



Profile: Tiange Kamara

By Olivia Acland

Tiange Kamara manages to support a household of eight on the small monthly salary—about \$80—she earns as the head of the nursery at the village school in rural Sierra Leone. Kamara’s seven grandchildren live with her while their parents are away working in the city of Bo. After buying food, books, and school uniforms, there’s not much money to spare. Yet, thanks to a loan she received from a women’s savings and loans group, Kamara has managed to send one of her sons to medical school. “If it weren’t for the group he would never have entered university,” she says.

The savings group to which Kamara belongs is part of a project called SATISFY, established in Sierra Leone by World Vision with financial support from the Government of Canada. Although the project wrapped up two years ago, the savings groups live on. Women were organized into groups of twenty five and given money boxes. Project staff provided lessons on how to add, subtract, and read numbers so that participants could keep track of the money coming in and going out. The women could buy shares every two weeks. The more shares they bought, the larger the loan they could access.

The women meet twice a month and each put small amounts of money into a communal pot. Members then take out loans at low interest rates. Some money is reserved for the “social fund” that the women can access in case of an emergency. Before Kamara was part of the group, if her grandchildren fell sick she could not afford to take them to the doctor or buy medicine; now she can access money quickly and get them to the hospital if necessary.

Kamara says that this program has caused the men in the village to see the women differently. “The project created a space for us women to meet regularly,” she says. “Before, men thought we women could not arrange anything by ourselves, but they see how we have kept this going for five years.” She adds: “We have shown them that we ourselves can generate and save money. We do not need to rely on men.”

The project also made larger tracts of land available for the women to farm. Traditionally, women in Sierra Leone were not permitted to inherit land. The women in Kamara’s group stopped cultivating rice individually and began to farm together for bigger yields. Rules were enforced to ensure everyone contributed equally. “If you arrive late you have to pay a fine,” says Kamara, “After that, people started coming to the field on time.” She says that the social fund keeps them together when they argue; no one wants to be forced out of the group and lose access to the fund.

“Before SATISFY I was struggling. I used to have to go and borrow money from people when I needed it,” Kamara says. The loans scheme and better rice yields now mean that Kamara can manage to look after her grandchildren without too much difficulty. Leaning against the wall of her house she smiles and says she is relieved. She no longer feels stressed about accessing money.

*The SATISFY 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 SATISFY 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 SATISFY case study, and other reports from the Food Security Policy Group’s research project, please visit <https://ccic.ca/leaders-in-the-field>*

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