Improving nutrition
Banking on rural youth
Dear Readers,

Previous issues of the Dimitra Newsletter have revealed how Dimitra Clubs can produce extraordinary results for rural communities, notably in terms of self-management and behavior changes in various areas such as agriculture, nutrition and gender relations, etc. In this edition, we wanted to give the floor to you, our readers, as the newsletter has done in the past. A call was issued to partners of the Dimitra Network with the idea of gathering and highlighting interesting gender-responsive experiences and approaches for rural development, in which people and participation play a central role. Many of you responded to our request and we are grateful for your contributions.

So in this edition you will find a series of articles on a wide range of themes whose common denominator is a wish to improve the livelihoods of rural communities, especially in Africa. It is interesting to note that two aspects emerge strongly from the variety of themes: nutrition and the role of young people – two aspects of development that are also central to activities at FAO.

The newsletter opens with several articles that address issues that are key to improving nutrition. In Chad, FAO is working with administrative and traditional authorities to implement an innovative approach aimed at increasing women’s access to fertile land, a winning formula for improving the livelihoods of rural households. Another initiative with a similar objective is subsequently showcased, this time in connection with Safe Access to Fuel and Energy (SAFE) and improved energy-efficient stoves. In Malawi, for a number of years now, FAO has opted to focus on agriculture, fisheries, environmental protection, collective action, education or empowerment - many partners have decided to leverage the potential of young people. Recent estimates made by the United Nations speak volumes: in Africa, 61 per cent of the population is under 24 years-old. There is an urgent need to support these young people, who will soon be responsible for feeding a global population expected to reach 9.7 billion by 2050.

The advantages and benefits of greater investment in children and young people are therefore indisputable, especially in regard to their role in agriculture, combating hunger and in improving nutrition across the globe. A series of articles from Dimitra Network partners describe initiatives in this sector, carried out in various countries, including Cameroon, DR Congo, Ethiopia, Guinea and Senegal.

In this edition, our Portraits Series presents Tine Ndoye from Senegal, “a city dweller who has opted for the countryside.” This woman, who since 1979 has been closely involved in organic and sustainable agriculture and in issues of gender equality in rural communities, is currently Chair of the National Network of Rural Women of Senegal (Réseau National des Femmes Rurales du Sénégal - RNFRS). We met her at the Universal Exposition of Milan, which, until October 2015, will be highlighting the technical know-how of 140 countries in the field of food security and combating food waste.

This edition closes with a new section called Dimitra Clubs in Brief, which offers factual information on activities conducted by various Dimitra Club projects, in Burundi, DR Congo and Niger. Here you will also find an Internet link to a new six-minute video on the Dimitra Clubs in Niger and their results in the areas of access to land and water.

I hope you enjoy watching the video and reading this newsletter!
Chad | Women’s access to land improves nutrition

In Kanem, western Chad, FAO and development partners have been taking an innovative approach to fighting malnutrition since 2011. A special feature of the approach is that FAO works together with local and traditional authorities to facilitate access to land tenure for vulnerable groups, notably women.

In this region, chronic malnutrition is higher than in the rest of the country. Food insecurity, whose victims are predominantly women and children, is caused by scant availability of food supplies (poor agricultural production, especially due to unfavourable climate conditions), low revenues that limit access to food, and as a result of the poor use of the food supply.

Since 2010, FAO has been working to improve food and nutrition security for vulnerable communities in the region. Support to horticulture, household livestock recapitalization and small-scale trade has produced encouraging results and the good practices identified have been shared with other departments of Kanem.

A series of grants (particularly from the European Union, the Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA), France, Finland, Sweden and Belgium) has enabled FAO and partners to take a long-term perspective and to succeed in improving horticultural production and nutrition in the region.

FAO activities have been conducted in the following areas:
– diversification of production;
– improved access to land;
– improved access to water;
– protection of oasis basins against silting;
– nutrition education and
– support to income-generating activities.

Access to land tenure

In Kanem, the poorest rural families, whose livelihoods depend on agriculture, have limited access to the irrigable land of the most fertile oases. They must make do with cultivating millet on the sand dunes. Since 2011, FAO has been strongly committed to improving their land access, through an innovative approach that comprises the following stages:

Through outreach workers and discussions with the village chief, FAO identifies the vulnerable communities to be targeted and supports them in organizing themselves into groups and with administrative recognition.

At the same time, having gained approval from the Sultan of Kanem, the provision of land is negotiated between FAO, the land chief and the village chief, as well as, at a later stage, with the owner of the plot. The owner may be motivated to lend a plot of land by the prospect of seeing it developed (through drilling or with an irrigation system), increasing its value as a result.

Once the plot has been identified, FAO checks the quality of the soil, the depth of the water table and counts the number of trees (given that trees cannot be removed nor planted, according to rules for the provision of this land).

A loan agreement may also be signed between the group (of women or men) and the owner. In 2011, the first loans were made for a period of 5 years. Today, the agreements are valid for a period of 10 years.

FAO supports and funds drilling by a local entrepreneur (using a proven technique) and the installation of a motor pump, as well as the setting up of an efficient irrigation system by a local partner.

Training in community life and horticultural techniques, coupled with nutritional education (by local partners and the National Office of Rural Development) complete the process, making it possible to offer secure access to fertile land to the most marginalized women and men.

An example of a successful approach, the process developed by FAO since 2011 has since been replicated by a number of local partners.

