



Niger © Eliane Nejros

Dimitra Clubs: a unique approach

The FAO Dimitra listeners' clubs are groups of women, men and young people – mixed or not – who decide to organize themselves to work together to bring about changes in their communities. They meet regularly to discuss the challenges they face in their daily lives, make decisions and take action to resolve their problems.

Set up in several sub-Saharan African countries, these clubs have been successful wherever they have been established. The formula is a simple one: the determination of community members to mobilize, a wind-up solar-powered radio – sometimes paired with a mobile phone, close collaboration with community radio stations, support from FAO, some flexibility and ... the process can start!

As a result, the club members will be able to make their voices heard and to face challenges together.

FAO uses the Dimitra Clubs approach in support of its strategic objectives, especially the one concerning poverty reduction. This includes supporting the empowerment of rural communities, strengthening formal and informal farmer organizations, as well as local governance.

But what is it that makes the Dimitra Clubs so special? This fact sheet answers that question by highlighting the eight key features of these clubs, and which make the approach unique.

Eight key features of the Dimitra Clubs

Access to information and communication

The clubs enable members to access relevant information that responds to their needs (for example, about available services, market access, prices, agricultural innovations, etc.) and to communicate on any subject that is of interest to them, in particular through discussions in the clubs and radio broadcasts.

An action-oriented mechanism

The clubs are geared for action. Club members hold discussions to find and implement solutions to development problems that affect the community. These are issues and priorities that they themselves have identified, while the solutions sought are those that can be carried out using local resources.

Autonomy and ownership

The clubs belong to their members! It is they who manage the clubs and decide how they should be run, including the subjects to be discussed, the frequency of meetings and the type of monitoring. This contributes to improving autonomy and accountability, and strengthens the willingness to make changes and take action, all of which favour ownership and the sustainability of the clubs' initiatives.

Participation

The clubs stimulate the active and voluntary participation of the whole community, whether it concerns decision-making, discussions or actions.

Gender approach and gender equality

All members, whatever their sex and social standing, have the opportunity to make themselves heard. The clubs pay special attention to the inclusion of groups that are marginalized or whose potential is undervalued, such as women and youth.

Networking

A club is never alone. It is part of a network that seeks to share and build on experiences. At community level, interaction is at the core of the approach, whether it be between listeners' club members or with other listeners' clubs, community radios, government services or other development partners.

Collaboration with community radio

The clubs do not depend on radio stations, but they develop a win-win partnership with them, based on confidence and mutual respect. Partner radio stations relay the voices of club members and become "radios by the community, for the community".

Support from FAO-Dimitra

During the first few years, the clubs receive guidance and strong technical support. This is crucial for ensuring the clubs' full ownership of the methodology, the quality of implementation and respect for the principles and features that make the clubs approach unique.



DKC, Orientale Province © Christian Akimami



Burundi © Gustave Ntaraka

What about impact?

Over 1300 Dimitra Clubs exist in sub-Saharan Africa today, involving about 30.000 women and men. Impact has been achieved in a number of different areas.

Social mobilization and local governance

The Dimitra clubs encourage their members and the communities to play an active role in development. They promote social mobilization and the participation of rural people in the economic, political and social life of their community. The process strengthens transparency, local governance and the social fabric.

Structuring the rural world

As a result of their action-oriented and self-management way of functioning, the clubs strengthen the organizational capacities of their members. Rural communities are encouraged to organize themselves and take control of their development. Often, Dimitra Club members become more closely involved in existing formal organizations, such as farmer organizations.

Capacity development and empowerment

The Dimitra clubs strengthen the capacities of their members – capacities for analysis and synthesis, listening and expression, as well as capacities for collective action and networking with other clubs, communities and development actors. The approach improves members' self-confidence and contributes to the socio-economic and political empowerment of women and men.

Social changes

Behaviour changes have been observed in all aspects of daily life, for individuals, households and communities. These changes involve agricultural practices, dietary habits, nutrition, health, education, housing, etc.

Transformation of gender relations

The dynamics of the Dimitra Clubs help women and men to become aware of gender inequalities and take action to address them, especially regarding roles and responsibilities in households and the community.

Women's leadership

The clubs help to give everyone a voice, especially women, thus improving their self-confidence. This process helps them to become more involved in collective bodies, expressing themselves and taking on leadership roles.

Use of information

Club members and communities are better informed on the topics that interest them. Above all, they are able to develop their knowledge on these issues through exchanges and discussions, taking ownership of them and bringing them to life.



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