



SUCCESS STORY

AN ENGAGED COMMUNITY LEADER BRINGS CHANGES IN HER VILLAGE



Noumoudio Diarra in her farm
Photo credit: CARE2019

"Woman is the pillar of society".

- *Noumoudio Diarra*

In Mali, women living in rural areas face obstacles that often hinder development. Difficulties include poor access to income, high workload, low participation in decision-making, and low access to land among others. In order to address these barriers, USAID's Harande Project implements gender-focused activities through its different program components, which has led to remarkable changes at the household and community levels. Noumoudio Diarra saw these changes in her life.

Noumoudio Diarra was born in Niogolon village in Mopti Region and today she has grown into a true icon in her village and beyond due to her leadership and determination despite socio-cultural constraints. In addition to being the mother of four children, she is a great farmer, president of the village women's association, traditional birth attendant (trained by the project), and a member of the water, hygiene and sanitation committee and the community development committee. Mrs Diarra Noumoudio is well known in her village and throughout the commune for her dynamism and activism.

After her husband passed away in 2008, she was lost the family land that her husband was farming, leaving her alone to provide food and social security for herself and her children. The land tenure management committee (CoFo), with the support of the village chief gave Diarra three hectares (ha) of land on which she started growing millet and rice to feed the family.

"When my husband died, I was taken out of the family farm. I was rescued by the members of CoFo who gave me three ha. Knowing that my salvation will come only from my own efforts, I worked hard and it paid off! My production is enough to cover the daily food needs of my family", explains Diarra.

Participation in the Farmers' Field and Business School enabled Diarra to acquire skills in new farming techniques and the use of seeds adapted to the area. This has increased both millet and rice production, which today is around 2.5 tons. Diarra sells her surplus production on the market to meet the family's other daily expenses. These include school fees, health and other household's expenses.

This situation and her own experience have strengthened her confidence and determination to help other women in her village. Diarra was able to involve the women of her village and those of the neighboring village of Manko, in village saving and loan associations alongside male members to facilitate social change. This was not easy given normal socio-cultural constraints. As a facilitator of the literacy center, she also taught reading and writing skills to 120 out of 249 women in her village.

"I urge women not to underestimate themselves and believe in themselves, because we can contribute to the development of our community," proudly states Diarra.

Unwearied and determined to improve the circumstances of women and children, she is a committed traditional birth attendant. Each year she assists

with more than 40 deliveries and promptly refers complicated delivery cases to the community health center.

Today, many women of her community are trying to follow her example and are mobilizing for their own self-fulfillment and well-being.

Harande is a five-year, \$45 million Food for Peace project which started in 2015. It aims to improve food security, nutrition and incomes of vulnerable communities, especially women and youth in 290 villages of Mopti.