Remarkable results

This innovative approach has resulted in an increase in food production for household consumption and sale. The women’s and men’s groups now have access to cultivable land and supply their families with food that is more plentiful – thanks to greater financial resources, more diversified – thanks to on-farm consumption – and balanced, thanks to improved nutritional knowledge.

An evaluation was conducted in 2014 to assess the project’s impact in terms of improved nutrition. The Household Dietary Diversity Score (HDDS) increased for project beneficiaries, with a particular impact on these households’ children, who had an upper arm circumference that was higher than average.

The activities also enabled communities to develop new processing techniques and to successfully introduce vegetables such as beetroot and carrot, which were not previously part of traditional household diets.

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Ensuring safe access to energy for all

Almost three billion people globally rely on wood, coal, charcoal or animal waste as sources of fuel for cooking and heating. Collecting fuels – fuelwood in particular – is often women and girls’ responsibility and can be an arduous and burdensome task, and sometimes, outright dangerous. Unsustainable harvesting of the scarce wood resources further degrades the environment. FAO addresses these challenges by promoting the use of fuel-efficient stoves, reforestation activities and livelihood activities that can replace woodfuel production and selling, especially in prolonged crisis and emergencies.

Ensuring access to energy in protracted crises requires solutions to address multiple challenges at once. Firstly, extensive harvesting and production of woodfuels often reduce forest resources and cause forest degradation which can increase soil erosion, desertification and the risk of disasters caused by natural hazards. Secondly, women and children who walk long distances to collect fuelwood are exposed to harassment, assault, rape and other forms of violence. Thirdly, if women from poor and vulnerable households have limited access to cooking fuel, they may resort to skipping meals, under-cooking food and bartering or selling food to obtain fuel. Fourthly, cooking on a three-stone fire is a common practice in rural areas and produces large amounts of toxic smoke which exposes women and children to lethal respiratory illnesses. Finally, the collection of fuelwood and production of charcoal are risky and unsustainable livelihood activities and the use of inefficient cooking methods, such as the three-stone fire, may cause households to spend much more of their savings and time on wood than they would with more efficient cooking technologies.

In order to address these challenges, FAO is working to ensure that vulnerable households have access to sustainable fuel, access to cleaner and safer technologies that can significantly reduce the amount of wood needed for cooking and improve the sustainable management of natural resources.

**Improved mud stoves in Darfur**

After more than a decade of prolonged conflict and crisis, the region of Darfur (Western Sudan) continues to be at the center of conflict, crisis and related displacement. In camp settings, fuelwood collection is one of the main reasons why women leave the camp, thereby putting their lives at risk. This is one of the reasons why FAO, along with other agencies, has been promoting the use of improved mud stoves in the area since the 1990s. Women have been trained to train others in the manufacturing and maintenance of the stoves, as well as on efficient cooking practices.

Today, about 99 per cent of the targeted women use the mud stoves frequently. These women report at least 50 per cent cash savings on fuel (charcoal or wood) and a significant reduction in their time spent to collect fuelwood. The fuel-efficient stoves have made the living environment healthier – with less exposure to respiratory and eye diseases related to smoke – and safer, with reduced cases of fire outbreak or exposure of children to burns. As a result, women’s exposure to harassment, assault, rape and other forms of violence is reduced.

Women’s groups in the region have played a prominent role in disseminating the message on the improved stoves and fuel-saving practices. They have offered support in mobilizing and monitoring participation at the camp and community levels. This process has also triggered the spontaneous emergence of new women leaders. Through ‘learning by doing’ many women are now able to train others to produce stoves, and can apply these skills also in other disciplines.

**Experiences in South Sudan**

The successful experience in Darfur inspired another FAO project to respond to communities in Yei County, South Sudan, which had identified the lack of cooking fuel as one of their main challenges. FAO addressed this in 2013 through a Japan-funded project, in close collaboration with a local partner, the Kagelu Forestry Training Centre (KFTC). The communities themselves selected twenty women to be trained to produce fuel-efficient mud stoves as an income-generating activity. During the project, they constructed 1,500 stoves, which were delivered to 1,500 vulnerable households.

The stoves were built using flexible designs developed with the participation of the women. To accommodate their wishes, the stoves were designed to allow the use of both firewood and charcoal on one stove, and both fixed and portable models were designed. Fixed stoves were built directly into the houses and often included a chimney to draw the smoke out of

Safe Access to Fuel and Energy (SAFE)

Through the Safe Access to Fuel and Energy (SAFE) initiative, FAO is engaged in partnerships with other UN agencies and NGOs, including the World Food Programme (WFP) and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

SAFE was initially established with the aim of identifying actions to reduce the exposure to violence, contribute to the protection of and ease the burden on those populations collecting wood in humanitarian settings worldwide. Today SAFE projects and activities are coordinated through a Steering Committee, chaired by the Global Alliance for Clean Cookstoves and the Women’s Refugee Commission, which includes FAO, WFP, UNHCR, Mercy Corps and the International Lifeline Fund.

The rationale behind SAFE is to address the fact that more than a third of the world’s population relies on traditional fuels – wood, coal, animal dung, and agricultural waste – for their energy needs. This fuel is used for cooking meals, heating homes and shelters, and lighting communities.

