



A Cleaner Community for Senegal

Public sanitation has been a problem in Senegal for years. In many communities, litter is scattered everywhere. Small piles of rubbish accumulate in front of homes and emit sharp, black smoke as residents attempt to incinerate them. A widespread lack of plumbing means that wastewater -- from the washing of dishes or laundry -- is dumped nearby, creating wet breeding grounds for insects and bacteria. Rain gutters running along main roads frequently have a noxious mix of refuse and standing water in the rainy season.

Marketplaces pose a particular sanitation challenge, given their high concentration of people including meat and vegetable vendors, and customers, in addition to refuse from restaurants and livestock, and the abundance of product packaging and plastic bags. Many of the 16,000 citizens of the central Senegalese town of Kougheul have long been troubled by such conditions.

The town had no formal sanitation system, nor even a designated community garbage dump, so waste disposal was a haphazard, individual affair. Forty-year-old Khady Top, who has sold kola nuts and other small products in the local market for over twenty years, was frustrated with the unsanitary conditions both in the marketplace and at home prior to recent assistance from USAID.



Photo: DGL Felo

Khady Top, resident of Kougheul, Senegal, and kola nut vendor, at the now much cleaner town market.

Numerous efforts to change conditions in Kougheul were stopped by a lack of coordination, communication, and leadership. By mid-2003, however, the combination of a new local administration and help from USAID was beginning to have a positive impact on the sanitation situation in Kougheul. USAID worked with Kougheul citizens to respond to public concern over sanitation issues, and collaborated with the local leadership to organize a series of diagnostic meetings on the subject.

The first phase of the community's efforts resulted in the "Clean Town of Kougheul" initiative, which focused on practical steps that would have an immediate impact. In addition, Kougheul created a community-wide sanitation management structure to assure the sustainability of its long-term plan. The new management system establishes clearly defined responsibilities for organizations such as the defunct health committees, and expands the periodic clean-up program to involve women's groups, neighborhood chiefs, and the health committees in addition to youth groups.

"African tradition delegates cleanliness to women, but to make sanitation sustainable, you need the commitment and participation of the entire population and its local officials."

- Dr. Djir Diagne, chief physician

According to municipal officials and citizens, one of the most important results of Kougheul's efforts has been the emergence of a sense of shared responsibility for the community's sanitation. People don't litter as much. Many households have begun bagging their garbage and people cover their used water puddles with sand. And more households pay garbage collection local officials.

