

Alliance



THEMATIC BRIEF

AVENIR Thematic Brief: Women and youth

The AVENIR project

The Adaptation and Valorization of Entrepreneurship in Irrigated Agriculture (AVENIR) project aims to improve the well-being and resilience of farming households, especially women and youth, in the regions of Tambacounda of Senegal.

AVENIR focuses on smallholder farms that use irrigation and promotes affordable agricultural practices and technologies that can help farming systems become more resilient to a changing climate.

The five-year project aims to directly benefit 10,000 farming households and indirectly benefit up to 35,000 individuals.

AVENIR is funded by Global Affairs Canada and implemented and led by Mennonite Economic Development Associates (MEDA) in partnership with the Alliance of Bioversity International and CIAT.



The Context: Women in Senegal

Women represent more than half of the total population in Senegal and make up 65 percent of the working population. In rural areas, women are mainly engaged in agriculture and animal husbandry and provide more than 70 percent of food production.

Despite their key role in agricultural production, women face major constraints. These include the low representation of women in decision-making bodies, discrimination between men and women in laws, inequality in relation to access to financial resources as well as employment and income-generating opportunities. They are also faced with limited access to quality inputs and use fewer productive inputs (fertilizers, pesticides, improved seeds) compared to men.

Only 20 percent of women have access to financial services and less than 30 percent are involved in governance for their producer organizations. Women also have very limited access to information and new technologies and therefore their tasks become very labor intensive. This is attributed to the gender and generational gaps in access to productive resources which are rooted in cultural norms. A major constraint for women is also their limited access to land. Some women practice irrigated agriculture on only 20 square meter plots.

This unequal access to resources and investment opportunities means women have little economic power, and this limits their contribution to agricultural production, economic growth and the well-being of their families and communities. Improving women's access to resources and their control over those resources can generate significant productivity gains and facilitate their economic empowerment as well as their financial inclusion.



The Context: Youth in Senegal

Senegal is experiencing sustained population growth and has a large youth population. But these young people face many challenges and often have limited opportunities to enter the workforce. Young people represent the social stratum most affected by unemployment, which affects about 18.5 percent of young people aged between 20 and 29 years, compared to 10 percent for adults. The young people lack training, have limited access to financing or are mostly excluded from the financial system. They also have limited access to land.

As a result, many young people are leaving rural areas to look for employment in cities. A number of measures will be needed to guide and support this demographic transition if the desired result is to stimulate productivity and growth in the agricultural sector. To reduce this migration, youth must be provided with proper training, as well as access to land and financing.

The AVENIR approach

Rural Senegalese women are savvy market actors. AVENIR will empower them to work as, and with, entrepreneurial farmers and advocates for sustainable agriculture and water use.

AVENIR's approach leverages the influence of women in communities and enhances their leadership skills. This leads to more and better-quality goods sold in the market, better stewardship of the environment and diversified crops for family well-being and nutrition. AVENIR works to provide women and children with a

future-oriented view to enhance their preparedness for, and reduce vulnerability to, climate risks.

A key aim will be to increase the capacity of women and youth to profitably operate agribusinesses in selected climate-change-adapted value chains such as horticulture, rice and agroforestry based on baobab, cashew and mango trees. Women and young people are differently engaged in the selected value chains. Women are more engaged in horticulture and rice among the gender differences exist in different nodes of the value chain. Women are also more engaged in production and artisanal processing than input supply and marketing. Barriers to entry for women in input supply are lack of financing and limited knowledge. In terms of processing, lack of training for women and young people, limited equipment and processing units are major challenges.

The AVENIR project works to identify and prioritize climate-smart adapted crops following a needs assessment baseline study of farming households conducted by CIAT and Institut Sénégalais de Recherches Agricoles (ISRA). MEDA has conducted market research to ensure that the identified crops have strong market potential with active market actors (buyers and suppliers) within the value chain.

Women and youth are receiving entrepreneurship training and coaching on "farming as a business," including topics ranging from financial management to market-oriented production and processing to the adoption of climate-adapted productive technologies. Focus group discussions with women and youth groups revealed that most farming households do not run their farms as a business and are stuck in the subsistence cycle.

