



An Executive Summary of

IN THE WAKE OF CONFLICT

An integrated approach to funding peace
and vibrant rural communities

Senegal 2004-2014



To read the full report:

http://www.newfieldfound.org/pdfs/In_the_Wake_of_Conflict_Eng.pdf

Summary

RESPONSIVE FUNDING

This publication traces the evolution of New Field Foundation's efforts to support peace and vibrant rural communities in southern Senegal as it emerged from twenty years of conflict. Between 2004 and 2014, New Field's grantmaking program evolved organically to support the emergence of rural women's organizations as drivers of development. Making grants in a post-conflict environment to women's organizations that have historically been passed over by other development efforts was challenging. It required creativity, flexibility and a multi-dimensional approach that included:

- Creating a local presence by appointing program consultants and advisors with firsthand knowledge of Casamance and its realities;
- Forming strong partnerships, developed over a number of years, with local organizations serving rural communities;
- Establishing a grantmaking infrastructure that delivered grants and technical support directly to rural women's groups;
- Investing in training for rural women leaders to build their knowledge and skills in financial management, women's rights advocacy, and governance;
- Strengthening community farming systems to increase food production while protecting the earth and maintaining crop biodiversity;
- Supporting community ownership of local media;
- Enabling rural women to participate in forums affecting policy and resource allocation at local, national and international levels;
- Scaling out successful initiatives through replication and learning exchanges.

It is New Field's hope that this publication will help other funders effect transformational change by investing in rural women's community organizations. When done well, the impact of such funding is significant, tangible, and inspiring.

RESULTS

Over a ten-year period, New Field provided \$5,130,184 to benefit rural women and their communities in the region of Casamance. Its integrated and evolving approach has yielded widespread and long-lasting results.

When New Field began its grantmaking in the region, it was clear that women wanted peace and stability first. Projects to expand community radio and involve women in the peacebuilding process contributed meaningfully towards these goals.

As women who had been displaced by the conflict returned to their villages, they came together to revive their community organizations and rebuild what had been lost. They needed financial and technical support to restart agricultural production, establish food systems, and create economic opportunities for members who had lost everything. Grants for agricultural and labor saving equipment were a meaningful step for dozens of women's community organizations. When they began to benefit from information and training on income-generating activities, their income and status rose within their communities. Assets in the hands of group members translated to improved access to education and health for their families.

In subsequent agricultural seasons, rural women's groups wished to expand their knowledge of agricultural techniques that would preserve their land, expand crop diversity, and improve the value of their livestock. With community grants and technical support, they installed wells, irrigation systems, fencing, and animal housing. They controlled these assets and continued to manage them for the benefit of group members and their families.

Rural women's community organizations emerged as powerful agents of change in their villages, earning the respect of both traditional and local government leaders. Many charismatic women came forward to provide leadership for their groups as well as to take part in decision-making about local resources and development initiatives. Some were elected to rural district councils while others became members of committees advising on internationally funded development projects. New Field also supported the participation of women leaders in many regional and international forums so they could contribute their valuable expertise.

Additionally, New Field has responded to requests from its Casamance local partners for financial services, health education, improved awareness of women's rights, and organizational development. Drawing on the specialist knowledge of national and international NGOs, investment in these areas has enabled local partners to develop their institutions and improve the quality of life in their communities.

