



SUCCESS STORY

Women Gain Power with Potatoes

USAID Diversifies Women's Revenue Sources, Promotes Women's Independence



Photo by: Vina Verman

Hadjara Ouattara, secretary of COFABA, shows USAID potatoes that she harvested in March 2009. "This potato farming activity has increased the solidarity among us women of COFABA. We are encouraging each other to learn these farming techniques which will allow us to increase our incomes", says Aissata Oattara, President of COFABA of Bamadougou.

USAID assisted partner farmer organizations in accessing more than \$100,000 in inputs for the 2008-2009 potato production season.

In the Sikasso region of southern Mali, women have been farming rice and maintaining vegetable gardens for many years while the men grow more lucrative cash crops such as cotton and potatoes. Women use the products they grow primarily for family consumption, only selling small portions of rice or vegetables when additional funds are needed to satisfy household expenses. This division of farming leaves men with greater incomes and women with minimal revenue sources and little, if any, purchasing power.

In collaboration with Bamadougou's Association for Agricultural Women (COFABA), which has been receiving USAID assistance to improve their rice marketing system, USAID is training COFABA's members to farm potatoes for profit rather than consumption to raise women's incomes. In late 2007, USAID trained 19 of COFABA's members in best potato production practices and provided them with seeds and fertilizer. After witnessing the successes of the potato pioneers in the first year, 13 more women (for a total of 32) participated in potato farming at the start of the 2008 potato season. In addition to providing technical assistance in best farming practices, USAID helped the women in preparing and monitoring a loan application. The women were able to acquire a \$2,000 loan from USAID's partner bank, Kafo Jiginew. After receiving advisory services from USAID to assess input needs, COFABA independently purchased more than double the amount of inputs used in the previous year.

Hadjara Outtara, a COFABA member and rice farmer from Mali's southern region of Bamadougou, took part in the training and added potato growing to her farming activities. As a result, she earned 171% more than Mali's average monthly income during the 3 months of potato production. Profits from potato sales enabled her to pay off her debts, purchase inputs and secure labor needed for her upcoming rice farming season, which begins just a few months after the potato harvest.

USAID's training has empowered her to become the breadwinner of the family. "Any time there are expenses, I can take care of them. This, I feel, is the most important benefit," says Hadjara.