



Profile: Ramata DIARRA

By DID staff, with files from Adama Diarra

Better access to credit... and self-esteem for Malian women farmers

In Mali, onion production is a sector exploited mainly by women, on small areas. However, there are many challenges for women farmers, who struggle to access land, finance and technical knowledge.

In Dougoulakoro, a farming village between Baguinéda and Bamako, a group of women farmers decided to join forces in a farmers' association. Ramata Diarra, a young mother of 31, is the administrative secretary. Unlike most women in her group, she has been lucky enough to go to school for a few years: an advantage that helped her greatly when it came time to apply for a loan for the association.

She obtained this loan thanks to the Agricultural and Rural Financing in Mali (FARM) project and its local partners: *Office du Périmètre Inondé de Baguinéda* (OPIB) and *Banque Nationale de Développement Agricole* (BNDA). Led by Développement international Desjardins (DID) and SOCODEVI with financial support from the Government of Canada, the FARM project aims to increase the productivity and income of small Malian farmers through better access to financial services and technical support.

A loan that made all the difference

"If it wasn't for the support of the FARM project, we wouldn't know what to do this year because we didn't have the financial means to work the land," says Ramata. But thanks to a loan of 2,500,000 CFA francs (5,500 CAD) obtained by the association, the women's group was able to start onion production. "None of the women in Dougoulakoro have experienced the usual stress of past campaigns," says Diarra.

The income they earned from the onions enabled them to plan for the next season, provide for their families and improve their living conditions. "Thanks to the income from my harvest, I was able to buy a second-hand motorcycle," reports the young woman, whose home is three kilometres from the field where she farms. "My motorcycle makes it much easier for me to get from the field to my house, to the market and to the city centre where I have to go shopping. My income has even enabled me to buy two tons of cement to start building my house," she says.

Self-confidence, a key factor for success

The FARM project also has a major component devoted to financial education and strengthening women's leadership. Thanks to the various training courses Diarra has received on public speaking, leadership and communication techniques, she is now much more confident. "Until recently, if I had had to speak in front of a group of people, I would have turned my back on them. But today, even in front of the President of the Republic, I would be able to express myself fully," she says proudly.

With five children and significant community and family responsibilities, Ramata is glad to see her abilities strengthened. The path to independence and success is now much clearer for her. "While we were in the dark, the FARM project opened our eyes!" she concludes.

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>