

CHANGES IN FAMILY HEALTH AND EDUCATION

The Effects Of Funding Women's Community Organizations In Senegal



NEW FIELD
FOUNDATION

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SUMMARY

As part of its strategic grantmaking to support women and their families overcome poverty, violence and injustice in Africa, New Field focused part of its efforts on southern Senegal as it emerged from twenty years of conflict. During 2006-2012, \$3.5 million was awarded in 90 main grants to 20 non-profit organizations that served rural women in Casamance. In turn, 6 of these organizations awarded 257 community grants totaling \$1,347,663 to 116 women's community organizations.

In order to understand the extent of the changes created by rural women and their organizations as a result of the community grants, a participatory study was carried out by World Education Senegal. Based in Casamance, it is linked to World Education International which works with local partner institutions in 50 countries to provide training and technical assistance to the educationally disadvantaged across many sectors.

The study involved 379 rural women, 35 women's organizations receiving community grants, and two evaluation consultants. Central to the process were 15 rural women whom World Education Senegal selected from the 35 women's organizations. They were trained as journalists and became proficient in conducting interviews, taking photographs and producing audio broadcasts for local radio stations. With support from

media professionals and coordination by 24 rural women, they carried out interviews and surveys, compiled 30 reports and produced 41 radio programs. World Education Senegal synthesized the information and carried out focus groups with the women's community organizations to corroborate the findings.

The evaluation showed that when women's community organizations are given grants averaging \$5000 a year for at least two years, the wellbeing and economic stability of participating rural women, and their families, significantly improve. The groups' activities enabled members to improve the quality and quantity of food for their households, increase their income, provide children with better access to education and enable greater access to health care. Women's community organizations are effective agents of change when they have the authority to manage grants and set their own priorities.

More details on study results are available at *Fostering Peace and Vibrant Communities in the Wake of Conflict: An Integrated Approach to Grantmaking in Senegal 2004-2014*. Accompanying thematic reports include *Changes in Rural Women's Leadership: The Effects of Funding Women's Community Organizations in Senegal* and *Changes in Asset Management: The Impact of Funding Women's Community Organizations in Senegal*.

OUTCOMES

Overall, results pointed to an improvement in quality of life for rural women and their families due to the additional revenue earned from community grantmaking program activities, along with the greater variety and volume of food grown for local households.

Chart 1 illustrates the respondents’ levels of satisfaction with their ability to cover household costs associated with their agricultural activities, their families’ health, the nutritional quality and quantity of food, and their children’s education – before and after their organization received community grants. Before the grant, the majority of respondents said that they were ‘not satisfied’ with their ability to cover their household costs (60%) or were ‘somewhat satisfied’ (31%). After the grant, however, 51% reported being ‘somewhat satisfied’ (an increase of

20%) and 18% said they were ‘mostly satisfied’ (up 13%). Those who were ‘not satisfied’ decreased by 33%. It is not surprising that a very small percentage of those surveyed reported being ‘highly satisfied’ with their ability to cover their costs (2% before versus 4% after), given the limited access to resources and opportunity.

A more detailed study of 12 women’s organizations (see Chart 2) showed that 69% of respondents reported improvements in their life due to community grant activities. One group, Coumbacara, reported no improvement since its grant had been cancelled. This was because the group had been unable to secure land for its proposed activities and did not have alternative plans. Of the remaining 11 groups, 88% of respondents reported improvements on an ongoing basis.