Ensuring access to energy in protracted crises requires solutions to address multiple challenges at once. Firstly, extensive harvesting and production of woodfuels often reduce forest resources and cause forest degradation which can increase soil erosion, desertification and the risk of disasters caused by natural hazards. Secondly, women and children who walk long distances to collect fuelwood are exposed to harassment, assault, rape and other forms of violence.
the house. The participating women learned first by observing the production process, then built the stoves themselves before learning to teach others how to use the stove. During the training, the women acquired skills on how to prepare mud bricks and use them for stove construction, making a durable foundation in the kitchen, stove maintenance, and improved wood handling.

In addition to reducing the need for fuel by improving fuel-efficiency in cooking, the project also contributed to increasing the availability of fuelwood. A number of men and women were selected from the communities for a training of trainers programme on tree nursery establishment and agroforestry techniques, in order for them to train other farmers. The formation of groups – women groups in particular – for tree nursery establishment and management was encouraged. A simple training manual on agroforestry techniques was also developed.

Lessons learned

In South Sudan, women who used the stoves noticed a reduction in the amount of fuel wood needed for cooking, reduced smoke, a reduction in the cooking time leading to more time for other activities, while leaving food safely on the stove to simmer. The stability of the stoves, as opposed to a three-stone fire, has allowed women to carry out farm work while leaving their sauce to simmer on the stove. Women have also learned the correct procedures for using the stoves and reported that the smell and taste of the food is better after being cooked on the mud stoves. Women therefore reported that they spend less time cleaning after cooking.

However, some problems persist. The distance walked by women to collect fuelwood is still quite significant since nearby fuelwood resources have been depleted. Therefore, increased attention needs to be given to reforestation activities, even if this will not provide an immediate solution. While not being used for cooking the main meals for the household, the three-stone fire is still used for various purposes such as heating, boiling water, roasting cassava, heating water for giving children a bath and as an area for socializing.

The experiences in both South Sudan and Darfur indicate that attention to energy issues can reduce the pressure caused by depleting natural resources and related security threats, and thus relieve women’s disproportionate burden. Giving women a voice when planning interventions leads to solutions that address the multiple challenges faced by the communities, while contributing to more resilient development.

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Video: Safe Access to Fuel and Energy
www.youtube.com/watch?v=EPw_7S7mwnM
Malawi | Agricultural diversification and nutritional challenges

Since 2011, FAO has been implementing an agriculture project in the districts of Kasungu and Mzimba called “Improving food security and nutrition policies and programme outreach” (IFSN) that promotes nutrition-sensitive agriculture. In collaboration with the Government of Malawi, this project primarily targets smallholder farmers - with a combination of food security and nutrition education activities, which especially benefits the diets of infants and young children.

Joyce Mvula, a 38-year-old mother from Kasungu district, used to feed her daughter plain, watered-down porridge. However, thanks to her participation in community-based nutrition education sessions provided in the framework of the IFSN project, she learned about the importance of improved complementary feeding and the need to add nutritious ingredients to children’s food. “Since I started feeding my daughter the enriched porridge, things have changed and she only got sick once and it was malaria”, she reported. Joyce’s life has also changed for the better, stating that: “I now have more time to take care of my farming activities, while in the past I was frequently visiting the health centre to seek medical care and did not have enough time to look after the farm.”

**Community-based Nutrition Education**

During the nutrition education sessions and participatory cooking demonstrations, numerous caregivers – notably mothers – learned how a diversified diet based on locally available foods can improve the nutritional status of children in combination with good hygiene and health practices. Fathers, grandmothers and grandfathers were also encouraged to attend as they have an important role in family support and decision-making. The 79-year-old grandfather Chikonde Ndengu who participated in the sessions remarked: “I have now seen that mothers in the village are giving the children enriched porridges that contain different foods, such as legumes or groundnuts, green leafy vegetables and eggs, and children are gaining weight and are not getting sick often. I have also realised that if I eat well I will feel stronger and not get sick so often.”

**Community Nutrition Promoters**

The nutrition education sessions were facilitated by a mixed pair of female and male ‘Community Nutrition Promoters’, a ‘Lead Farmer’ from the agricultural sector and a ‘Community Health Volunteer’ from the health sector so as to ensure cross-sectoral collaboration. The ‘Information, Education and Communication’ materials used in the sessions were adapted from the UNICEF Child Feeding template for Africa and touches on a wide range of topics about nutritious foods, dietary diversity, food preparation, water, sanitation and hygiene as well as danger signs of childhood diseases.

To date, the nutrition education sessions have reached almost 11,000 beneficiaries comprised of 9,000 mother/child pairs and an additional 2,000 fathers, grandmothers and local leaders from 330 villages from the Kasungu and Mzimba districts. Interviews with mothers showed that they knew about the benefits of enriched porridge and the participatory cooking demonstrations have enabled them to put their knowledge into practice. In a group discussion, mothers commented: “we did not know things before; we were cooking the porridge from refined maize flour, which was not healthy for our children. But from the school we have learned about different porridges.” Similarly, fathers of young children from a different village knew several enriched porridge recipes that used sweet potatoes, small fish, vegetables and eggs, which they had tasted and enjoyed.

**Linking Agriculture and Nutrition Education**

Participants of the nutrition education sessions also benefitted from food security interventions. These included the transfer of knowledge and practical skills to farmers in regard to income-generating activities, sanitation, irrigation and cultivation of different crops as well as about the distribution of seeds such as cassava, mango, guava, loquat, leafy greens, tomatoes, cowpeas and soy and small livestock such as chickens and dairy cows. These interventions resulted in improved household availability of diverse staples, vegetables, fruit, legumes, nuts and animal source foods. Increased household food security also triggered behaviour changes and enabled caregivers to apply their new found knowledge and skills, and to use their crops to prepare diverse, nutrient-rich meals for young children and families.

