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SNAPSHOT

Strengthening Women's Property Rights in Tortiya through Mining Site Rehabilitation

Côte d'Ivoire efforts to rehabilitate old mining sites are improving women's access to land and their control over it



Photo: Emile Kpan

A Fotemowoban group member plants onion seeds on group-rehabilitated land.

"The land chief in Songholokaha [a neighboring village] gave us this big portion of land as our own to start whatever farming activities we wanted on it. He didn't think that this land would be very useful since it is full of holes from mining activities, but it is perfect for rice and vegetable farming since we have year-round access to water."

—Mrs. Silué Tiewa
President of Fotemowoban Women's Group

Telling Our Story

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As in many West African countries, women in Côte d'Ivoire face discrimination, especially in regard to ownership of productive assets such as land. This is exacerbated in such places as the diamond mining area of Tortiya, a small town in the nation's northern section.

Because diamond deposits have been mined out over the past fifteen years around this town, diamond miners are now turning to such alternatives as agriculture. Land once mined by companies—and then later by artisanal miners—is being converted into cashew tree orchards and utilized in other agricultural activities, but women often are excluded from these opportunities. Women generally lack access to fertile agricultural lands, unlike men.

The USAID Property Rights and Artisanal Diamond Development (PRADD) II project addresses these challenges through its support of livelihood activities for women's groups. One notable example of the project's work is *Wobewognon* (meaning "we are together"), an association of about 40 women farmers. Last year, *Wobewognon* started rehabilitating land for agricultural production on exhausted mining sites in the lowlands around Tortiya town. PRADD II helped the women strengthen tenure security by (1) obtaining permission from the customary owner to access the land; (2) completing the customary cultural practices to acquire the land; and (3) encouraging women to use available tools and labor to do the most challenging manual work. The women in *Wobewognon* succeeded, and PRADD II is now supporting other such women's groups to copy this initiative in growing vegetables or rice on similar rehabilitated sites.

PRADD II reinforces women's land rights in Tortiya by clarifying rights and encouraging the use of small lowland plots. This rights clarification process, one women's group explained, has been successful, because Tortiya land chiefs now recognize their claims. Even more importantly, chiefs in the surrounding communities do as well. Women were granted ownership rights, because village land chiefs perceived mined-out lands to be of low quality. Despite the elders' thinking that women would

“Tools provided by the PRADD II project allowed us to mobilize more group members to farm this area, and each of us can have as much surface as we are able to farm. There is still more than half of this surface available, but filling diamond holes take some efforts, and we’ve just started. This land is ours, we will farm it bit by bit until we have farmed it all, and we look forward to good techniques that ANADER will bring us to increase the fertility of the soil.”

—The Fotemowoban Women’s Group



Photo by Emile Koan

Cabbage is harvested from a rehabilitated site.

“ANADER technicians are teaching us a lot, especially in transplanting rice and vegetables, so we can avoid drowning crops with rain which we can’t control”

—A member of the Diguissème Women’s Group



Photo by Emile Koan

A watering system is under construction on the Diguissème rehabilitated site.

never do much with that land, women gained the same ownership rights that men have.

Once the women had gained control over the land, two other women’s groups—*Fotemowoban* (meaning “there will be nothing to stop us from moving forward”) and *Diguissèmè* (meaning “land is our hope”)—hired young men to fill in abandoned diamond pits, leaving the deepest holes open as wells for dry-season irrigation. PRADD II provided the tools for this effort. PRADD II then contracted ANADER, the national rural development agency, to help these women’s groups increase crop production. ANADER is providing agricultural guidance to the women farming these rehabilitated lands. For the first time, the women are learning new agricultural techniques and practices.

The three groups—comprising nearly 120 women—rehabilitated almost 8 hectares of mined-out diamond pits in 2015. They farm all year long, focusing mainly on corn and rice during the rainy season and such vegetables as onions, lettuce, eggplants, and okra in the dry season. *Fotemowoban* harvested 600 kilograms of rice in November 2015. That harvest has inspired them to rehabilitate more land for vegetable farming and (for next year) more rice farming. Their success has also drawn much acclaim from local authorities.

Despite these achievements, women’s groups still face persistent challenges. Because such cash crops as cashews and cotton are the focus of regional economic development, local development policies don’t support the groups’ rehabilitation of mined-out sites. As women expand food production dramatically, they run the risk of saturating the local Tortiya market. New markets need to be found. Unfortunately, a recently allocated diamond mining concession may lead to interdictions against the groups’ farming in the lowlands.

PRADD II will continue to support these groups’ organizational growth, as new market outlets need to be found for the surplus produced each season in nearby urban centers. PRADD II also will help these women’s groups participate in the decision-making processes that affect the future of their land in Tortiya, more importantly.

Hopefully, the women’s hard-won gains will not be lost.