector of Fatick. “We have seen that the girls, put in a certain situation and assisted, are capable of performing as well if not better than the boys. We hope that this program will grow.”