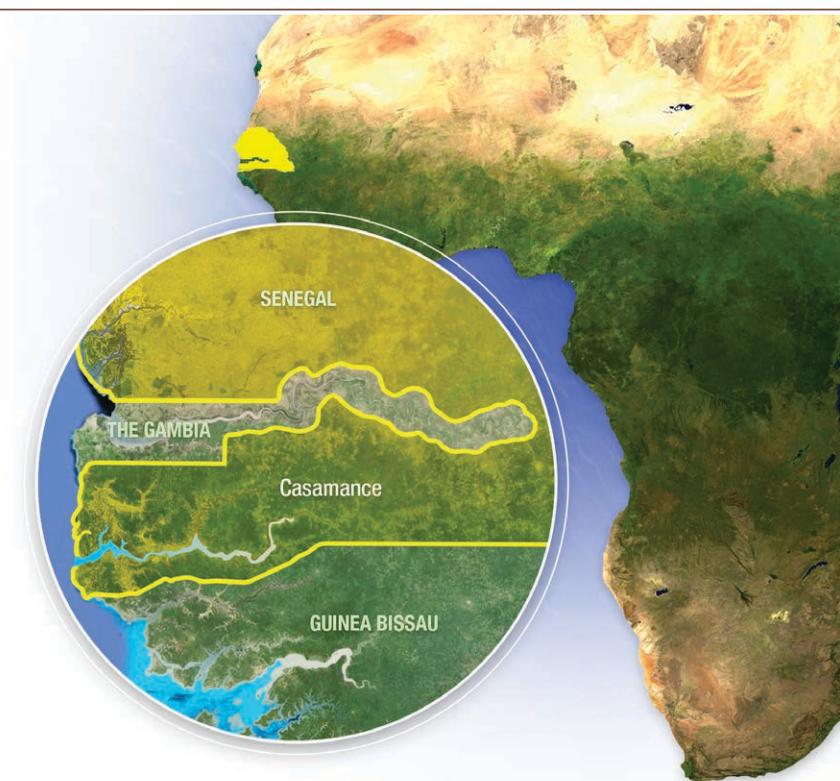
Strategic Focus

EARLY DECISIONS

In 2004, New Field Foundation made the strategic decision to focus its funding on women and children in Africa. Data showed women and girls faced disadvantages in many spheres, including education, health, rights, access to resources and livelihoods. Research also showed that women played a vital role in the production and processing of food in Africa, were organizing to improve their status and resources, and were interested in systemic change at a variety of levels, from household decision making to national policy. Guided by its values and the intention to fund where there was "greatest need, least funding and most potential," New Field chose to concentrate on West Africa, in places that were emerging from conflict, including Casamance in southern Senegal.

THE LONG ROAD

Within this context, New Field decided to fund organizations in Casamance for at least eight years, on the basis that transformative and long-lasting change in conflict-afflicted areas takes time. Strategically, New Field decided to direct its funding to reach rural women and their organizations for the reason that, when rural women have the opportunity to manage and increase their resources collectively, they consistently use those assets to benefit the health and well-being of their members, families and communities. Since more than 1,000,000 women live in Casamance, predominantly in rural areas, New Field developed an integrated approach to help build peace, strengthen local food systems, increase economic stability, and advance community rights.





Grants to Rural Women's Groups

RELYING ON LOCAL ORGANIZATIONS

Just as there were thousands of rural women's groups already in Casamance, so there were many larger and more established NGOs with a mission to support rural development. While these organizations were more structured, with staff, financial and administrative systems and legal recognition, many were limited to providing technical support to rural women's groups and faced many constraints in the post-conflict environment. New Field's community grantmaking program identified and supported some of the most promising of these NGOs not only to continue their valuable technical support but also to make community grants to the rural women's groups that they served. With New Field's support, NGOs had more resources for their work, while rural women's groups gained a higher degree of agency in identifying and addressing their own priorities.

COMMUNITY GRANTS

New Field's Senegal-based program consultant and advisors identified six NGOs in Casamance that had well-established relationships with rural women's groups, along with the capacity to receive and manage larger grants. From 2006-2014, New Field invested \$2,414,965 in AJAC-Lukaal, AJAEDO, CASADES, DIRFEL-Kolda, FODDE and USOFORAL. In turn, they awarded \$1,630,473 to 135 rural women's groups that successfully presented proposals and budgets for activities their members identified as important. The application process for a community grant was often completed orally, with the help of NGO technical staff, and the strongest proposals were funded. The average size of a grant to a rural women's group was \$5,000 for 12 months. The recipient groups had an average membership of 76 rural women, with some as small as 15 and others as large as 550. Many groups received funding over two or three years. In all, the six NGOs awarded 330 community grants.

FOOD FOR THE FAMILY

Food insecurity was a major issue in Casamance during the conflict. As a result, rural women's groups receiving community grants placed a priority on improving and increasing the production of a variety of foods to be eaten by their own families and communities. They purchased farming tools and materials, put in fencing to protect cultivated areas, introduced irrigation, and increased crop diversity. Under new land laws, several groups secured official land titles, ensuring long-term food production.

CHANGES IN RURAL WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP

Another positive trend for rural women was their emerging leadership. In a Casamance case study of 35 women's groups receiving grants, rural women's responses pointed to important changes in leadership in a number of spheres as a direct result of the impetus created by community grants. Most notably, women leaders acquired new skills in managing their organizations effectively, had greater confidence in speaking publicly, and gained more influence in the community. Of the 379 rural women interviewed, 65 had been elected to district councils with influence over local government budgets and a range of community issues. Many others had been appointed to committees advising on internationally funded development projects relating to health, financial services, environmental and natural resource management, and peace building.

