

# outbursts

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## A 4-H Program in Senegal?

*New program lets youth work toward food security*

By Hannah Samlall

Children in the Senegalese village of Santanba are growing vegetable seedlings and selling them in the community. They are raising money by hosting traditional Senegalese wrestling events for the village. They are working with a women's group to build a community center. This level of youth engagement was not the case when Ozzie Abaye, professor in the Department of Crop and Soil Environmental Sciences in the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, arrived in Senegal in 2013.

"I saw a lot of youth and young people with time on their hands" Abaye says. "I started thinking it would be really good if we actually motivated these young people to understand agriculture, to become agriculturalists and to be involved in family farms and their communities."

In Senegal, the 4-H Positive Youth Development program encourages young people to get involved. In March 2015, several groups banded together to launch



Students from the Ndoumbouji primary school 4-H club stand with their 4-H leader in front of the school garden.

the program, including the U.S. Agency for International Development-funded Education and Research in Agriculture in Senegal program (ERA-Senegal) and Virginia Cooperative Extension. Managed by Virginia Tech, ERA-Senegal is part of USAID's Feed the Future initiative, an effort to address the root causes of global hunger and poverty.

Efforts have been extraordinarily successful so far, according to Abaye. At the Ndoumbouji primary school, where the main focus is a gardening program, "the teachers told us that at every break the students run to the garden," Abaye says. "The group wants to expand the garden project outside of the campus."

In Santanba, the kids are working on several projects. One involves growing vegetables that will be sold to community members. The group is also working with a women's

organization to build a community center. They are also raising money by hosting traditional Senegalese wrestling events and charging admission to community members. "What's interesting to me is that when we asked to meet with the 4-H club, it wasn't just the club that showed up," Abaye says. "The entire community turned out. They are very happy that the kids are involved in doing something meaningful."

The third program is in the village of Toubacouta and involves college-bound students. "They're not necessarily interested in community gardens," Abaye says. "These kids are actually interested in bigger projects that generate money but are still connected to agriculture. They are interested in making compost and maybe selling the compost

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*Gender specialist Bineta Guisse receives a plaque from Cathy Sutphin, associate director of 4-H, for completing 4-H Youth Development Training conducted by Virginia Cooperative Extension and 4-H.*

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for fertilizer soil. They have written a small proposal to submit to ERA-Senegal to get some money going to initiate their activities."

The 4-H program began with a 10-day training session that aimed to set and create a positive learning environment for the youth of the community. Three clubs were established with different goals and age groups. The Ndoumbouji primary school includes ages 8 to 13, the village of Santanba includes ages 7 to 15, and Toubacouta includes ages 15 to 17.



Above, Virginia Tech student Aubrey Stephenson, top left, of the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, was part of a team of students who planted vegetables and trees, made silage, and purified water in Senegal. She is pictured here in the village of Toubacouta. Below, Virginia Tech student Katlyn Smith, center, gardens with Santanba schoolchildren.

Since the 4-H Youth Development program began, Abaye has seen things turn around among youth in the communities.

"I have introduced a new leguminous crop called the mung bean," Abaye says. "Two or three of these young kids have asked me if I can bring back mung beans because they want to grow them and sell them to generate money. You can see the sparkle in their eyes."

### WHY 4-H?

4-H stands for head, heart, hands and health. Since 1902, 4-H has been mentoring and advising young people on topics such as leadership, citizenship and other life skills all over the United States. 4-H, along with land-grant universities across the United States, has implemented these programs around the world to address urgent global needs. The 4-H Postive Youth Development Program in Senegal addresses food insecurity and encourages young people to be involved in and well-informed about their communities.

### SUSTAINING THE PROGRAM



Ozzie Abaye, professor in the Department of Crop and Soil Environmental Sciences

The five-year capacity-building project, begun in 2010, was scheduled to be completed by September 2015 but has been extended for another year. "Some of the problems associated with creating these programs in developing countries involve sustainability," says Virginia Tech's Ozzie Abaye. "The ERA-Senegal project is a capacity-building project, so in order for this 4-H program to continue progressing, it has to be run by universities in Senegal. Our efforts actually include faculty members from several partner institutions in Senegal. We hope that when we finish and leave the country, the project will continue."



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