

It started with a conversation among members of a women's farming group in Affe Tidiane, a small village in the Kaolack region of central Senegal. "The leader of the women's group said we should have a meeting and ask everyone what they wanted to do," says Helen Fallat, a Peace Corps volunteer working in the village from 2006 to 2008. "I thought that sounded simple enough."

But the challenges that the community was facing were anything but simple. Like much of the rest of western Africa, Affe Tidiane is experiencing increasing periods of drought and water scarcity. Dependence on a few staple crops such as millet and peanuts, combined with a lack of access to markets and reduced wholesale prices, pressures the men to leave the village for much of the year to try to earn money in nearby towns and cities. Women are left at home to take care of the children and figure out how to feed everyone. While men are focused on earning an annual income, says Fallat, "the women are thinking about what is going in the bowl for lunch on a daily basis."

Transplanting eucalyptus trees from the tree nursery to the garden. (Photo credit: Helen Fallat)

The community decided to start facing these growing challenges head on. Using the Peace Corps' Participatory Analysis for Community Action (PACA) program, Fallat helped facilitate a discussion about how to best address the financial, dietary and environmental challenges in the community. PACA is a series of activities and discussions that help communities identify solutions to challenges, better understand the impact of gender roles and relations in community development, and identify existing strengths and assets to use to their advantage.

What is critical to establish, according to Fallat, is the difference between wants and needs, and what will benefit the most people at a single time. "And in the midst of all these big questions, we also ask the group to examine the rules and social regulations that they take for granted," says Fallat. "We separated the men and women to make sure that everyone could be heard," and asked for suggestions before bringing everyone back together for a final vote. The village decided that what they wanted to do—and what they could afford to do—was improve their community garden.

The newly installed public faucet for the garden. (Photo credit: Helen Fallat)

The strength was the garden, what the community wanted to improve was its sustainability. Women headed the project up. "The very first step was to build a fence," according to Fallat. "We needed to keep the goats away from the crops and so the women developed a system of pooling money to save up for the fence. Immediately they took ownership of their project and became invested." The garden consisted of eggplant, tomato, lettuce, onion, carrot, okra, and tall, thorny bushes that lined the outside of the garden to create a live fence. The berries on the bushes are edible as are the leaves of the "never die" trees, otherwise known as *moringa oleifera*, that also act as a barrier for gusting winds.

To address irrigation, the women decided to raise money for running water. The village already had a well where women collected the water for the garden and for their homes. But it was hard work to lift the buckets of water they needed each day.

"So we had another meeting," says Fallat, "and we applied for a grant to expand the running water for the village into the garden." Fallat raised approximately \$USD 2,500 from abroad, but the village was responsible for raising USD\$300 of the total USD\$3,000 needed. "It was truly a community effort," according to Fallat.

Now Affe Tidiane is a regional hub for sustainable agriculture trainings and irrigation workshops, has created a profitable market run by women, and acts as a model for other villages to follow. "The most obvious benefit of the garden and the running water is that now they have more fresh vegetables for the community," says Fallat. "But they are also building relationships with farmers throughout the region, and forming a network of farming knowledge that they will continue to benefit from for years to come."

To read more about innovations that benefit the whole community, see: [Cultivating Health, Community, and Solidarity](#), [Cultivating an Interest in Agriculture and Wildlife Conservation](#), [Malawi's Real Miracle](#), [Emphasizing](#)

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