PHOTO & CAPTION
Computers Improve Commerce

Photo: USAID/Richard Nyberg

Facoumba Gueye, left, explains how information technology can help clothing merchant Omar Fall increase efficiency and profits.

Facoumba Guèye works her way through the colorful, crowded streets surrounding Dakar's bustling Sandaga Market. Dodging into shops, she waves to merchants who have seen her often as she drums up support for technology and the Internet. As a volunteer with the USAID-sponsored Digital Freedom Initiative, her task is to show shop owners how computers and the Internet can increase efficiency and sales.

She encourages merchants to drop by Cyber Louma, a USAID-supported Internet café just around the corner that trains entrepreneurs in everything from spreadsheets to sourcing new markets or suppliers online. It is becoming a popular place to do business.

For Abdoul Aziz Fall, a construction materials wholesaler, access to the Internet has helped improve his business prospects. His latest quest at Cyber Louma was to find cheaper fans. "Cyber Louma was my first contact with a computer. The local volunteer helped me to open an email account and find information on the Internet."

Mamadou Guèye, a tile trader who imports from Italy, also learned about computers at Cyber Louma. He is convinced they can save time and improve efficiency. "I'm now planning to arrange a space in the shop to build an office and buy a computer to better manage my business," he said.

The initiative's reach extends far beyond this market street. In 2005, USAID helped over 70 people find jobs and trained employees from 360 enterprises. With a team of 92 volunteers from Senegal, the Peace Corps, and other international organizations, the initiative has also trained 302 entrepreneurs nationwide to better manage their businesses.

Through the Digital Freedom Initiative, USAID works together with leading U.S. companies to promote economic growth for entrepreneurs and small businesses in developing countries through information and communications technologies.