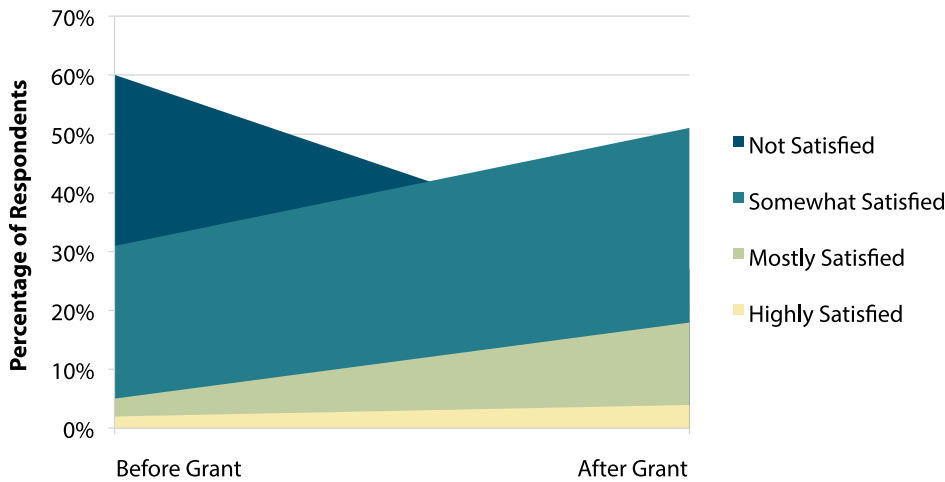
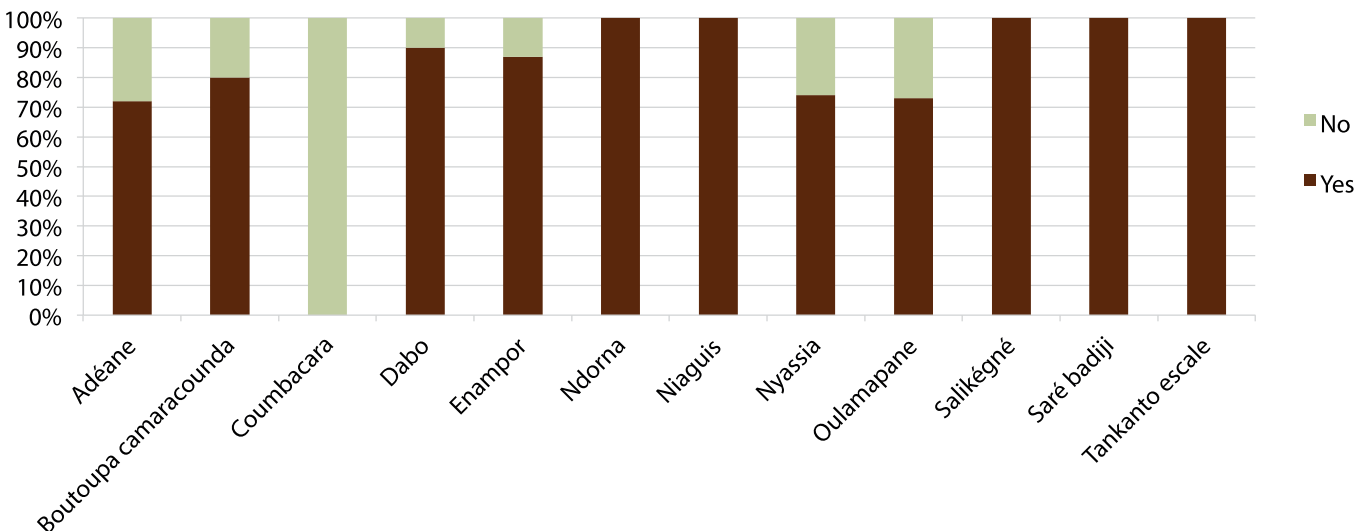


CHART 1 (Left): Respondents’ level of satisfaction with household spending before and after community grant activities.

CHART 2 (Below): Percentage of respondents who reported whether their lives had sustainably improved because of the grants awarded to their community organizations.



IMPROVING THE HEALTH OF WOMEN & THEIR FAMILIES

72% of the rural women grant beneficiaries (of 379 who were surveyed) reported that they were better able to respond to their family's health needs as a result of the income generated by activities supported by the grants. We describe below some of the key changes reported in health.

ADOPTION OF RECOMMENDED PREVENTIVE HEALTH PRACTICES

Women noted that they gained the economic means to adopt recommended preventive health practices such as purchasing mosquito nets that reduce their family's risk of malaria. They also had better access to water purification tablets for drinking water that helps to prevent diarrhea.

cash savings as well as goods and livestock could be sold to cover health care expenses including the purchase of medicines. Treatment for high blood pressure and chronic fatigue is now regularly sought by more women.