AVENIR links women and youth to appropriate financial products and services for their agriculture and irrigation needs through partnerships with financial service providers and government agriculture and irrigation schemes. For example, the project is working with Holland Greentech, a provider of horticultural services, to improve water productivity by installing drip irrigation and solar pumping and train in its use.

AVENIR also facilitates market linkages for women and youth by identifying and building partnerships with companies (e.g. input suppliers and offtakers) who can extend their supply chains to include women and youth, or who can provide products and services to them.

Smart incentives, including matching grants and e-vouchers, for buyers and input suppliers will enable AVENIR to provide innovative, market-driven, climate-



adapted solutions to farming households. AVENIR will pilot multiple approaches to support aggregation of production, including the development of female/youth sales agents as entrepreneurial providers of products and services to a network of producers and processors at the community level. AVENIR is building the awareness of project partners and collaborators in implementing gender sensitive and transformative approaches. This includes gender empowerment focusing on the nested and layered relationships of women, youth and men in households, communities and institutions.

Social empowerment can involve many dimensions, including personal agency, confidence, leadership and decision making. With local partners, such as Seye Agrobusiness, EXPERNA, AFEX and Eco from Africa. The project will encourage women and youth to recognize their own entrepreneurial strengths and abilities. Activities will build confidence to manage improved agribusinesses and engage in leadership roles in groups and associations to improve water resource management and champion climate-change adaptation.



Case Study: EXPERNA

EXPERNA (Inter-village Agreement for the Export of Natural and Agricultural Resources) is a youth-founded and youth-led organization that epitomizes the fresh and forward-thinking leadership necessary to promote sustainable and climate-smart rural enterprises. EXPERNA brings together a hundred producer groups in the department of Goudiry in Tambacounda.

EXPERNA is oriented towards a local economic development model based on agroforestry and entrepreneurship (production, processing and marketing of local products) and crop diversity (sesame, moringa, baobab, bissap, horticulture, etc.).

EXPERNA operates a model farm where women and youth can receive training. As part of the AVENIR

project on the climate-smart agriculture approach, the EXPERNA farm is used as a site to demonstrate an intensive rice system and agroforestry practices.

The intensive rice system is based on the rational management of seedlings, soils, water and nutrients without an over-reliance on inorganic manure. It allows the plant to maximize its production potential. The project helps reduce poverty in rural areas and helps ensure food security by improving rice productivity. The farm is trialing ISRIZ 12, a new rice variety adapted to plateau conditions, and demonstrates good agricultural practices with the use of organic matter and fertilization (microdosing and deep urea placement).

EXPERNA also uses the model farm to introduce women and youth to agroforestry techniques. Baobab trees are interspersed with market garden crops such as chili, okra, onion and bissap. The demonstration focuses a new orchard model that allows the domestication of baobab and market gardening production to increase the supply of fruits and vegetables. This innovative approach promotes the preservation of baobab stands thus improving biodiversity and raising awareness of the importance of the tree in the stability of the ecosystem. Women and youth can learn how to implement good agricultural practices and use drip irrigation systems adapted to each crop and environmental conditions.



Conclusion

Commercial value chains for high-value products such as agroforestry and vegetables are growing rapidly in Tambacounda. This presents many opportunities for women and youth employment, but does require that major constraints and challenges, such as access to land and information, are overcome.

AVENIR is working to strengthen women's participation in climate-adapted value chains by building capacities, creating market linkages, and organizing smallholder farmers in a way that allows them to maximize agency to leverage access to finance and market opportunities.

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Further reading

- Prioritizing value chains for climate-smart agriculture (CSA) promotion in Mali, Niger and Senegal <https://ccafs.cgiar.org/resources/publications/prioritizing-value-chains-climate-smart-agriculture-csa-promotion-mali>
- Gender and youth responsiveness considerations for targeting, testing and scaling suitable CSA practices and technologies: learnings from the climate-smart villages <https://ccafs.cgiar.org/es/resources/publications/gender-and-youth-responsiveness-considerations-targeting-testing-and>
- Youth engagement in Climate-Smart Agriculture in Africa: opportunities and challenges <https://ccafs.cgiar.org/resources/publications/youth-engagement-climate-smart-agriculture-africa-opportunities>

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