



CREATE!

Center for Renewable Energy
& Appropriate Technology
for the Environment

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Fall Newsletter

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Women of Senegal: Taking Their Community's Future into Their Own Hands

You'll often hear that women are the backbone of society in Senegal. They are remarkable, strong, and committed to advancing the well-being of their families. Women are also sources of inspiration and strength for the next generation of girls. However, life isn't always easy for women and girls in Senegal, especially in rural areas.

Over half of Senegal's population live in rural areas, and over 30% live on less than \$1.25 per day. Agriculture is the traditional way to make a living in rural communities, but climate change has decreased the means to do so. Men are leaving their villages to make the perilous journey abroad in search of work to support their families. Women are often dependent on their husband's earnings from abroad while they continue to live in the rural villages, facing the challenges of unemployment and food insecurity with their children. Without adequate education, most women are unemployed. It is common for girls to drop out of school at a young age to help their mothers with household chores.

CREATE! helps women utilize their current resources to improve their livelihoods. By providing training, guidance, and space for women to step up to the plate, we are seeing women apply their local knowledge and expertise to improve their own lives and uplift their communities. We are seeing villages start on the path to overcoming food insecurity and creating income generating opportunities in just a matter of months.

Empowering women isn't just about establishing food security and generating a stable income. It's about building women's confidence in their abilities. It's about transforming lives.

Traditionally, women in Senegal are in charge of childcare, housekeeping, and cooking. CREATE! works with communities to develop leadership capacities for women through garden cooperative teams, income generating projects, and Voluntary Savings and Lending Associations (VSLA). Through these groups, women lead both men and women in efforts to redirect their community's future. Men respect and support women's mission for the community. Once women see how they can effectively create change, they begin to believe in their own abilities. Women can proudly say: We did this. We grew this garden, we planted these trees, and we earned this income. This kind of self-actualization is intangible.

Through gaining confidence and security, women develop self-assurance that empowers them to go beyond



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Women of Senegal Continued:

traditional gender roles. *CREATE!* guides women to expand their potential from supporting their families, to uplifting their communities, to preserving the environment. Women are not just creating change on the community level, they are also combating a global issue: environmental issues brought on by climate change. We have seen a large increase in confidence and self-esteem as women discover bigger roles for themselves, and this confidence is spreading. Women look up to other women, and girls look up to the women. It is important for girls to see empowered women, because girls are the next generation of women and leaders.

We have heard women say that *CREATE!* transforms their lives. We say that *CREATE!* supports communities with the tools and training they need, but women transform their lives themselves. We are so proud of the women in these villages who have embraced the challenges and risen to leadership, taking their community's future into their own hands and inspiring others to do the same.



“Our children no longer suffer from malnutrition because they have the possibility to eat fresh vegetables every day.”

- Seynabou Niang, Cooperative President in Diender

Meet Cooperative President, Arame Diop



“As president, I always encourage my group to work hard.”

Arame Diop is the president of the Cooperative Garden Group in Wereyane, a village in the Louga Region of Senegal. “*CREATE!* has changed the village because almost all the women have activities without leaving their families,” Arame describes. “As president I will always encourage my group to work hard.” Currently, Arame and her group are learning and utilizing different gardening techniques that they learned from *CREATE!*'s field technicians. These techniques include organic composting, organic fertilizers, cover crops, and live-tree fencing.

“After graduation, I will be able to manage my own garden,” Arame says. *CREATE!*'s community programs are approximately five years long. Wereyane is beginning their second year in the program and they have already made incredible progress,

thanks to Arame's encouragement and tenacity. At the end of the program, villages graduate to self-sufficiency.

Recently, Arame finished helping her community with a tree-planting project. The community planted a variety of trees for multiple uses such as fruits, nuts, firewood, and live-fences. Arame recalls, “Before *CREATE!* we didn't have many trees in the village because we used to cut them severely without being aware of the inconvenience.” Now that they have replanted, Arame says that these trees will help future generations in her community.

Arame's story shows how deeply people's lives can be affected through training and empowerment at the village level. Her empowerment encourages other women in the village, who in turn, inspire their daughters and the next generation.



A Letter from *CREATE!*'s Founder

Dear friends,

At *CREATE!* we are dedicated to helping communities in rural Senegal improve their conditions of life through sustainable self-development. Part of the self-development process is encouraging women to develop confidence in their own abilities. When you improve the lives of women, you improve the lives of girls as well.

