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Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,
Once again it is a pleasure for me to send you the first newsletter for the year 2015 and keep you updated.

Since the end of last year up to now I have been busy, but enjoying the field work with my friends (farmers). Before undertaking vegetable production in December, we had to finish the harvest of field crops around mid-November. However, due to insignificant rainfall this year the yield of field crops was bad in most part of Senegal except from the southern part of the country. As you might know in West Africa in general and Senegal in particular the rainy season is within a period of about two months, unlike in other parts of Africa where the rainy season lies within a period of about six months or plus. Local farmers cannot afford irrigation for field crops which are mostly grown here such as: corn, millet, beans, okra, etc... Thus, they rely 100% on the rains. Once there is such an unexpected shortage of rains it usually results in some serious losses. It was painful to realize that all the efforts women and men invested in their fields resulted in a quarter or less harvest than expected.



Okra field ready for first harvest

Early December 2014 we started transplanting some vegetable crops, mostly onions, eggplants and tomatoes at two main sites in the villages of Pointe Sarene and Ndoffongor. In the village of Pointe Sarene we worked through training and offering guidance to a group of 30 people and 14 of them received from us loans which served as capital.

To materialize all the theories these farmers were taught, a demonstration plot was set at the Pointe Sarene site. We have been working together with them from land preparation, planting, watering, and weeding. I told them that this plot is ours, don't watch it from far as if it is for myself. This was a way to encourage participation from everyone. Most of them came to take ownership of the field and the farming activities.



Explanation before planting on the demonstration plot

During field visits as we were standing in a field, a local farmer, wearing some smile on his face, told me that "we have been applying all the techniques that you taught us and I can see the way my crops (eggplants and onion) are growing, we will have a good harvest this year". Such words encourage me a lot and give me joy.



Farmer's eggplant's field

In Ndoffongor, which is located at about 60 miles from Dakar we started an experimental onion project for the mission. The plot is about an acre. The field in Ndoffongor also serves as demonstration field to the community of farmers we offer guidance to in that area.



Planting onion on the experimental field in Ndoffongor

At both sites we expect to harvest the main crop for this growing season in March, and you will receive my next newsletter late April or early May. But, if you want some information before I send my next newsletter feel free to reach me through e-mail (dmakobo@umcmmission.org).

From January 27-29, 2015 I attended Echo West Africa Summit on sustainable agriculture. Echo is a nonprofit interdenominational Christian

organization which serves to strengthen work of both missionaries and national churches as they reach out to those who are farming under difficult conditions.

Since I still need to know more about agriculture in West Africa, it was important for me to attend the summit so that we can share ideas and learn from each other experiences. There were 105 participants from 12 countries. The common challenge shared by most of us was the shortage and irregularity of rainfall which can't be compensated by irrigation for field crops and scarcity of land. The scarcity of land makes difficult soil conservation under sustainable agriculture. This is because farmers hire or borrow land for one growing season without a guaranty of using it the next growing season. So, once the land is lost, the farmer would start again the soil management on the new piece of land. Please keep us in prayers so that together with farmers we can overcome these challenges.



Echo forum participants in Ouagadougou

Thank you so much for your prayers, your moral and your generous financial supports.

May God bless you abundantly!

Yours in the Lord's service,

David MAKOBO