Through an integrated approach with the Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Water Development and the Ministry of Health, the IFSN project managed to increase and diversify agriculture production and improve nutrition of smallholder farming households.

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Guinea-Conakry | Mechanization of traditional tasks to fight against rural poverty

In an effort to reduce the severe poverty that afflicts the country’s forest region, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has installed Multifunction Platforms (MFP) in various communities. From the outset, NGO Pride/Guinée has been involved in activities that aim to consolidate the achievements made by the platforms and to ensure their sustainability. This has been done by offering training and support to MFP management staff to increase their autonomy.

Thanks to the PAACIG Programme (Programme d’Appui à l’Accélération de la Croissance Inclusive en Guinée), support from UNDP and the involvement of a number of local actors, 17 Multifunction Platforms were installed in the territories of Lola, N’Zérékoré, Macenta, Guéckedou, Beyla, Yomou and Kissidougou between 2010 and 2013.

Multifunction Platforms are composed of an engine and of various tools such as a grain mill, dehusker, welding equipment and a seed press. By mechanizing chores traditionally performed by women, such as crushing and grinding, MFPs help to lighten their workload all the while increasing value-added agricultural production.

Also, thanks to the presence of electric alternators, battery chargers and pumps, these platforms allow for water and electricity distribution in the communities where they have been installed. Therefore, aside from lightening the burden of a number of tasks, the power supplied by these machines provides a source of energy that can make a valuable contribution to income-generating activities with a multiplier effect on priority community infrastructures (healthcare and sanitation, hydraulics and lighting).

In the context of the PAACIG programme and the use of these platforms, local NGO Pride/Guinée has carried out initiatives specifically aimed at strengthening the capacities of women in the targeted villages. The women taking part in training sessions run by the NGO have learned to use and master MFPs, particularly for tasks linked to processing agricultural products such as rice, cassava and maize. This has given women the possibility to dedicate less time to long and arduous chores and more time to generate additional income, which has also contributed to increasing their status in the community and to achieving greater financial responsibility.

An economic and social development for communities

In a wider sense, the implementation of the Pride/Guinée NGO’s activities has led to significant impacts in the region’s 17 rural municipalities that have benefited from the Multifunction Platforms.

Today, the entire population of the N’Zébêla territories has access to electricity, which is generated by the machines, and it is estimated that use of the mini-electrical network has produced a gross profit of nearly 1,400,000 Guinean francs (US$184) in the village. Total annual revenues obtained through use of these platforms are calculated at 244,800,000 Guinean francs ($32,000) for the targeted communities.

The impact of the Multifunction Platforms on local communities is reflected by a strengthened community economic fabric. The Platforms have contributed to improved quality of life in communities in various ways: by helping disadvantaged populations gain access to mechanical power and electricity; through the development of technical and organizational capacities for beneficiaries; by creating jobs and increasing local capacities for mechanization and electrification system and infrastructure management (the MFPs concerned are often maintained by local artisans).

These impacts highlight the fact that development initiatives at local level – aimed at freeing women from the heaviest tasks – have a “knock-on effect” on communities as a whole, having positive repercussions on improving livelihoods and combating rural poverty.

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Guinea-Conakry | Life-saving information to ward off Ebola

Since March 2014, the Republic of Guinea has been facing an epidemic of haemorrhagic fever, caused by the Ebola virus. Notwithstanding a decrease in the number of cases early this year, the epidemic rages on. According to figures supplied by the National Coordination Committee for Response Against the Ebola Virus, the country has recorded nearly 3,653 cases, of which 2,426 were fatal. The epicentre remains the forest area, in the south of the country, where NGO Pride/Guinée is conducting activities to disseminate information and raise awareness in rural communities.

When conducted efficiently, information campaigns carried out in rural areas have proved highly effective, especially in cases of infection in small, isolated communities. Reliable information about the disease, modes of transmission and risky behaviours together enable local communities to halt the virus from spreading.

With technical and funding support from the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), the NGO Pride/Guinée has launched the programme Raising community awareness to combat haemorrhagic fever caused by the Ebola virus in the prefectures of N’Zérékoré, Lola and Yomou in Forest Guinea. The programme has mainly targeted young people, women and leaders living in communities so these people can protect themselves against the disease and at the same time become resource persons to inform other community members about the epidemic through awareness-raising and training sessions.

The NGO’s planned activities fall into three categories: Firstly, it was decided to train community facilitators. To do this, training sessions were organized at the secondary healthcare school of N’Zérékoré, at the Yomou Prefectoral Hospital and at the primary school in Tighenbo. These training sessions focused on modes of transmission and prevention of the haemorrhagic fever and brought together a total of 180 participants, including 82 women.

The other strategy selected by Pride/Guinée involved raising awareness in communities through door-to-door visits and distribution of chlorine and soap. This grassroots awareness-raising campaign was carried out by 90 teams of 2 people in neighbourhoods of the urban municipality of N’Zérékoré, Lola and surrounding districts; three neighbourhoods of the urban municipality of Yomou, and surrounding districts and all the villages in the rural municipality of Banié (Prefecture of Yomou).

