



USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

GUINEA

SUCCESS STORY

Loans and Literacy Boost Food Security

Literacy classes and agricultural support improve a community's standard of living



Photo: USAID/Laura Lartigue

A woman in Siguiri takes a basic literacy class, one of the prerequisites to receiving a small loan.

"I can now ensure that my children go to school, and I can better support my husband by buying food and stocking it to get us through the difficult rainy season," says Nyamba Konate.

For four months of each year, the local granaries in the Siguiri region of northeastern Guinea are empty and its residents malnourished. Poor farmers often direly need a financial boost just before the planting season so that they can maximize field productivity. But while regular seeds cost about \$1 a kilogram, improved varieties can cost more than three times that.

USAID is working to improve the lives of Siguiri's residents by giving small loans to farmers so they can buy improved seeds and tools, which allow much higher yields and, in the end, better food security for the community. In 2004, USAID helped 6,922 households buy improved seeds, oxen and farm equipment, and showed 4,237 women how to begin gardening and trading their produce to enhance their families' incomes and nutrition.

In addition to small loans and agricultural training, each beneficiary takes courses in money management and reading. Few rural residents of the Siguiri region can read or write, and improving this is indispensable for increasing their standard of living. Basic literacy improves peoples' ability to manage household finances and participate in democratic, village-based organizations — which, in turn, improve farmers' ability to market their produce and procure equipment that will increase their income.

Illiteracy in participating households has fallen from 92 percent to 62 percent, and farm productivity has increased 17.6 percent for rice (from 2.04 to 2.4 tons per hectare), and 66.4 percent for corn (from 1.61 to 2.68 tons per hectare). The return rate for the farmers' small loans is an impressive 90 percent. But more important is the increase in nutrition and food availability. The percentage of households reporting seasonal food shortages has fallen from 56 percent to 46 percent, and the average number of food shortage months has also decreased from 5.5 to 2.2 in the past four years.