



SUCCESS STORY

New Seeds, New Profits

USAID Helps Women Rice Farmers Produce Improved Seeds and Diversify Incomes



Photo by: Vina Verman

Women of the FOKABEN association stand in front of bags of NERICA rice stored in their warehouse. In all, the association and individual members produced over 22 tons of improved rice seeds.

USAID helps 650 women diversify their income and increase their food security through the production of improved rice seeds.

Rice farming — a practice often left to the women in the lowland plains of the Sikasso region — has been in Diahara Traoré's family for generations. Like so many other farmers in her area, she has relied on the seeds her father passed down to produce her harvest. As a result, her crop yields were decreasing steadily each year. She was not alone. In fact, studies show that farmers must purchase new base seeds every four years to maximize yields or the yield starts to drop by 30 percent and continues to decline year after year.

Recognizing the challenges aging and less productive seeds were presenting to these small farmers, USAID provided training to 650 women in the production of a high-producing seed variety known as NERICA 4. Working through the women's association, FOKABEN, USAID helped the women to diversify their income through this new activity while also providing them access to improved base seeds. FOKABEN farmed NERICA 4 rice on 1 hectare of land, yielding 2.2 tons — a 200% increase from traditional yields for local rice varieties. While local rice varieties are farmed for consumption and sales to satisfy household needs, NERICA seeds are farmed in the off-season, providing the women nearly \$11,000 in new income.

USAID provided inputs and offered training in business negotiation. The more than 22 tons of rice seeds produced by FOKABEN and its individual members will be made available to rural farmers who otherwise do not have access to these basic improved seeds. IICEM will also keep a portion of the seeds in order to train more farmers in the upcoming year to produce basic seeds. As improved varieties are adopted for farming, production volumes will rise, thus increasing food security.

In previous years Diahara would often have to finance schooling for her children on credit. "Because of the profits from this activity, I have been able to secure materials and labor for the upcoming rice farming season while putting my four children through school this year," she said.