



SUCCESS STORY

Banking on Seed Fairs Amid Drought

Event, media outreach teach farmers the need to save and store seeds



Photo: CRS

Senegalese farmer Mbaye Bâ buys peanut seed to improve his chances for higher crop yields.

“We had nothing harvested, so we could not create personal seed reserves. I think the seed fairs will be quite welcome in this area,” said Mbaye Bâ, a farmer in Senegal.

Telling Our Story
U.S. Agency for International Development
Washington, DC 20523-1000
<http://stories.usaid.gov>

Every Friday morning, Mbaye Bâ heads to Gawane’s daily market from his village of Mbadje. Dressed in a sky-blue “boubou” (the traditional robe) and greeting friends, Mbaye has a goal today: sell his extra wheat, so he can buy foods such as hot pepper, seasonings, and vegetables.

He has come to this market since he was a boy to sell his surplus grains and peanuts. But things have changed. For the last several years, because of poor rainfall and reoccurring drought, Mbaye has only been able to manage three hectares (7.4 acres) each of peanuts and cowpeas, and four hectares (9.8 acres) of wheat (compared to 10 hectares (24.7 acres) of peanuts and five hectares (12.3 acres) each of wheat and cowpeas in a good year). Moreover, the 2004 locust invasion severely reduced his stock of seed varieties.

In need of help, Mbaye enrolled in a USAID-sponsored assistance program to receive seed coupons and to participate in a seed fair in rural Gawane. The day of the seed fair, Mbaye picked up peanut and cowpea seeds and an assortment of other seeds, bolstering his stock and giving his crops a better chance of survival in hot, arid conditions.

Through a USAID-sponsored media campaign before the seed fair, Mbaye learned about the importance of seeds and their role in agriculture, the methods of seed selection and storage, and the necessity of personal seed reserves. After the harvest, Mbaye, who intently followed the media campaign, had a plan: He wanted to assemble seed banks. He ran the idea by fellow villagers, explaining that seed banks are a way for communities to keep seed reserves and for all farmers to select the best peanut, wheat and cowpea seeds for the next planting season. Most of the villagers welcomed the idea with enthusiasm and took part in the seed bank system.

This new innovative step allowed the farmers of Bathe, comprised of some 60 heads of households, to satisfy their seed needs. It also provided peace of mind as they waited for the first rains of the season, because they knew they could at least control the seed reserves if not the weather.