In an effort to expand the strategy of diffusing awareness-raising messages, community meetings have been organized so as to provide a platform where everyone can share, adapt and discuss the information received on the disease and its modes of transmission. All these meetings were staged by a team made up of resource people (a supervisor, a religious figure, the local wise man and a local authority representative – the mayor or the village chief) with support from community facilitators in these places.

A total of almost 24,000 households (about 228,000 people) in three urban municipalities (N’Zérékoré, Lola and Yomou), as well as the rural municipalities of Banié, Péla, Diécké, Gouécké, Samoé, Soulouta, Yalenzou, Guéasso, Kokota, N’Zoo and Lainé have been reached by the awareness-raising campaign. In addition, there are now 180 community facilitators (82 of them women) trained in responses to haemorrhagic fever caused by the Ebola virus. Lastly, some 13,000 motor-taxi drivers and road hauliers – including nearly 3,000 women – have received information through peer-to-peer communication.

Funding support from UNICEF, the involvement of political, administrative and local healthcare authorities, as well as close links with local media and other NGOs in the area have all proved crucial to planning and implementing this awareness-raising campaign, which has resulted in a halt in the spread of the virus in the regions concerned. NGO Pride/Guinée is now a member of the communication committee at the Prefectural Coordination for Response Against the Ebola Virus in the prefectures of N’Zérékoré, Lola and Yomou.

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FAO is at the forefront in the fight and prevention of sexually transmitted infections in fishing communities along the Lagos-Abidjan corridor (Nigeria-Ivory Coast). Through a programme funded by OFID, the Fund for International Development of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries, FAO endeavours to establish cooperation between regional fisheries organizations and different regional and national health initiatives in order to provide efficient services in the areas of reproductive health, especially on HIV/AIDS.

The fishing communities along the Lagos-Abidjan corridor, the landing sites and fish markets are known to be colorful settings: boats, flags and crowds surround the fish displayed for sale. These communities are often multiethnic with a significant number of youth and of poor people in search of a daily income within the local economy. What’s more, the local population has strong links with external groups in the corridor that are considered “a high-risk population” by AIDS agencies, such as professional sex workers, truckers, porters and men-in-uniform.

As a health sector specialist, Setho Hugues explains that: “The challenge of a health specialist in the fisheries sector is to make the link between the risks and dangers in the profession, the patterns of masculinity and femininity in the communities and the reproductive health problems. The major issues in fishing communities are the high number of migrants and high levels of mobility, the heavy workloads and the strong influence elders exert on youth.”

Inclusive approach to empower youth and women

From the beginning, the FAO programme has identified several critical issues such as different socio-cultural norms (due to the presence of various ethnic groups and nationalities); distinct gender roles in capture and post-harvest activities that contribute to the practice of the transactional sex (fish or services for sex); high number of divorced women; sexual promiscuity as major risk behaviour and the influence of the masculinity model on relationships.

Through the adoption of two specific approaches entitled “License Plus” and “Value chain Plus”, the programme decided to ask the collaboration of boat owners, traders and collectors along the fish value chain to select young fishermen, within crews and marketing teams, to be trained as peer educators.

Both approaches are focused on technical and prevention interventions that combine value chain upgrading and livelihood diversification activities with services. These activities include mass sensitization; distribution of youth magazines like “Amour et Vie”; support to youth clubs; HIV/AIDS counseling and testing; sexually transmitted infection screening and family planning.

In 2014, thanks to this programme, 142 peer educators (35% women; 65% men) were trained. Youth and women are now considered key actors in the Lagos-Abidjan corridor, as they inform the fishing communities on sexually transmitted infections, provide skills in behaviour change and increase knowledge, resilience and resistance among their peers.

Encouraging results in support of successful partnerships

A recent qualitative survey has collected data on the impact of the programme.

Marie, twice divorced and with five children, is one of the peer educators: “License Plus improved our health. Even though a number of people still resist to buy condoms, there are many women who came with me to buy them at night. I also noticed that one of the women peer educators, who before never spoke in public, is now addressing participants in our meetings. License Plus has really changed the perception of our life. If today I can eat and live with a person who is sick with AIDS and provide him with support, it is thanks to License Plus.”

The major benefits documented by women and men relate to different levels. From an individual perspective, the benefits were improved health, increased self-esteem and income from marketing of products. At group level, men and women benefitted from access to information and knowledge, access to counsel for mobile and migrating youth, reduced stigmatization and openness to discuss safe sex. Lastly, at the community level, there was a reduced incidence of malaria, diarrhea, and of unwanted pregnancies in adolescents as well as increased access to quality mobile services and to family planning services for poor women, thereby reducing the risk of maternal death.

At the national level, the implementation of the programme was possible thanks to the proactivity of the fisheries’ departments and umbrella organizations. Exchange platforms were set up with partners and key stakeholders. This interface is institutionalized in Benin, in the Health Committee of the National Marine Fisheries Umbrella Organization.

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Senegal | Youth and gender, the experience of the Baamtaaré Sukabé Guédé Association

In the village of Guédé, in northern Senegal, the setting up of a mixed group of young people to lead an awareness-raising campaign on AIDS and malaria throughout the region of Saint Louis has marked a turning point for a whole range of issues affecting the local community. With support from the Enda Pronat NGO, what started out as a simple cultural association for young men and women has gradually become a model, not just for local economic development, but also for the mainstreaming of gender issues into economic practices.

