

Developing Women Leaders through Community Radio in Senegal

Fostering women's development and leadership by training them in journalism and radio station management has had significant success in rural Senegal. Such dramatically new roles for these women have led to greater community engagement for them, higher radio listenership and resulting discussion groups, and income-generating activities. Moreover, the radio programs have actively promoted community activities that have empowered both women and men in these rural communities. As a result, more people feel confident about expressing themselves about development challenges faced by their entire communities.

BACKGROUND

During the latter half of the 20th century, many programs have attempted to empower women and develop skill sets that will enable them to continue growing and thriving after the projects have ended.

While existing policies in Senegal that endorse gender equity in national and local governing bodies hold new hope, women currently represent a small percentage of those in decision-making positions at local, regional, and national levels. At the community level, women make up a small percentage of those serving on rural councils, Parent Teacher Associations, or participating in other local decision-making bodies. When women are involved with such organizations, they are often relegated to roles that do not allow them to significantly influence policy (e.g., serving as secretary rather than in an office such as president). One example is the rural council. In Senegal Rural Communities (*Communautés Rurales* or CR) are administrative subdivisions that are

composed of a number of rural villages. Each CR has a governing body known as the rural council that is comprised of 25- 40 members, elected to five-year terms, and responsible for a number of decisions affecting development at the community level. Women occupy only 27.3% of rural council positions, with great variation by zone. For example in the four rural councils surrounding the radio station, Guindiku FM, only 27 out of 184 councilors are women.

World Education, with the support of USAID and in collaboration with local partner ARLS (*Association Rurale pour la Lutte Contra la SIDA*), has been managing the Women's Leadership and Civic Journalism program in rural Senegal since October 2010. The program is building women's development and leadership skills and engaging communities in ways that are changing attitudes about women.

This innovative program is fostering women's development by leveraging the power of community radio while also

engaging communities. Women reporters produce content for the radio by engaging with community members through listening groups and other forms of community dialogue and advocacy—e.g., household visits to male opinion leaders to gain support for their initiatives. In addition to these two elements, the program addresses practical issues that might impede women’s participation through income-generating activities and a community health insurance program (*mutuelles de santés*). While elements of this model have been used in other programs, never before have they all been brought together and leveraged by such a high level of communication as made possible through the use of radio

The combination of radio (a powerful tool in a low-literacy environment) and direct engagement with opinion leaders and community members are quite profound. When you add into the mix economic and health issues (which are also done more effectively with the support of the radio, e.g., by promoting the health insurance scheme through radio, you have tackled some of the most important issues in the country.) Furthermore, this is all taking place in a very traditional and conservative area. World Education is building on the

experience of previous programs by determining best practices and working with women to think creatively about the possibilities that are opening up. It is instructive to see how the project has evolved to date and what the prospects for the future look like.

THE PROGRAM

The goal of this program is to promote women’s leadership by giving them a greater voice and presence in community radio combined with actions in their communities to increase support for the inclusion of women in decision-making bodies. The program also has drawn upon the popularity of community radio in Senegal and uses it to deliver messages and spread awareness about women’s roles and responsibilities in community development.

Since October 2010, the Women’s Leadership program has been working in 60 villages in 13 rural communities in the regions of Thiès and Diourbel of Senegal. What’s more, and perhaps even more important, the radio reaches well over 500 villages that are home to approximately 450,000 people.

World Education has partnered with local NGO, *Association Rurale pour la Lutte Contra la SIDA* (ARLS), to implement the Women’s Journalism and Civic Leadership program in Senegal. ARLS brings community-based women’s groups together to help mobilize populations around support for increased women’s leadership.

Throughout the program World Education has worked to strengthen both the technical and organizational capacity of ARLS so that they can continue efforts after the end of the program.

The project initially focused on capacity building efforts that emphasized gender equity perspectives in order to help promote women's leadership at the community level through radio combined with community action. Program content and the themes covered are selected by the women reporters and listening groups, not World Education. Thus, the program is driven by community interests, not dictated by an outside organization.



World Education and partner ARLS recruited and trained 60 women reporters and radio staff at Guindiku FM (the local ARLS-supported station). It also supported women reporters to run listening groups, composed of 15 women and 5 men, in the 60 targeted villages. World Education also worked with radio managers to ensure that women were frequently featured as broadcasters/hosts, guest speakers, and key experts in community radio, as well as in management positions. In addition, the Women's Leadership and Civic Journalism project has been training station managers and broadcasters about program formatting and gender themes to make sure that radio

programming is infused with gender-equitable messages.

Through these trainings, regular support, coaching, and feedback by World Education staff, Guindiku FM now has a full programming schedule that features daily programs produced by women reporters and radio staff about local development concerns, gives a voice to rural women, and promotes an environment more favorable to women in leadership roles.

