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**SENEGAL**

## FIRST PERSON

# Helping the Handicapped Reintegrate

### Small loans help landmine victims earn a living



Photo: USAID/Richard Nyberg

Elisabeth Nassalan and her son, Jonas, rest outside their home in Casamance.

***“Now, even though I am alone, I am able to earn money and care for my children. The assistance I have received has helped me greatly in making a fresh start.”***

Elisabeth Nassalan had a normal life in Senegal's southern Casamance region near the village of Djifanghor. A wife and mother of six, Elisabeth tended to gardens that produced enough tomatoes, peanuts and okra to sell at local markets and support her family.

But while harvesting mangoes in September 2001, she stepped on a landmine and lost both legs.

An armed struggle for independence of Casamance stretches back two decades, and although peace seems to be on the horizon, thousands of landmines remain under the soil. More than 650 people have stepped into tragedy; 147 lost their lives, including 23 children.

“It took me a month before I realized I was at the hospital,” Elisabeth said. She spent three months recuperating in the hospital in Ziguinchor. On returning home, her husband abandoned her.

But now Elisabeth has hope for a brighter future. With support from USAID, she opened a small shop in her house, selling soap, oil, coffee and matches to local villagers. USAID has assisted 140 handicapped people in Casamance since 1999. The program focuses on helping them reintegrate into society after months in hospital, providing prosthetics, transportation, educational support, vocational training and start-up funds for alternative forms of income, such as Elisabeth's home kiosk. USAID is also supporting an extensive landmine awareness campaign in the area that has reached more than 400,000 people.

“At the beginning it was terribly difficult, as I had the children and didn't think I could provide them a decent education and success in life,” Elisabeth said. “But now, even though I am alone, I am able to earn money and care for my children. The assistance I have received has helped me greatly in making a fresh start.”