Enda Pronat

An FAO Dimitra partner, Enda Pronat is a non-governmental organization that was launched in 1982 and a member of the Enda Third World network. It operates in the field of sustainable rural development, with a special focus on family farming. Started by awareness-raising on the abusive use of pesticides in agriculture and by developing of alternatives to fertilizers and chemical products in agricultural production, its activities have quickly spread to include all areas linked to family farming and rural development. In this way, various themes are touched on such as land tenure, processing and marketing of agri-products, support for credit access, strengthening of organizational capacities of women and federations, promoting women’s participation in political decision-making bodies, integrated land-use design and the protection of natural resources, the restoration of degraded soils, etc.

Fouta is one of Senegal’s Halpulaar provinces, with strong Islamic traditions and a highly hierarchical social structure. Here, despite modern means of communication, girls’ education and the implementation of various projects and programmes, the role of women is restricted to carrying out household duties and girls are still married at an early age.

The few visible changes to benefit women in the region can be seen in their increased participation in public life (attending meetings, taking the floor) and involvement in income-generating activities.

Earning money can be a means of self-fulfillment, a way of “no longer totally relying on one’s husband.” Some women manage to not only to cover their daily expenses, but also to make investments, for example, by buying livestock. However, their status is never allowed to develop much in this region where the husband’s authority remains very strong, especially regarding management of revenue, even though this is mainly destined to cover the needs of the family and children.

The launch of Baamtaaré Sukabé Guédé

Against this background, the launch of a mixed group of men and women who work to open up the region and achieve social and economic development for the village, has marked a turning point in regard to a number of issues.

In August 2009, young men and women gathered to carry out awareness-raising activities as part of a campaign on HIV/AIDS and malaria, which was launched by local political figures. The awareness-raising campaign was a huge success and represented a great source of pride for these young people. It has also encouraged them to continue their activities.

The 22 members of the group (10 women and 12 men), drawn from different social backgrounds, gradually came to understand their potential for contributing to the development of their community. They decided to launch a formal association called “Baamtaaré Sukabé Guédé”, which means Youth Development in Guédé.

With the support of prominent figures from Guédé and the surrounding area, the association succeeded in earning the trust of local actors (such as Enda Pronat) thanks to the members’ dynamism, serious approach and commitment to the cause.

Professionalization of the association

The introduction of an economic dimension of the activities of Baamtaaré Sukabé Guédé was made possible by the FSP Gender and economic development project. Implemented with assistance from Enda Pronat, it provided
three kinds of support: purchase of a dehusker, technical and management training as well as gender training.

Technical training focused mainly on the use and maintenance of the dehusker, so as to improve the group’s performance in processing and selling agri-products.

Other training sessions examined basic principles and good practices for hygiene, as well as the Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point (HACCP) method, which analyses dangers and critical points regarding hygiene and safety. The emphasis was placed on various types of contamination that can arise and risks in the process of dehusking and processing rice.

Finally, gender training and exchange visits were conducted. Issues such as equity in the workplace and sharing household tasks were widely discussed and the trainers repeatedly encouraged women to assume greater responsibility. In parallel with the gender training, the young people took part in exchange visits with an Economic Interest Group (EIG) involved in processing cereals in Dakar. This offered a chance to share experiences, discover new opportunities and evaluate their level of skills and organization.

Judicial and social recognition

On a judicial level, the association became an Economic Interest Group (EIG), acquiring its certificate in September 2010. This new status authorizes it to conduct profit-making activities, especially commercial ones – something, for example, that a federation (with the status of an association) cannot do. As an actor in the value chain for processing and marketing rice produced with healthy and sustainable agriculture methods, the EIG became a member of the Ngataamaré Toro Federation (see Box) in 2010.

Judicial recognition later led to a strengthening of social impact and economic positioning in the value chain and within the federation. The EIG is responsible for processing paddy rice, as well as harvesting, sorting and selling onions that are cultivated using healthy and sustainable agriculture methods.

Gender mainstreaming in organizing work and revenues

The dehusker changed working conditions for the group. Mechanization of dehusking eliminated arduous manual labour. However, the greatest innovation was the introduction of women into the dehusking phase – until then a task reserved for men. As well as generating increased awareness of gender issues among its members, the EIG made visible progress at organizational and economic levels. Today, it serves as an example, since certain taboos in processing activities have been lifted. However, much remains to be done in promoting gender equality. The results achieved show the complexity of taking gender into account in mixed groups, with tension between short-term efficiency and economic returns on the one hand, and on the other, the effective participation of all actors – both men and women – which may require time and resources.

Reducing inequalities will be achieved by more specific support to women in strategic areas such as women’s rights, literacy, self-confidence and self-esteem. There is still a long way to go, but there is no doubt that the experience gained during this project will contribute to future initiatives.

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Baamtaré Sukabé Guédé and the Ngatamaré Toro Federation

The youth Economic Interest Group (EIG) Baamtaré Sukabé Guédé is involved in processing rice produced by farmers from local unions. It became a member of the Ngatamaré Toro Federation in 2010. This Federation, based in the municipality of Guédé, has 2,600 members, 60% of them women. Its members are grouped into EIGs of small-scale producers. It started its activities with rice and onion cultivation, and for the past year has been diversifying into vegetable production (squash, potatoes, peppers and cabbage), as well as groundnuts, maize and cowpeas.
What makes you describe yourself as a “city dweller who has opted for the countryside”?

