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SÉNÉGAL

Fatou Sow Ndiaye is very involved in the work on gender and development, grassroots communication and ICTs, sustainable agriculture and the management and analysis of information.

ENDA-PRONAT is dedicated to protecting natural resources by using appropriate technologies which allow the transformation of local plants in natural pesticides and for organic agriculture. All its programmes and activities are adapted to local resources and constraints.

ENDA-PRONAT is Dimitra's partner for West-Africa – Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, the Gambia, Guinea, Mauritania and Senegal. Fatou is coordinating this partnership. She is also the Coordinator of the Réseau National des Femmes Rurales du Sénégal (RNFRS – National Network of Rural Women in Senegal).

# Strategies to minimise the impact of women's lack of access to land in Senegal



## 1. The issue

The management of land resources has always been a key element in community-based activities, and will remain so in the years to come. According to the period and the political options available, land resource management can be dependent on political and cultural traditions.

The theme chosen for World Food Day in 1998, “Women Feed the World”, showed the importance of the contributions women make to agriculture and food security. In West Africa, women are involved throughout the food production process – female farmers and workers account for over 70% of food production in the poorest regions.

For some years now, however, development partners (international institutions, NGOs, etc.), pressure groups and women's organisations have been demanding that governments do more to tackle the real issues preventing women from having fair access to land and other natural resources, since any such problems will have further detrimental effects on women's health, safety and ability to take action.

This was the reason behind Senegal's adoption of constitutional reforms and a new legislation guaranteeing men and women's equal rights as regards land ownership. But many women are unaware of the existence of these laws that could help them exercise their rights. And if they do know about the laws, they do not dare to challenge social norms, particularly not the power balance between men and women.

Information and communication strategies must be implemented at different levels to minimise gender inequality in terms of access to land and production methods.

## 2. Access to and control of land

Owning land is one of the pillars of environmentally friendly agriculture, which is why Enda-PRONAT has incorporated gender issues in its approach, bearing in mind the role of women in the rural economy. When conducting research and working with organisations in the field, Enda-PRONAT has paid close attention to land ownership issues in its areas of activity.

Enda-PRONAT notes that:

- Legal texts guaranteeing equal rights to men and women do exist, but in spite of this, traditional allocation methods are still dominant. Laws have been enacted and voted upon, but that is no guarantee that they will be applied. In practice, men are still responsible for managing and allocating land. And yet we can see considerable improvements when land is developed and managed by women.
- The issue of access to land seems more closely linked to sociology than to legal principles.

For this reason, better management of land ownership has been the subject of training courses and information campaigns by all stakeholders in Enda-PRONAT's areas of intervention, particularly in the Niayes, where demand for land far outstrips availability.

Despite activities to raise awareness of the devastating effects of land speculation in the process of sustainable land development, land continues to be sold to Dakar-based civil servants. Following an evaluation of activities that had been carried out, people living in Keur Moussa (Niayes) reaffirmed their concerns about the management of their land. Both men and women are threatened by land speculation. This situation can be explained by the lack of resources for working land and the poverty that forces some producers to sell their land to feed themselves or to pay for their children to go abroad.



Given the current trend towards the commoditisation of land, many men and a few women use inheritance systems or their own financial position to acquire land.

#### **a. Constraints**

Access to land is far from being fair – women still have fewer land ownership rights than men, who are considered to be the heads of households and families and therefore the main breadwinners. This inequality exists in all areas of life, just as much in religion as in the application of traditional principles, not to mention the discrepancy between the existence of laws and their application.

In practice, men are in charge of the land. They are given the best land and they manage it, divide it between family members and protect it on behalf of the family to which it has been allocated.

The words of Papa Guèye, the President of the Fédération des Agro-pasteurs (Agropastoralists' Federation), are a good illustration of this phenomenon: *“Land is power, and since men are naturally driven by power, it is not easy for them to give up land to women”*. Women must therefore be committed, determined, and extremely motivated to gradually find a solution to the issue of land ownership.

Women's work within their families means that they have more problems and less time than men when it comes to accessing technology, training, information, know-how and agricultural inputs.

Unequal access to production factors is a major obstacle to increasing rural women's food production and income. In the cotton basin in eastern Senegal, a general lack of equipment and extremely limited access to land are a significant constraint in asserting women's role in agriculture. In areas where rain-fed crops are grown, men's land is weeded and sown before women's land. This has repercussions on crop yields, especially in view of the country's dry climate.

In some regions of Senegal, traditional systems of land ownership and traditional laws are still applied, despite the existence of modern legislation. Women are not entitled to inherit land from their husbands or fathers and widows are excluded from land ownership and cannot provide the necessary guarantees.

#### **b. Real-life experiences**

The issue of women accessing and controlling land is very complicated because it challenges social norms and is closely linked to individual opinions. Women's status as social regulators works against them when discussing land ownership matters. To ensure that women have improved access to land, it is therefore necessary to adopt a very diplomatic multi-stakeholder approach supporting both men and women. This could act as an impetus for changes by individuals, families and society as a whole.

