

# A Day of Celebration for Women

*“I am happy to have been committed to this class because now I can sew clothes for my baby.”*

## **Sister Elisabetta La Manna, SFP**

Samine, Senegal - May 5, 2007

During this second year of our presence in Samine my work has focused on daily visits to the various villages to gather the women, spend a few hours with them and give them the opportunity to learn how to sew.

I accepted the invitation of Fr. Bruno, our Pastor, to serve in the villages, though it seemed to me not so easy to carry out. I especially knew it would be especially hard for the women to attend faithfully this itinerant class to the end. There may be many reasons – from eyesight problems for the older ones to having hands ruined from working the land, to their underestimating their ability to learn how to sew and the many obstacles that women encounter in the family. Usually they are the only ones to be involved in their children’s upbringing and in their financial support.



Though I felt perplexed I decided to begin by having complete trust in the women, getting close to them, working with them to help them protect their own interests and the interest of their groups. This is for me an opportunity to get to know their wishes and expectations in order to promote their status and condition within the villages.

My daily visits to the six villages where I had committed to teach have been rewarding especially when I realized how the women have been responsible, and the older ones overcame their impatience when they could not thread the needles and the women had to sit there and begin learning how to cut and sew – underwear, shirts, clothes for their babies. It was a big surprise for everyone at the end to see the result of their work of the past five months. The class began in November and ended in March – quite abruptly – due to the harvest of cajou, a fruit that women and children need to harvest to feed the whole family.

I could not end the year without organizing a party for all the women. The goal was to spend a day together to get to know one another, sing, dance, play, eat a good jeebu yappa (rice with meat). The women were happy to have been invited for the party that would take place on April 19th.

On the day of the party the women arrived from the neighboring villages carrying their babies on their backs. Much to my surprise one hundred women came, all gathered in the yard of our parish in Samine. They were women of different races: Manjak, Manding and Balante, both Christians and Muslims. They were tired from their journey, but happy to share with others the joy of having a day dedicated to them. We began with a show of the products each one had made while the music played and the women danced accordingly.

During a moment devoted to listening to each other's experiences, one woman said: "I am happy to have been committed to this class because now I can sew clothes for my baby." Another remarked, "Before I didn't know how to hold a needle in my hand, but now I can sew in different stitches." Another said, "I am happy to see all these things the women from villages like mine have made."



The meal was abundant and very much appreciated. They said, "Thank you, thank you, we ate well, everything was delicious." The music continued to enliven the celebration and so did all the dances from the different ethnic groups – Mandenga, Balante, Mancagna. The party ended with a small goody bag received by each one. As they opened them, you could hear their expressions of joy in the various languages.

As the women went back to their villages, they bore witness to everyone the joy of living together with simplicity.