These efforts have already contributed to a number of positive outcomes in communities. Although there are always many variables that may help explain such results, various community members – including men – attribute a number of these successes to the program and the work of women reporters. That is not insignificant. The community-level outcomes range from improved responsiveness by local service providers, for example: a local electric company repairing electric lines following a report on the radio discussing their lack of response in one community; improved economic opportunities for women, such as the planned establishment of a market in a village that was featured in a report discussing the great distances women were required to travel to reach the nearest market; and access to local decision-making positions for women, including the movement of women into the local water management committee in one village.

QUANTIFIABLE ACHIEVEMENTS

The following sample data for the Guindiku FM and beyond illustrate the scope and scale of this project over the last two years.

- 6 radio staff trained to manage radio operations and support production of content by women reporters.
- 60 women trained and working as community based correspondents for the radio and leaders of their respective listening groups journalists
- 60 listening groups established and functioning in 60 communities
- 900 women participated in listening groups
- 300 men participated in listening groups
- 50 km radio broadcast range
- 17 hours continuous broadcasting conducted
- 65% of programs developed and presented by women
- 9 women leaders interviewed each week by radio staff to showcase examples of successful women working in the region
- 2,047 radio programs broadcast on themes relating to women's leadership and gender equity over two years, as of October 2012
- 1,339 women accessing credit for income generating activities
- 2,400 women joining community health insurance plans

"I would like to thank World Education for having initiated a program based on the radio. It is important, now if we have a problem, to resolve, we approach our women reporters." Abdoulaye Wade, chauffeur in the village of Hannene.

Additionally, World Education has conducted many training sessions to help these groups and individuals develop a certain level of expertise and a comfort level with their roles. Before this program was implemented, music was the dominant, and virtually exclusive, media format at this community radio station. The Women's Leadership and Civic Journalism program has substantially changed the landscape of radio broadcasting with community-based reporters.

QUALITATIVE ACHIEVEMENTS

The following are significant qualitative achievements of the program to date:

Guindiku FM

World Education supports local radio stations to produce quality programming of interest to local populations and increases the voice of women, therefore creating an enabling environment for women's leadership. This program also assists in upgrading equipment, technical training, organizational capacity building, and gender equity training. Guindiku FM now supports a full schedule that features programming on women's issues, health,

education, political participation, human rights, and entertainment.

Results:

- ☐ Increased airtime, coverage zone, and quality of radio programs
- ☐ Increased number of programs about gender equity
- ☐ Increased percentage of programs developed and presented by women

Women Journalists

The Women's Leadership and Civic Journalism program recruits and continues to train female journalists to produce radio programs in their communities and engages women and men in activities that promote women's leadership. World Education provides training in journalistic techniques and themes relating to women's leadership and also facilitates local listening groups (composed of fifteen women and five men each).

Results:

- ☐ Women journalists in control of development of programs
- ☐ Increased awareness about themes addressing barriers to women's leadership
- ☐ Women journalists educating their communities around women's rights, roles and responsibilities in community development

Community Engagement

World Education carries out activities at the

community level that complement themes discussed in radio programs and addresses specific barriers to women's leadership. This program supports listening groups, income-generating activities, and the community health initiative, while addressing underlying economic barriers to women's leadership. To address these barriers, the program has established a rotating fund to enable listening group members to undertake income-generating activities (IGAs) and a community health insurance initiative (*mutuelles de santés*). The income generated through the IGAs not only increases the economic independence of women but has a positive impact on the well-being of their families as well. The health initiative also extends program benefits to a wider population. Designed to help women better manage the health of their families, this program component also frees them to engage in new leadership roles. These activities have already created a sense of empowerment at the community level that will support women as they advocate for an increased role in leading their communities.

Results:

- ☐ Increased engagement of women and men to support women's leadership
- ☐ Increased sustainability of health initiatives
- ☐ Increased recognition of relationship between economic barriers and women's leadership

BARRIERS TO PARTICIPATION

Based on World Education's experience in the region and focus group discussions carried out under the current program, the following barriers have been identified that contribute to the lack of women's participation in local leadership positions:

- ☐ Higher illiteracy rates for women (67.1%) compared to men (47.9%) put women at a disadvantage with respect to access to information.
- ☐ Low levels of land and home ownership among women leaves them in an insecure position within the family. For women aged 15- 49 years old, only 14% own a home (only 2% of these are homes where a woman is the sole proprietor) and only 12% own land (of these, only 4% constitute land owned by an individual woman, as opposed to a group of women).
- ☐ Women play a small role in decisions within the household. Survey data has shown that in only 13% of cases did women make decisions on family health issues and in 8% of cases did women decide on major household expenses.

