



Profile: Habibatou DIAWARA

By DID staff, with files from Adama Diarra

More autonomy and leadership for women farmers in Mali

In the village of Fachoribougou, located near Sikasso in southern Mali, Habibatou Diawara is recognized as a leader and agent of change by members of her community. The 45-year-old farmer and mother of seven children is the president of the Kotogngngontala agricultural production cooperative, of which 73 women farmers are members.

This cooperative is one of the many farmers' associations supported by the Agricultural and Rural Financing in Mali (FARM) project. Led by Développement international Desjardins (DID) and SOCODEVI with financial support from the Government of Canada, the project aims to increase the productivity and income of Malian farmers through better access to financial services and greater cooperation among the various players in the value chains.

The project also includes a major component devoted to financial education, technical support and strengthening women's leadership. Mrs. Diawara is one of the many women leaders who have led awareness sessions for the benefit of other women in their villages, after having themselves been trained in leadership, public speaking, communication and andragogy. "My relatives, especially my husband, are happy and proud to see me serving the women of my community in this way," she says with satisfaction.

"Now everything is clear to me! »

Thanks to the FARM project, members of the cooperative have also benefited from technical training on calculating the cost of production. "Last year, this training made all the difference for us, when we were a bit behind our farming schedule," explains Ms. Diawara. "We learned that it was better not to plant maize as planned, but rather cowpea (beans), a crop that would be more profitable. »

Mrs. Diawara no longer sets her sales prices arbitrarily but according to her production costs. "Now it's all clear to me! I know how much I spent on seeds and fertilizer, and I keep accurate records of how much I harvested. So I can take stock of the situation and plan for the next season. Thanks to the FARM project, we have formalized our cooperative and our ways of doing things. Calculating production costs allows us to set the selling price of our products and estimate our profits. "

The training offered by the project has also established a savings culture among members of the cooperative. Thanks to the small amounts they set aside on a regular basis, they are now able to manage exceptional expenses such as weddings, baptisms, funerals or engagements without stress. For her part, Mrs. Diawara manages to save 2,000 CFA francs (nearly 5 CAD) every week thanks to the income she earns from her activities.

Her projects? "To build a house on the plot I bought last year in Sikasso. I'm sure I'll be able to do it because with this savings culture, my income will increase. I have also started the process of opening my personal account with a financial institution in Sikasso," she says confidently, as her family looks forward to a brighter future than ever before.

The FARM project is featured in new research commissioned by the Canadian Food Security Policy Group (FSPG), a coalition of civil society organizations seeking to improve Canada's food security work overseas. The FARM project is featured as one of six independently researched case studies in West Africa that demonstrate how support for agriculture in rural communities can improve livelihoods, promote gender equality and build climate resilience.

To read the FARM case study, and other reports from the Food Security Policy Group's research project, please visit <https://ccic.ca/leaders-in-the-field>