



## News from the Field

# In Senegal, USAID's Water Program Contributes To Participatory Governance

As in many West Africa countries, the availability of water governs the conditions of life for Senegal's rural population. A harsh climate and uncertain rainfall threaten food security and drive rural-urban migration, which further decreases food production while overburdening water and sanitation infrastructure and worsening social conditions. For years, these conditions have trapped the population in a cycle of poverty and disease. This has been particularly true in the Casamance region, in the southwest corner of the country, where a longstanding, low-level conflict has resulted in the destruction of the rural water and sanitation infrastructure and left the population dependent on scarce and unsafe water sources and few improved sanitation facilities.

Recognizing that inadequate water and sanitation are major barriers to growth, the Government of Senegal is focusing on meeting the Millennium Development Goals for water and sanitation as a key part of its poverty reduction and economic development plan. In 2005, the government decreed a \$1 billion program, which is known by its French acronym PEPAM.

"When you're trying to address water and sanitation in rural areas," said Aaron Brownell, who manages USAID's water sector activities in Senegal, "you're looking at a lot of interrelated issues. The most serious challenges," he stated, "include sector governance and ones related to the sustainability of access."

"Governance in the rural sector is fragmented," Brownell noted, "and the population has little to say about how services are allocated." PEPAM is building the population's capacity for participatory governance by empowering women to take leadership roles in community life; strengthening communities' capacity to cooperatively manage water resources and sanitation systems; and developing shared information systems. The creation of these shared systems is also supporting efforts to reduce the risk of water-related conflict.

Rural water and sanitation systems tend to deteriorate after a few years because of the lack of maintenance. To ensure sustainable access, the population needs to have the training,



Photo Credit: J. Graham USAID

**MAKING PROGRESS:** A new village water pump.

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resources, and organization of responsibilities to keep the systems working on a permanent basis.

USAID is supporting Senegal's water sector reforms through its 5-year (2009-2014), \$21 million USAID/PEPAM program, which Brownell manages, as well as through several smaller programs.

According to Dean Swerdlin, Chief of Party for RTI International, USAID/PEPAM's main implementing partner, "the innovation of USAID/PEPAM is its integrated, holistic approach." The program is based on four interrelated and mutually reinforcing principles:

- Strengthen participatory governance and support community-level infrastructure planning, management, installation, and maintenance;
- Increase the demand for sustainable water sanitation and hygiene services and products by promoting appropriate low-cost systems that ensure a hygienic environment, and improving the sanitary and hygiene behaviors identified as critical by the community;
- Strengthen the capacity of small-scale service providers and water users associations (WUAs) to respond to the demand for improved water and sanitation services;
- Encourage private sector involvement in the installation and rehabilitation of water and sanitation infrastructure.

These principles are aligned with the Government of Senegal's goal of achieving sustainable water and sanitation access through participatory planning. As Senegal's former Minister of Health, Issa Mbaye Samb, explained at the 4th World Water Forum in 2006, "Our policy emphasizes participatory planning through the PLHA [local water and sanitation plan] along with the legal



Photo Credit: A. Brownell PEPAM/USAID

**CAUSE FOR CELEBRATION:** Women dancing and singing in rural Senegal to express their appreciation and engagement in water and sanitation activities funded by USAID.

recognition and strengthening of the water users associations to manage rural multi-village systems." As of October 2010, 12 PLHAs were finalized in a region of the Casamance known as Ziguinchor, and are awaiting validation by the Ziguinchor Regional Council. With USAID support, Ziguinchor will soon be the first region in Senegal to have local water and sanitation plans for all of its rural communities.

USAID's emphasis on participatory governance of the water and sanitation sector, as well as sustainable access, has helped the people of the Casamance believe their situation is improving. The openings of new water points and sanitation facilities in their conflict-ridden communities were once an occasion for skepticism. They are now an occasion for dancing. *D. Davis*

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