



## SUCCESS STORY

# Fair Trade Cotton Becomes Social Harvest

### Success of program funds community activities



Hand weeding of fair trade cotton in Medina Yoro foula (Kolda, Senegal).

***In Senegal, farmers of fair trade cotton earn an extra \$2.7 million over the minimum price paid for cotton.***

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It sounds like a fairy tale: a farmer sows a seed gently in the earth, and then watches it grow into a classroom, mills, school supplies, and cereal banks. But more than a rural fable, this has been the social harvest for communities in southern Senegal growing fair trade cotton during the past five years.

Faced with the rising cost of growing conventional cotton, and ever-shrinking profits, Senegal's national cotton trade association, Society of Development and Textile Fibers (SODEFITEX), looked to fair-trade cotton starting in 2003 for some relief. Five years, almost 11,000 hectares of fair trade cotton and more than 15,000 certified producers later, SODEFITEX and USAID are working to strengthen and expand Senegal's fair trade cotton producer network.

USAID facilitated several activities related to cotton through SODEFITEX including training promoters how to sell the product, and working with producers—175 of which are women who harvest seed cotton—on how to fight contamination. USAID also provided training manuals which addressed issues of organic and fair trade crop systems.

To earn the fair trade cotton label, producers agree to standards that ensure an environmentally-friendly product, including avoiding genetically-modified seeds; limiting the use of pesticides; enriching the soil; practicing crop rotation and hand picking; and reducing the use of chemicals. Producers also agree to invest a percentage of cotton proceeds back into the community. In return, fair trade cotton producers get better prices. In Senegal, they earned 42% more than their conventional cotton colleagues, or about \$100 more per hectare, in 2007. A third of these proceeds are then invested back into the community.

Since 2003, SODEFITEX has reported almost \$43,000 in fair-trade funded community investments, including cereal banks that stockpile the previous year's harvest to help feed communities during the lean seasons, and new classrooms to alleviate some of the overcrowding in the schools.

Magnang Niang, a manager with SODEFITEX, says fair trade returns are not only bricks and mortar improvements. "The committee structure, oversight and monitoring required for fair trade certification and cotton cultivation improves social cohesion, reinforces leadership capacity, improves transparency [of cotton operations], and accords a prominent management role to women," he said.

And of course, there are the financial rewards. In Senegal, revenue for 2008's fair trade cotton harvest earned farmers an extra \$2.7 million dollars over the minimum price paid for cotton, of which \$1 million goes to their communities—a nice modern twist to the classic fairy tale ending.