



# Boreholes mean business

Yanflé Touré

**A main tenet of providing more accessible water supplies is always 'to save women time'. When the women of Diass gained some extra hours, they wasted no more before plunging into business — with interesting social benefits.**

**In an area which is home to 2000 people, 'more than 18 000m<sup>3</sup> of water are sold each year'**

**B**efore 1991, the women of Diass suffered water shortages. In this Senegalese area of 2000 inhabitants, all the wells had dried up; in addition, when water from Lake Guiers, supplied through waterpoints, stopped getting through, women were forced to travel long distances. Five years ago, a Chinese-financed borehole was built.

### Voluntary managers

Witnessed by the local authorities, the local people elected a six-person management committee. An audit committee helps make sure that the borehole and its two waterpoints are managed properly. Committee members — all volunteers — include four women, vital to the smooth running of the borehole, as women are responsible for the family's water supplies. The local authorities retain overall supervisory rights.

### Profitable — and long-term

A mechanic and two salespeople are paid each month from the proceeds of the sale of water. The mechanic remains at the

borehole all day, but the salespeople only work part-time, when the water is distributed. Their pay is modest, helping keep borehole costs low and, therefore, the cost of water. More than 18 000m<sup>3</sup> of water are sold each year — enough for domestic needs and animal watering. A 30-litre bowl is sold for CFA5 (less than US\$0.01) and the herders pay CFA115 (about \$0.20) per month per animal. This revenue allows the pump to be maintained and its depreciation to be calculated.

### Credit and small business

In March 1996, the management committee made its first loan — of more than CFA1 million (over \$1600) — to seven women's groups. Each group then redistributed the money to individual members for their enterprises — selling fruit, vegetables, and groundnuts. This six-month loan came with an interest rate of 12 per cent, 6 per cent going straight into the borehole kitty, the other half destined for the women's-group funds. The exercise worked well and, since then, loans totalling CFA3m (almost \$5000) have been made. Repayment has not been a problem, with some groups even making payments *before* the deadline. The women's businesses are doing well.

The Diass women are well aware that failure to make repayments is bad for everybody:

- unless the balance of the borehole kitty is healthy, water supplies cannot be sustainable. The women are anxious to avoid a recurrence of the pre-1991 situation;
- the loans help women to build up capital. With their new revenues, traditional credit associations — for example, Idr in Amharic, and Njangi in Nigeria and Cameroon — are working better than ever; and
- the groups can develop as their coffers

People making full use of the waterpoint at Diass, which is linked to the well/borehole.



## gender and water — six years on

are replenished from the 6 per cent interest. It is now possible to envisage collective investment projects.

### Management problems

Naturally, even this successful water-management initiative experiences problems. For example, the finance available is inadequate for supplying water to all parts of the village, because rain erosion has created deep ravines, making it expensive to pipe water from one place to another. The occasional conflict breaks out at waterpoints, showing that more are needed; and, disturbingly, water is lost from some of the waterpoints. In addition, the pump is fairly weak (1hp) which, together with the limited capacity of the reservoir (30m<sup>3</sup>), means that parts of the village go without. Finally, some of the pastoralists do not pay on time.

### New perspectives

In spite of these difficulties, progress is being made. With the interest earned

from the loans and the revenue from the sale of the water, an extension to the network is under construction, and waterpoints are being added in four more village zones — Sakirak, Garage, Ndiorokh and Ndiefun — the trenches have already been completed. What is important is the sustainable management of the borehole, both in terms of finance and maintenance.

This is a beautiful story about women: water finances business which finances water! This is a profitable circuit because it allows the time that is saved in fetching water to be reinvested in money-making activities; the women have been able to develop small business initiatives. Their living conditions have improved as well as their buying power. Women sit on the management committee, which gives them power over the use of water — leading to more equitable relations between the sexes. And last, but definitely not least, water-borne diseases have practically disappeared from the villages involved. ■



The mechanic and the 1hp pump motor for the borehole at Diass.

### about the author

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## resources guide



### Gender and water

There are many more resources on the topic — the ones cited below are the most commonly used and /or recommended by experts. Further, most publications contain an extensive bibliography.

#### Rights

Gender and Property Rights: Proceedings Volume of Gender-Prop International E-mail Conference, IFPRI, Washington, 1997.

116pp. Pbk. First copy free. IFPRI, 1200 17th Street, NW, Washington 20036, USA. Fax: +1 202 467 4439.

#### Gender, Property Rights and Natural Resources

Ruth Meinzen-Dick *et al* IFPRI, Washington, 1997. 46pp. Pbk. First copy free.

How shift from customary tenure systems to private property has affected women; effect of gender differences in property on collective action; and implications for project design.

#### Rights of Women to the Natural Resources Land and Water

NEDA, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, The Hague. 59pp. FREE. ISBN 9 05328 150 9. Copies from Information Desk. Fax +31 70 348 4418.

#### Women and Water Resources: Continued marginalization and new policies

Frances Cleaver and Diane Elson, IIED, London, 1995. 18pp. Pbk. £6.00. ISSN 1357 9258.

#### Irrigation

Women and Waterpumps in Bangladesh: The impact of participation in irrigation groups on women's status  
Barbara van Koppen and Simeen Mahmud, IT Publications, London, 1996.

256pp. Pbk. £9.95. ISBN 1 85339 336 3.

Women's participation and the impact on their status is studied in 35 female and mixed-sex irrigation groups. Background, methodologies and conclusions, with summaries of policy implications.

#### Women and water management

The Community-Managed Sanitation Programme in Kerala: Learning from experience