

# Abdoulaye Diagne, Senegalese Economist



Abdoulaye Diagne at a MIMAP conference. (IDRC Photo: Jean-Marc Fleury)

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*Jean-Marc Fleury*

Abdoulaye Diagne smiles easily and often. His cheerful demeanour belies the enormous challenge posed by the fight against poverty, the focus of his research and his daily work.

The director of the Centre de recherche en économie appliquée (CRÉA) at the [Université Cheikh Anta Diop/Dakar](#), Dr Diagne is also the coordinator of the [Micro Impacts of Macroeconomic and Adjustment Policies \(MIMAP\)](#) program in Senegal. Supported by the International Development Research Centre (IDRC), the MIMAP program analyzes poverty reduction strategies in more than a dozen countries around the world. And recently, Diagne has been standing next to Senegalese authorities negotiating Senegal's eligibility to [The World Bank Group/Debt Initiative for Heavily Indebted Poor Countries \(HIPC\)](#).

## **Poverty, a new science**

Poverty, once the preserve of charitable organizations and bureaucrats, is emerging as a new science. For researchers and intellectuals in the South, poverty is part of their daily landscape and they are determined to play a role in defining this field as it evolves.

"Previously, Senegalese academics did not work on poverty," says Mr Diagne. "Many studies were done, but by foreign consultants."

This changed with the advent of MIMAP. "Thanks to MIMAP, our institute was able to carry out research on poverty," says Diagne. "Three to four months after we started our research, we were designated the technical partners of the Ministry of Economics and Finance to develop the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) required as part of the HIPC process." This paper is supposed to reflect consensus among government bodies, local experts, development partners, and citizens' organizations. It is also supposed to clearly state how the country intends to use the free-up funds to reduce poverty.

"We produced a document," says Diagne, which served as the launchpad for the consultative process leading to drafting the PRSP.

"The barriers fell very quickly, and we now have joint teams involving our researchers and those of the administration." Adds Dr Diagne: "Now it's as if there is no one involved but ourselves. I don't see consultants any more."

### **From natural scientist to economist**

Initially, Abdoulaye Diagne had intended to pursue a career in the natural sciences. Circumstances, however, have made him a specialist of another science – economics. After completing his master's degree in economics at the Université de Dakar, he was awarded a fellowship to study in France, where he obtained a doctorate from the Université d'Orléans.

After completing his studies Dr Diagne was offered a teaching position in France. But he decided to return to Senegal where, in 1982, he became a professor at the Université de Dakar. He continued his research on the common features of various African monetary systems to better understand the notion of monetary independence. In 1990, Diagne was appointed director of the department of economics, then director of CRÉA whose mandate is to carry out research on social and economic conditions in Senegal and in Africa and to conduct applied research leading to decision making.

### **At the helm of CRÉA**

Dr Diagne's appointment gave CRÉA a new lease on life. Mr Diagne has overseen the growth of CRÉA from an institution with virtually no budget to one with 25 active researchers and a series of regular publications: 17 of the researchers are part of the MIMAP team.

These researchers are part of the larger MIMAP network, which includes more than 40 teams from Africa, Asia, and Canada. At a September 2001 workshop that brought together MIMAP's teams from five African countries in Dakar, Dr Diagne and his team made some half-a-dozen presentations on their work.

"I am delighted with the spirit of the MIMAP network ... the researchers' freedom to explore research issues, to discuss with their counterparts in the North, Africa, and Asia," says Diagne. "We can dive into a true research environment and, at the same time, enjoy a great many friendships. It is truly a fulfilling environment for researchers."

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