I was born in Rufisque, a town that has now been incorporated into the suburbs of Dakar, but my father came from a small village nearby. When I decided to marry a farmer from my father’s village, I chose to follow him there. I am therefore a woman who has chosen the countryside over a town, opting to become a farmer, and subsequently an entrepreneur in the healthy and sustainable agriculture sector. I have lived in the village for 22 years, during which time I have witnessed the difficulties that rural women face.

When I arrived in the village, I knew nothing about land. I experienced many difficulties, especially as he already had two wives. The first day that I took food to my husband in the fields, with my child on my back, I cried! I summoned up all my courage... I didn't want to go back to the town and have people make fun of me. That is why I started to work on behalf of rural women who were facing difficulties, who were marginalized and forgotten about... Rural women work from morning till night, from seed planting to harvest; it is they who do everything and then find themselves with empty pockets. That’s what prompted me to help them get organized... At the start it was just a small group, but now we have this network (the National Network of Rural Women of Senegal), in which Dimitra has played a crucial role.

And are you involved in politics?

Yes, I always have been. In my youth, I chaired coordination of the Socialist Party in Rufisque. Later, I was a councillor in the rural community of Diender, before becoming the second assistant mayor of the village of Kayar, where I fought for the village to have access to running water and electricity.

Were other women involved in politics at that time?

No, I was the only woman and there was as yet no mention of gender equality in Senegal. I was shocked: there were 27 councillors, of whom 26 were men and I was the only woman. I began to fight to group women together. I also applied to become chair of the rural community.

How did you mobilize the rural women’s groups to launch RNFRS?

There were already grassroots organizations, and each of these organizations worked with a support organization. The group that I was involved with had Enda Pronat as a support organization (see Senegal article), who we worked with to promote healthy and sustainable agriculture, especially concerning everything linked to pesticides and other harmful agricultural practices. It was immediately afterwards that we decided to organize ourselves into a national network. In 2002, we met at Thiès, with support from various partners such as FAO-Dimitra, Enda Pronat, l’Association des maisons familiales et rurales, le Réseau Africain pour le Développement Intégré (RADI), la Fédération des ONG du Sénégal (FONGS) and Enda Graf, and the RNFRS was born.

“From city dweller to farmer”

TINÉ NDOYE, CHAIR OF THE NATIONAL NETWORK OF RURAL WOMEN OF SENEGAL (RÉSEAU NATIONAL DES FEMMES RURALES DU SÉNÉGAL - RNFRS)

Tiné Ndoye has been closely involved in organic and sustainable agriculture and in issues of gender equality in rural communities since 1979. Today, she is Chair of the National Network of Rural Women of Senegal (Réseau National des Femmes Rurales du Sénégal - RNFRS), which was launched in 2002 with support from FAO Dimitra and other partners and currently has 30,000 members. We met Tiné Ndoye in May 2015 at the Universal Exposition of Milan, together with the delegation of women leaders from Senegal.
How was the network organized?
The network has 30,000 members, distributed throughout 14 regions. These are 30,000 individual members, but who also belong to federations, unions, associations, organizations and cooperatives, and who are either made up of women only, or are mixed. In each region, there is a focal point and a support organization that offers assistance to members. In this way, RNFRS can count on a well-organized and well supported structure. Before launching the network, we carried out a review of the different regions, so as to bring all the rural women together.

What are the main challenges faced by rural women?
Since 2002, a number of difficulties have been identified, particularly the fact that rural women were not informed of their rights; some of them didn’t even know that they had any! For example, in regard to access to land, it is neither religion or the law that dictates whether or not women can have access to land as men do, it’s tradition! We began to understand that a critical challenge was women’s access to information and communication, and that we needed to work on this aspect. In this regard, the partnership with Dimitra has been invaluable: together, we organized a workshop on land access in Thiès in 2002, and another in M’bour in 2008. Other meetings and workshops later focused on techniques for communication, advocacy and negotiation, on access to microcredit, easing the burden of women’s household tasks and the concept of gender equality.

What is the current situation in Senegal regarding access to land for women?
A land tenure reform is under way that takes into account the needs of both women and men. Ten years ago, one of the main challenges was lack of information, but nowadays, there are practically no women who don’t know their rights with regards to land. Equality is enshrined in the law and this exists in reality.

What are the objectives of the National Network of Rural Women of Senegal?
Our prime goal is to give rural women greater visibility and contribute to their empowerment, which also means better representation within institutional bodies. As a result of the tireless work carried out by RNFRS, we have obtained some outstanding results.

In 2013, the President of the Republic of Senegal allotted 120 seats on the Economic, Social and Environmental Council (CESE) to professional and women’s organizations in Senegal.

There were very precise conditions and only the RNFRS network and the Fédération des Associations des Femmes Sénégalaises (FAFS) were accepted. I am now an Economic, Social and Environmental Councillor on the CESE, and also a member of the National Observatory of Gender Equality.

Has your family supported you, especially during the time when your political role was becoming increasingly important?
Yes… Politics are never easy, especially when you are a woman. Wanting to have a voice is difficult. But my husband and my family have always supported me, and that is why I have never been afraid.

How do you see the future of rural women in Senegal?
In my country, rural women have the support of the government. A national policy is in hand to foster their development, with strong support from the President of the Republic. In this regard, we are well satisfied.