Local Food Systems & Agroecology

FARMING CHOICES

As New Field became better informed about issues of food and agriculture for rural women in West Africa, and as rural women and their organizations became clearer and more confident about their priorities for farming and food production in the wake of conflict, an important question emerged. What *type* of farming and food systems did rural women want?

ECOLOGICAL PRACTICES

In Casamance, women had a long tradition of growing many different varieties of rice from their own seeds. They also grew cereals and vegetables, gathered fruits from the forests, and harvested oysters from the mangrove swamps, all of which contributed to a nutritious and diverse diet that was ecologically viable. However, this tradition was threatened. Many rural farmers had lost their rice seeds during the conflict. They faced increasing pressure from private enterprise and government authorities to use modified seeds and chemical inputs to increase production. While this was tempting, many rural women's groups were more interested in rebuilding their own food systems using ecological practices.

SEED AUTONOMY

Responding to rural women's interest in local seeds, New Field Foundation reached out to the Association Sénégalaise de Producteurs de Semences Paysannes (ASPSP). Founded in 2003, with its main office in Mbour, Senegal, ASPSP's membership is made up of 15 farmer organizations with some 63,000 members. Its purpose is to contribute to seed autonomy by safeguarding local traditional varieties. Its hypothesis is that technologically improved seeds are not better and do not necessarily produce bigger yields over the long-term. Patented genetically modified seeds also lock smallholder farmers in a perennial cycle of purchasing commercial seed and chemical fertilizers. ASPSP's activities include collecting local seed varieties, creating seed production gardens, training women to create traditional seed banks, and holding annual and bi-annual seed fairs during which farmers from the region exchange and share seeds.

TRAINING IN AGROECOLOGY

From 2009-2014, New Field funded ASPSP for a total of \$152,718 to provide technical assistance to rural women's groups that wanted to integrate agroecology and seed-saving practices in Casamance.

PEASANT FARMER PRIORITIES

ASPSP's work was part of a larger movement in which national and regional peasant farmer networks were calling for greater recognition and increased resources from policy makers and funders. As the main food producers in West Africa, smallholder farmers and their organizations have the means to feed the majority of the region's population in a healthy and sustainable way. They do so in spite of climate change, large scale commercial agriculture with chemical inputs, land acquisition, and the privatization of seeds. ASPSP filled a critical need in promoting agroecological practices, and has great potential to expand its work and develop its trainings to reach more farmers and their organizations. Along with the Casamance community grantmakers, ASPSP engaged in national and regional fora to communicate the message that agroecology and local food systems provide long-term solutions for stability and well-being.

Rural Women's Rights

REACHING RURAL WOMEN

Changes in law at national level were slow to reach rural women in Casamance, especially those in remote areas whose lives were predominantly bound by customary and religious laws. Rural women had limited information about new laws and how to exercise their rights; they lacked the resources to take action or to have access to legal advice if their rights were violated. One of several organizations addressing these limita-

tions for rural women in other parts of Senegal was Réseau Africain pour le Développement Intégré (RADI). Created in 1985 to fight poverty, injustice and ignorance, RADI provided rights education among rural communities using a participatory approach so that communities could address their situation and build long-term independence. New Field invited RADI to extend its work to rural Casamance, with a focus on women's rights. From 2008-2014, RADI received seven grants totaling \$325,104 for this work.

RAISING AWARENESS OF RIGHTS

RADI introduced several approaches for advancing rural women's rights in Casamance. Its team carried out a major campaign using plays, community radio programs, and large meetings to inform communities in Casamance of their rights. More than 25,000 rural men and women learned about women's human rights, social and economic rights, land rights, family law, citizenship and democracy. RADI also trained 42 rural women as paralegals to improve rural women's civic engagement in Casamance. The paralegals provided information and advice to groups and individuals on a range of issues, including their rights to land, property, divorce, and child custody. Where necessary, they referred people to a legal advice center in the nearest large town, even if it would take more than a day to get there. To address the gap in services for women, RADI and the paralegals created community committees in rural areas throughout Casamance that act as a frontline resource in addressing women's rights violations.

Conclusion

With a sustained commitment by New Field, rural women in Casamance have experienced tangible improvements in their standard of living and their quality of life, even in remote villages. With trust and careful planning, a funder can enable rural women and their organizations to realize their own creative solutions, successfully manage their assets, and lead the way towards a more peaceful and equitable world.

