



SUCCESS STORY

Tackling Pneumonia, Village by Village

Cadre of trained, local health workers may save thousands of lives



Photo: USAID/Senegal/ Richard Nyberg

A pilot community health activity funded by USAID, Pfizer, UNICEF, and World Health Organization could save the lives of 2,500 children each year in Senegal, where over 12 percent of children die before their fifth birthday (with 20 percent of these

deaths due to pneumonia and related conditions). As most cases of pneumonia are found in villages with no doctors or nurses, the challenge has been to bring immediate care to people, so that they do not need to travel long distances to get the medicine they need to survive.

During a study conducted in the districts of Kédougou, Khombole, Thiadiaye, and Vélingara, medical experts trained community health workers to properly diagnose and treat children under age five who suffer from pneumonia and other acute respiratory diseases. Senegal was the first African country where community health workers were trained to prescribe antibiotics to treat these illnesses.

Ngor Dione (right), a community health worker in the village of Koulouk Mbada in Senegal's Thiadiaye district, discusses new treatment of pneumonia and other acute respiratory infections. Villagers can now receive prescriptions for antibiotics from trained community health workers without having to travel long distances.

The study found that a well trained, supervised, and adequately equipped community health worker at a health hut could correctly diagnose and treat young patients, which virtually all of study participants did.

The findings were so promising that health representatives from several West African countries attended a conference in Senegal's capital, Dakar, to learn more about this community approach to health care. At the event, USAID, Pfizer, UNICEF and WHO launched a partnership to fund the expansion of the training and treatment activity throughout Senegal.

Through this program, eighteen districts in Senegal already have community health workers trained in diagnosing and treating pneumonia at the health hut level, close to patients' homes. New training materials will soon be ready so that USAID and its partners can assist the government in rolling out this life-saving approach nationwide.

“Involving the community in taking charge of its own health is a policy that works,” said Moussa Mbaye, general secretary of Senegal’s Ministry of Health.