INCREASED USE OF MATERNAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH SERVICES

Women interviewed reported that their added income enabled them to attend regular prenatal and postpartum visits at their local health facility. In addition, many more women were able to afford the 1000CFA (~\$2) cost of delivering their baby in a medical facility. According to local health agents, the number of women visiting the health office for maternal care in Ziguinchor rose from 28% in 2003 to 70% in 2012; and in Kolda from 35% in 2005



“Women are better able to cover their health expenses now; they regularly go to their prenatal visits and we are noticing fewer and fewer deaths after delivery. The women don't wait for their health situations to get too serious before they seek help.”

- O.S., a member of the Fédération Adéane. In 2009 she lost a son to a serious flu after she was unable to pay for his medical care.

IMPROVED ACCESS TO TIMELY CONSULTATIONS AND TREATMENTS

In the past, when there was a serious illness or injury, the default course of action was to wait and hope the situation improved rather than seek prompt medical attention. Few families were able to pay the cost of seeing a doctor; they would seek help from traditional healers, regardless of the severity of the situation. Now it has become a common response to take the injured or sick person to a health clinic for emergency treatment. Several women noted that

to 80% in 2012. While these figures cannot be attributed to the community grants, rural women benefiting from community grants self-reported having the reassurance of resources to visit a health facility when giving birth. Prenatal care and delivery by a trained health worker are instrumental to improving maternal and newborn health.

CHANGES IN THE PREVALENCE OF THE PRACTICE OF FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION (FGM)

The participation of circumcisers in the activities funded by the community grants has been a key factor in the move towards ending FGM. Circumcisers have turned away

from FGM in favor of other income-generating and food production activities promoted by their groups. They have been able to find new ways to earn a decent living with a steady income that replaces the fees earned from their circumcision work.

IMPROVED ACCESS TO WATER

The health of the women and their households also benefitted from the improved access to safe drinking water through the grant-supported construction of wells. The wells also reduced the need to travel long distances while carrying water for their families' needs.

LABOR-SAVING CHANGES REDUCE ILLNESSES RELATED TO HEAVY FIELD WORK

The physical burden of long hours of heavy labor contributed to poor health for many rural women. Reducing this work burden with the purchase of labor-saving equipment such as rice hullers with community grants, and increasing the women's financial means to hire additional workers during the winter, has reduced illnesses due to colds, flu, and high blood pressure.



Children gather for a class photo. Enrollment rates for young children in Casamance surpass the national Senegalese average, but as children get older, it becomes increasingly expensive and difficult to keep them in school.
- Photo by Aissatou Badji.

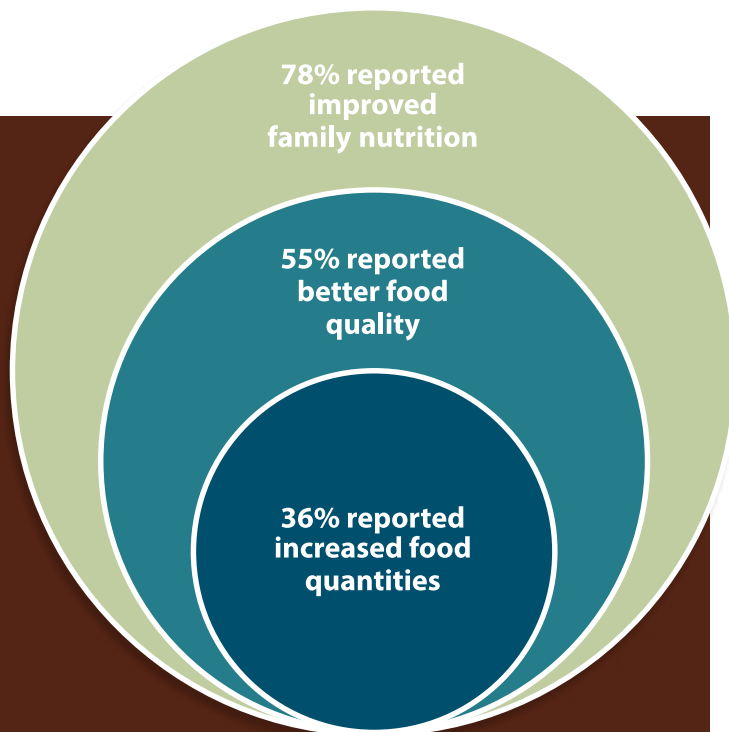


CHART 3: Percentage of respondents reporting improvements in food consumption.

