



PHOTO & CAPTION

Village Banks Make a Little Go a Long Way



Photo: USAID/Richard Nyberg

Sitting outside in a large circle, the women of Djiguinoune quietly await their turn. There is no haggling or hustling here. These enterprising villagers have learned that patience and planning pay off. Under the shade of a large tree, the village bank in this remote, dusty settlement in Senegal's southern Casamance region is open for business.

One by one, each woman turns over her precious account booklet and cash saved up over the past month. A loan specialist records each new entry and applies the woman's fingerprint next to it in blue ink. When all 50 customers are done, the bank issues new loans from a red plastic

bowl. Based on need and repayment history, women can borrow \$50, \$100, \$200, or even more.

Astou Tamba, a mother of six has been a member since 2001. "Before, I didn't save," she said. "Now I have real savings." She used loans to expand her small garden where she grows eggplant, tomatoes, and okra for market. "I'm saving for hard times," she said, as well as her children's education. Tamba is one of more than 4,700 people in the Casamance to benefit from small loans like this. Others have used their loans to make soap or dyed fabric, open a pottery business, or run small shops.

Fatou Diatta developed a robust business with a small loan. She started by selling firewood, but now imports stylish cloth from Mali popular among women in Senegal. She has earned enough to build a new house. Having saved \$4,600, she was also able to send her son to school and travel to Mali to restock her shop.

Over 33,000 loans totaling about \$663,000 have been made in Senegal, generating over \$4.4 million in profits. With USAID support, those red plastic bowls continue to improve lives and livelihoods in rural Senegal.

At a village bank in Djiguinoune, women line up with account booklets and monthly savings that help secure fresh loans to fuel their small businesses.