Enda-PRONAT and the agropastoralists from Diender worked together on a very positive scheme comprising activities for information, communication, awareness-raising and training at all levels, involving all stakeholders (leaders, women, young people and eminent religious or political figures) and using all the appropriate methods (such as meetings, workshops and the media).

The Fédération des Agro-pasteurs de Diender, a partner of Enda-PRONAT, cooperated with the Rural Council, the Cayar town authorities and the sub-prefecture of Pout to find solutions to the problem of access to land. They implemented joint strategies for improving land management. One of these was the local land occupation plan drawn up by the Federation for the rural community in which it is based. This should lead to the local development plan being updated. The two plans will help local people to consolidate and develop their skills with a view to finding systems to establish rules for fair occupation and management of the community's natural resources.

A follow-up to the 2003 international workshop on “Rural Women and Land”, supported by a documentary titled “Femme et foncier, Entre lois et réalités” (Women and land – between laws and reality), allowed the community to express its opinion on the issue of land ownership in different environmental areas in Senegal. In the documentary, members of parliament, members of civil society and other development partners shared their opinions and supported the views of rural women. The film, which was in Wolof, the main language of Senegal, with French subtitles for external audiences, helped to communicate the message to high-level politicians.

The Ministry of the Family and National Solidarity showed the film as part of its activities for International Women's Day 2004, which were based around the theme “Land ownership reform in Senegal – what issues do women

face?” The film was also used to launch discussions at one of the sessions organised in 2005 by the Swiss development cooperation agency in Senegal, Enda-GRAF and other NGOs in the “Circle of Interest on Rural Development”.

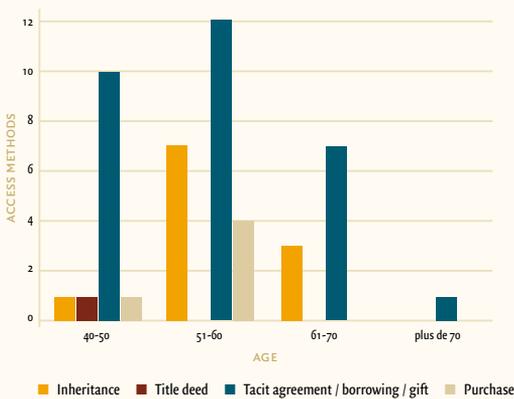
Going beyond these strategies for information, participative research, with results shown in figures, has also highlighted a model for raising awareness of the issue of land ownership. In 2008, a survey was conducted on the

way women acquire land. Responses were collected from 100 households in two rural communities (Diender and Keur Moussa). The survey’s results showed that communities often manage to bypass the law and even tradition to improve their access to land.

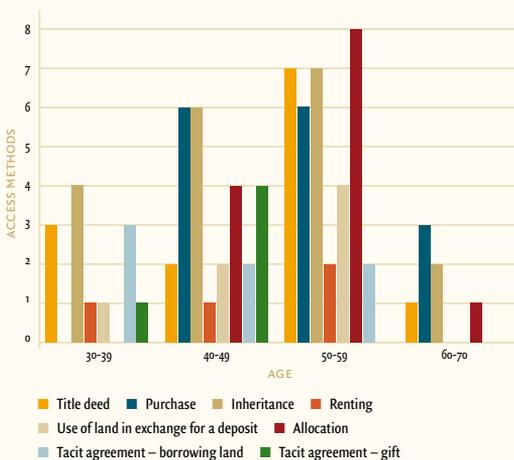
The law expressly forbids transactions involving land that has a particular status. In practice, however, very few people are concerned with what the law says, since it is extremely rare for the Rural Council (which manages land in the local community) to expropriate someone. The people who access land through allocation by the Rural Council are generally new arrivals or people who have been informed of the issues around land ownership law and who want to safeguard their land as it has particularly valuable characteristics (e.g. high-quality farmland, land with good access).

The survey covered purchases, gifts, borrowed land, inheritances, etc. held by women between the ages of 40 and 70. Most of the transactions were made by tacit agreement, but there were some that were formalised with written documentation (see graphs).

### Women’s access to land in Keur Moussa



### Women’s access to land in Diender



### 3. Recommendations

Land is a vital resource in rural women’s survival strategies. It is therefore crucial that laws are applied in practice and that there is a political drive for reforms, focusing on the following areas: implementation and improvement of rural land registers, local development plans and poverty reduction (illiteracy, lack of knowledge and malnutrition). The political and economic status of women as key stakeholders in their community’s development should also be enhanced, and considerable emphasis should be placed on boosting investments in rural development (health, water, hygiene and schools).

This must go hand-in-hand with:

- the introduction of credit instruments that are appropriate for the type of operation in question;
- the promotion and extension of access to agricultural equipment and production factors;
- efforts to strengthen professional organisations for women farmers;
- the involvement of grassroots farmers’ organisations in the decision-making process;
- the extension of action-oriented research on ways to improve land, with a special focus on irrigated land.