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## SUCCESS STORY

# ICT training of 600 West Africans provides computer literacy and more

**Equipped with computer training, agricultural producers and traders increasingly use electronic media to manage their associations and access trading opportunities.**



Photo: Kofi Debrah, COP MISTOWA

*The Federation of Market Producers of Niayes (FPMN) of Senegal led the way, moving from a handwritten ledger notebook system to an electronic database record-keeping system, accurately tracking their members and monitoring trade activity.*

When the MISTOWA (Market Information Systems and Trader Organizations in West Africa) project first provided ICT training to agricultural producers and traders in Nigeria, the participants were worried they would never grasp how to use the new technology. However, they soon realized that acquiring basic computer skills and learning to use Excel was easier than they imagined. In addition, accessing the World Wide Web would fundamentally change their lives—for the better. Habibu Rabiou Yalwa, a proud trainee in Nigeria, now boasts of being able to send e-mail messages to friends, family and business associates alike.

Participants like Mr. Yalwa are now confident that they can use e-mail and the Internet to identify suppliers, compare prices and assess market conditions across the region. This has expanded new opportunities to those who were previously limited to national or traditional information networks. By logging on to [www.wa-agritrade.net](http://www.wa-agritrade.net), Mr. Yalwa, a cereal trader, can now access pricing information in cities and towns all over West Africa, even if he is not privy to the traditional information networks.

While ICT training may have opened up a whole new world for its participants, building the capacity of agricultural producer and trader associations to access the West African market is also recognized as essential to increasing trade and providing food security in the region. Since its official launching in February 2005, the USAID-funded MISTOWA project has provided ICT training to nearly six hundred (600) producers and traders.

Many associations are using their newfound skills to better manage their organizations. After a recent ICT training program by MISTOWA, the Federation of Market Producers of Niayes (FPMN) of Senegal, switched from a manual notebook ledger system to an electronic-based record-keeping system. With the aid of an Excel spreadsheet, the association members now realize that they can more accurately manage their member database and even track production and sales figures. FPMN staff welcome the changes because they no longer need to spend hours manually searching for information through tomes of ledger notebooks.