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CASE STUDY
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► Improved working conditions, productivity and income for formalized women tanners

Guédiawaye Artisanal Tanners
Cooperative, **Senegal**

This document is part of a series of case studies by the Enterprises Department of the ILO. Each case study presents one or several approaches that contribute to enterprise formalization across the world. The case studies provide a snapshot on a particular initiative and may not be exhaustive.

Women tanners in Senegal are informal own-account workers who perform a hazardous job under harsh conditions often without any protective gear. In addition to being exposed to work-related accidents and illnesses, they are discriminated against due to negative hygiene perceptions associated with the tanning practice.¹

1 Unless otherwise stated, the information in this case study is a summary of the paper by Seck et al. (2017) *"Transition de l'économie informelle vers l'économie formelle: L'expérience de la coopérative des tanneuses de Guediawaye, Dakar - Senegal"*.



Improved working conditions, productivity and income for formalized women tanners Guédiawaye Artisanal Tanners Cooperative, Senegal

In 2013, the National Federation of Independent Trade Unions of Senegal (UNSAS) launched a programme to formalize women tanners in Guédiawaye, a suburb of Dakar. The ILO supported the International Confederation of Unions (CSI) and several other overseas organisations to create the Cooperative des Tanneuses de Guédiawaye (COOPTAG) and facilitated action planning and training of women.

The cooperative was established to overcome two main challenges which tanners faced:

1. Lack of bargaining capacity made them vulnerable to fluctuations of production input prices, unable to negotiate a fair price with their buyers and ill-equipped to convince local authorities to grant them the land title for their site of operations.
2. Limited productive capacity due to low-self esteem, illiteracy, limited business capacity, and lack of occupational health and safety procedures.

To support the women in overcoming these challenges, COOPTAG took the following actions:

1. Capacity building for members: Women were trained in literacy, business management and organizational skills to equip them to manage the cooperative and their business. Moreover, women were trained in leadership skills to help address their self-esteem issues. COOPTAG also received a digital application that was used to manage activities such as client tracking, inventory

management, turnover tracking and receipt issuing (ILO, 2019).

2. Improved occupational safety and health at work: Capacity building workshops in occupational health and safety were organized which assessed and addressed health risks and improved working conditions.
3. Creation of a revolving fund: Since the women were unable to access services from microfinance providers due to savings and guarantee requirements and high-interest rates, the cooperative created a fund through the cooperative's membership fees.
4. Collective purchases and sales: As a registered cooperative, COOPTAG was able to buy in bulk and issue official invoices. This gave them the leverage to negotiate better with existing suppliers and engage with new ones. Using the fund that was created, they purchased inputs when prices were low and stored them, which enabled them to lower their costs through economies of scale. Moreover, they were able to negotiate with buyers such as artisans and shoemakers and get fair prices for their products.
5. Obtaining a land title for the site of operation: As a formal legally recognized cooperative, COOPTAG was able to obtain the land title which made it possible to build facilities that improved working conditions and operations.



Today, the cooperative has 76 members. The actions taken have empowered the women and built their self-esteem and competence and they now engage in social dialogue with local authorities to reclaim their rights as workers. Furthermore, between February 2016 and June 2017, they increased their revenues by an estimated 20 per cent. Finally, improved facilities and working conditions, as well as the use of proper protective equipment resulted in a clean and healthy working environment for the women.

5. Resources

- 🔗 International Labour Organization. 2019. [Informal Female Tanners in Senegal](#). Geneva: International Labour Organization.
- 🔗 Sale Seck, M., N'Diaye F. C., and Khai, T.T. 2017. [Transition de l'économie informelle vers l'économie formelle: L'expérience de la coopérative des tanneuses de Guediawaye, Dakar - Senegal](#). Dakar: International Labour Organization.



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