Since 1984, I have been working with both villagers and refugees in Africa to help ameliorate the conditions of hardship in their lives. My work began with the Peace Corps in Togo, where I worked closely with women's groups, teaching them to build the same improved cookstove model that is found in *CREATE!*'s communities today. These women were the inspiration for creating a non-governmental organization (NGO) that would employ the best practices I had learned to help rural African

villages sustainably meet basic human needs. My daily interaction with women's groups gave me insight into the conditions of their lives as well as a deep appreciation for their strength and resilience. I learned that women are often the backbone of family livelihoods and community development. *CREATE!* inspires women just as they inspire us, and we truly honor this mutually reinforcing partnership of shared happiness and success in improving people's lives.

I have many great memories of working alongside women and girls in rural communities, but one story in particular always brings a smile to my face. It happened while I was training a community on how to build the improved cookstove. I was finishing up the training when suddenly, I felt a tug on my pants leg. At my feet was a little 5-year-old girl. "*Monsieur, monsieur, viens voir!*" (mister come and look!), she said, as she proudly presented me with a miniature version of the improved cookstove. She had used an empty tomato paste can as a pot and had built the walls with the same clay-sand mixture that the women were using to construct their cookstoves. It was perfect! She beamed proudly as her mother picked her up and kissed her. It was in this moment, that I knew another generation of girls turning into women would have their own fuel-efficient cookstoves in their kitchens, and that the next generation of women would be willing to step up to the plate, to do what it takes to lead the development of their communities and themselves.



Improved cookstoves enable women to prepare meals using their custom methods and pots more safely and efficiently than on traditional open fires.

My hope for the future is that the communities where we work will lead happier, healthier, and more secure lives. I hope that by developing confidence in their abilities, women will create happy and comfortable lives for themselves and their families, without want or distress. I hope that this will lead to safer and more secure family life, one where girls are healthy, strong in spirit like their mothers, and can pursue an education.

It has been such a privilege to work with rural communities in Africa for over 30 years. But in particular, it has been an honor to work with the rural villages in Senegal and to watch our partner communities, as well as individuals, grow and thrive in the sustainable lifestyles that they've created for themselves. I am looking forward to many more years of success. Thank you for your support and dedication to our work.

Best wishes,

Barry R. Wheeler
Founder

barry@createaction.org



Working to Inspire the Next Generation of Women

Meet Ndeye Fatou Sow and Ndeye Fatou Thiam

Ndeye Fatou Sow (*left*) and Ndeye Fatou Thiam (*right*) are *CREATE!*'s Communications Team in Senegal. Affectionately referred to as *La Presse* or "The Press" by the field technicians, the Communications Team is in charge of documenting our partner villages. Every week Fatou Thiam and Fatou Sow visit the rural villages to take photos and interview community members about the village's activities.



Fatou Thiam and Fatou Sow both agree that they enjoy helping rural communities develop themselves with *CREATE!*. Fatou Sow explains how they like to create good relationships with the women in the rural villages. She describes what it is like when they interview the women, "We introduce ourselves, and joke and laugh with them so that they can be free and are able to express themselves." The interviews are conducted in Wolof, a local language spoken in many of *CREATE!*'s communities. Back in the office, the Communications Team translates the interviews into French and then into English for the U.S. team!

Both Fatou Thiam and Fatou Sow hold BA degrees in English from Cheik Anta Diop University of Dakar. They hope that their work will inspire the girls in the villages to stay in school. "Many years ago," Fatou Thiam says, "People thought that school and working was only for men, but now everybody knows that both girls and boys must go to school." Fatou Sow adds that she hopes that with a good education, the future generation of girls will be able to further develop themselves and their country.

Improving the Livelihoods of Women in Senegal

67%

of women in Senegal are unemployed.

However, **95%**

of women in our partner communities participate in economically productive activities every day.

186

women hold leadership positions across our 15 partner villages.

97%

of our beneficiaries are women.

94-100%

of women in our partner communities achieve a level of dietary diversity associated with good health.

In rural Senegal, over **50%** of women's days are spent preparing meals and collecting firewood.

However, a total of **2,852** hours are saved every day across our partner villages by women using improved cookstoves that they have built themselves.