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**SENEGAL**

# SUCCESS STORY

## Preventing HIV Among At-Risk Men

### Outreach worker faces incredible social stigma to advocate for health



Photo: USAID/Senegal/ Richard Nyberg

Saadou Ba (right) discusses HIV/AIDS information tools with a representative of a USAID implanting partner.

***“I couldn’t dream of a better program. At last someone cares about our health,” said Saadou Ba, who does STI/ HIV prevention outreach among the MSM community in Senegal.***

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Saadou Ba. Strong. Healthy. Outspoken. And exceedingly brave. A leader among Senegal’s MSM (or “men who have sex with men”) community, Saadou has accepted his homosexuality and bears weighty social consequences within this traditional Muslim society.

Since 1994, Saadou (a pseudonym) has played a critical role in encouraging other MSM to have regular medical check-ups. Senegal has been one of the first countries in Africa to introduce HIV prevention and care activities targeting this high-risk group, which has an estimated HIV prevalence rate of more than 20% (in contrast with less than 1% among the general population). In 2002, USAID took on the challenge of extending prevention and care activities to reach as many MSM as possible. With USAID, Saadou went into other large cities in Senegal to identify one or two local physicians willing and able to treat the local MSM population.

“I couldn’t dream of a better program,” said Saadou. “At last someone cares about our health.”

Implemented by a USAID partner organization and the Ministry of Health, this program provides HIV prevention and care for MSM in six regions. In each region, several doctors have been trained to recognize and treat STI symptoms. The MSM community trusts these doctors to protect their identity while providing them with needed treatment.

Saadou is now a leading member of the “MSM facilitator group”, which has taken over from the Ministry of Health the role of conducting evening focus groups in confidential locations to encourage MSM to access both HIV prevention and care services. Saadou’s message, “Be confident, get yourself tested for STI and HIV to protect your health”, has been well received by his peers. His greatest achievement has been to reduce the number of MSM who, out of fear, try to care for themselves rather than seek medical treatment from a trained doctor.

“My friends are getting tested for STIs and HIV, and we are all more willing to use condoms now that we know how to protect our own health,” he said.