FAMILY NUTRITION

As Chart 3 summarizes, 78% of the 379 participants surveyed stated that the community grants had contributed to the improvement of family nutrition. Since women's agricultural production and purchasing power increased, so the nutritional quality of food improved too, with a larger proportion of vegetables, fruits, white and red meat, eggs and milk. This meant a greater intake of nutrients such as calcium, iron, vitamin A, along with protein. 55% reported that the quality of their food improved, while 36% said they noticed an increase in the quantity of food they were able to provide for their families due to the community grant activities.

According to one estimate by AJAC/Lukaal, members of women's groups receiving community grants grow about 60% of their family's food. This production enables them to regularly feed their families at least twice a day. Their contributions to the household diet improve the quality and quantity of breakfast and lunch, enabling their children and other adults to get the nutrition needed to learn and work throughout the day. However, most of the women interviewed continued to have difficulty in feeding their families three times a day. During the lean season in particular, families that managed to have three daily meals were medium-sized with several working adults who brought home regular income.

CHILDREN'S EDUCATION

In Casamance, rural women are traditionally responsible for their children's school attendance. Their consistent effort to prioritize their children's education has been a determining factor in the evolution of Casamance's school enrollment rate which now surpasses the national average. Despite many obstacles and difficulties, the enrollment rate for children rose to 87% in 2009.¹ This progress notwithstanding, the ability to maintain children in school is an ongoing challenge.

Of the 379 women who were surveyed by World Education Senegal, 73% said that they are now better able to cover the costs associated with educating their children, thanks to the additional income from activities supported by the community grants. These costs include tuition, school supplies and books, children's clothes, and money to buy lunch at school.

In the same sample, 53% of the rural women surveyed stated that they are now able to keep children in school beyond the early years. Keeping children in school becomes much more difficult and expensive after the primary level. Those interviewed identified a number of specific strategies they adopted to support their older children to continue their education, including:

- Purchasing bicycles to travel to and from school (many children must travel several kilometers each way).
- Paying for their children to eat at school rather than having to walk home at lunch. This allows their children to resume classes on time.
- Putting money aside to pay for school fees.
- Buying lamps for their homes so that their children can do their schoolwork in the evenings and avoid falling behind.
- Establishing savings groups (*tontines*) with other rural women to help pay for tuition, transportation, pocket money, and school activities.

PARENTAL AUTHORITY

The increase in income for rural women benefitting from community grant activities has improved domestic relationships between men and women and given more parental authority to mothers. When rural women were able to contribute financially to household expenses such as health care or education, their husbands included them more readily in their decision making. Women's influence over many aspects of their lives thereby increased and their concerns were more likely to be addressed. In discussions with rural women reporters, members of

Below, a girl rides her bicycle to school. The older the child, the further the school is likely to be for rural families since there are fewer high schools than elementary level schools. - Photo by Elisabeth Coly.



women's community organizations said that they were now consulted by their husbands on decisions in the following areas:

- Their children's education
- The family budget (emergency unforeseen expenses, spending priorities, day-to-day needs, and opportunities)
- Child and parental health
- Family marriages
- Family ceremonies, religious celebrations, cultural ceremonies
- Family safety
- Important life events

CONCLUSION

The benefits of investing in rural women's community organizations were clearly demonstrated, even with the many constraints and challenges of the Casamance region as it recovers from 20 years of conflict. The evaluation methodology of training rural women as journalists to conduct surveys and interviews with their peers in their communities allowed for some unique insights into the ways in which community grants have impacted their lives. Rural women's responses pointed to important improvements in the quality of life for themselves and their families in the areas of food, nutrition, education, health and social status.

¹ www.iaziguinchor.edu.sn

RELATED PUBLICATIONS:

- Changes in Asset Mangement
- Changes in Rural Women's Leadership
- Fostering Peace and Vibrant Rural Communities in the Wake of Conflict

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