SUMMARY OF ACCOMPLISHMENTS TO DATE

The radio programs combined with activities led by listening groups have empowered both women and men in rural communities to express themselves by sharing development challenges faced by entire communities. As a result of this process, a number of promising signs of change at the community level have begun to emerge in areas as diverse as: respect for

the rights of women; political processes; health issues for women and children; gender-based violence; education; and economic empowerment. These community-level changes that World Education is witnessing were not directly targeted outcomes. However, by empowering rural women to identify the challenges that they face and facilitating dialogue at the community level to overcome them, a more holistic program approach has been developed. This approach, supported by a robust training program for rural women, relevant radio programming, listening group activities, and engagement of male opinion leaders has led to a much wider range of outcomes. The table below outlines the various changes that the program has begun to facilitate.

WHAT REMAINS TO BE DONE

While the program has made progress on many levels, significant work remains to be done in order to ensure that the gains that have taken place are extended and sustained. The type of social change that this program seeks to achieve requires a process that cannot be completed in a short period. The significant progress to date has greatly surpassed expectations and is attributable to:

- ☐ the strength of local partners;
- ☐ a program design that links the powerful tool of community radio with concrete activities in communities, efforts to engage all stakeholders (religious, traditional, and governmental leaders), including those who would be

potential barriers to program success; and,

- a program implementation that was flexible enough to respond to the interests and needs of the community members and resulted in a more holistic approach to increasing women's leadership.

Nonetheless, clear obstacles and challenges remain for sustaining the solid progress to date and for moving forward to build on these accomplishments and to plough this fertile new ground. Issues including social norms that either exclude women or prevent issues that concern them from being addressed, and potential opposition from village chiefs or religious leaders to women's leadership are areas that will take continued and sustained efforts to overcome.

However, the fact that such potential opposition has been overcome in some villages is grounds for optimism.

In many ways, the barriers still there are much more profound because they concern very fundamental societal roles for women and men that have been in place since time immemorial. On the other hand, the breakthroughs that have taken place were themselves unprecedented in many ways, and the positive outcomes brought around those who might never have accepted them only a few years ago. Perhaps that bodes well for the hoped-for changes yet to come. Strategic and optimistic entrepreneurship on the part of the Senegalese women combined with the support and advisement of World Education and ARLS will hopefully contribute to more changes and even loftier successes.

SUCCESS STORY: A woman with hope for Ndirène

Born in 1973, Maty Ndiaye lives in the village of Ndirène, in the rural community of Notto. She grew up in the Casamance, where she attended French school until 8th grade. While Maty was preparing for her 9th grade, her mother passed away. She joined her father in Dakar hoping to continue her studies, but her father had decided to give her away in marriage. Maty's uncles tried to convince her father to allow her to return to school, but he refused. Maty was married and forced to join her husband in his village, Ndirène, and she had to give up her studies.

Fortunately, Maty was not discouraged. She participated in numerous development projects around Ndirène and soon gained the esteem of fellow community members. "People trust me in my village," Maty says. "I have no difficulty mobilizing them because they know that everything I undertake is for their benefit."



Maty Ndiaye conducts an interview in her community.

Today, Maty is a community health agent, and she manages the village health kiosk. She is also Deputy Secretary General of the local well management committee (ASUFOR), for which she also does the accounting. There are only two women in ASUFOR's nine-member committee. Maty and her fellow female committee member try to make sure that their voices are heard by the male members. Maty hopes that more women will join the committee. However, Maty says that people are resistant to changing the current committee.

World Education recruited Maty as a reporter because of her dynamism, her fairness, and her good reputation in the village. After attending all the trainings on different journalistic styles and gender issues, she facilitated focus group discussions with her listening group and the village women's group. Maty is also active in the advocacy campaign for women's leadership.

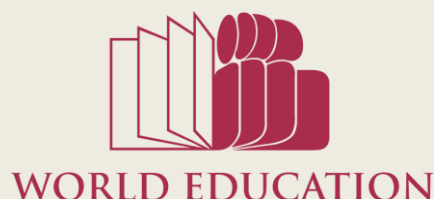
To date, Maty has already done several radio reports on a variety of themes. These reports made her even more popular in her village. "People in the village approve what I do on the radio," Maty says. "Some men call on me to prepare reports on the segments I do with women. People are particularly appreciative that the work being done in the village is now more visible."

Through her reports, Maty has been able to bring to public attention to the important projects that women undertake in her village. For example, when Maty did a report on a woman who started her own market, women from Khombole came to the woman to learn how to replicate her business model.

Today, Maty's ambition is to see the women in Ndirène emerge as a strong force for further development. Maty passionately pursues this goal every day through the radio programs and reports that she presents.

World Education is a nonprofit organization dedicated to improving the lives of the poor through integrated literacy programs, and economic and social development.

This series of technical briefs highlights program approaches that are breaking new ground and achieving results for populations where implemented.



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