How do you see your presence here at the Universal Exposition of Milan?
I am thrilled! Thanks to the support of international partners like Dimitra, I got the opportunity to represent rural women from Senegal in important events such as this one. Even though Dimitra did not fund my participation here in Milan, I am grateful to this FAO programme with whom trust has been built over the years.

What advice would you give to readers of the Dimitra Newsletter?
Quite simply, I hope that the Dimitra programme will continue to support the empowerment of rural women, given all the results obtained in the region where I work and elsewhere. One very important point is to work with men. If we want to achieve results, it is absolutely crucial that they be involved. What is good for women is also good for men. Today, among the 30,000 members of the National Network of Rural Women of Senegal, there are even some associations that are mixed, and others made up of just men. I find that truly amazing!

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“Rural women work from morning till night. It is they who do everything and then find themselves with empty pockets. That’s what prompted me to help them get organized...”
“Feeding the Planet, Energy for Life” is the main theme of Expo Milano 2015. The Universal Exhibition provides an opportunity to reflect upon – and seek solutions to – the contradictions of our world. On the one hand, a substantial number of people face hunger on a daily basis (approximately 870 million people were undernourished between 2010 and 2012) and, on the other, many others are dying from ailments linked to poor nutritional choices or too much food (there were approximately 2.8 million deaths from diseases related to obesity or to being overweight during the same period). What’s more, approximately 1.3 billion tons of foods are wasted each year.

The United Nations’ participation at Expo 2015 is coordinated by the Rome-based agencies: FAO, the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and the World Food Programme (WFP). These joint efforts are a sure-fire demonstration to Expo visitors – and to the world – that hunger eradication is achievable if we join forces and collaborate to be part of the solution (Zero Hunger Challenge Initiative).

FAO Director-General, José Graziano da Silva, invited all countries to adopt the Zero Hunger Challenge Initiative and to put an end to hunger by 2025 for good: “We can do it, we can transform our vision of a sustainable and food secure world into reality and we can do this by working together; governments, United Nations, civil society organizations, private sector, and citizens. Together, we can make a difference”.

Expo Milano 2015: FAO takes home award for two food security projects

Two FAO projects were rewarded at the Milano Expo in July 2015 for Best Practices in Sustainable Development in the framework of the Feeding Knowledge Platform. This initiative aimed to identify, collect, promote and facilitate the sharing of best practices in food security that had an impact in regard to food availability, food access and food use.

IARBIC, Intensification of Agriculture by strengthening cooperative agro-input shops (Niger)

Implemented by FAO and Niger’s Ministry of Agriculture, IARBIC is a 5-year agricultural intensification programme that focused on strengthening cooperative input shops. The strategy behind this initiative was to develop the capacities of farmers’ institutions to better manage a network of input shops and to organize them collectively in order to provide smallholder farmers with the means of production to improve their yields.

During its implementation phase, IARBIC helped to increase yields up to 100% in more than half of the targeted villages. It also provided farmers with a wide range of practical skills, from agricultural and management techniques to record keeping. The programme has also promoted innovative micro-financing schemes, such as an inventory credit system known as ‘warrantage’, under which farmers stock part of their harvest and use it as collateral to obtain credit from a bank. The credit then enables them to buy inputs for the next planting, or to engage in other income-generating activities.

Eradication of the tsetse fly from the Niayes (Senegal)

After a four-year eradication programme that included nuclear techniques, the Niayes region of Senegal has almost freed itself completely of the tsetse fly (Glossina palpalis gambiensis). This fly is renowned for transmitting “trypanosomosis” or “nagana”, one of the most devastating livestock diseases in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Given the need for continued efforts to eradicate the tsetse fly definitely, Senegal worked in close collaboration with FAO and partners at the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), the Directorate of Veterinary Services, the French Agricultural Research Centre for International Development and the Senegal Institute for Agricultural Research to integrate an insect birth control technique that sterilizes male flies and reduces the fly population over time. The main innovation of this programme was the extensive use of scientific principles to develop and implement an environmentally-sound eradication strategy to maintain a sustainable development of small rural communities.

For more information:
www.expob2015.org/
www.un-expo.org/en

Intensification of Agriculture by strengthening cooperative agro-input shops (Niger):

Eradication of the tsetse fly from the Niayes (Senegal):
www.feedingknowledge.net/02-search/-/
bsdp/6402/en_GB
Deforestation, carbonization, quarrying and declining soil fertility, the drying up of streams that irrigate the plains used for horticulture, intensive food crop production and poor harvests are all factors that pose a serious threat to the inhabitants of Guinea.

In the communities of Koba Pastoria, Koliady, Yogon Tamba and Tabounna, close to the town of Kindia, 135 km from Conakry, pressure on natural resources is particularly worrying as a result of intensive sand quarrying and coal mines that supply the Guinean capital.

The AGPAB Association initiative

In order to cope with this alarming environmental degradation, l’Association Guinéenne pour la Promotion de l’Agriculture Biologique and environmental organization l’Association pour la Protection de l’Environnement (APE) requested a grant from the Small Grants Programme of the Global Environment Facility (GEF) to train 50 women drawn from 15 women’s groups and 50 young people between December 2013 and November 2014.

Women benefitted from the training sessions about collecting, sorting and composting techniques while the group of youth learned about setting up forest nurseries, reforestation for compost production and protecting tree headwaters.

The participatory option

The training initiatives conducted by AGPAB in the communities of Koba Pastoria, Koliady, Yogon Tamba and Tabounna sought to raise local awareness and especially to prompt people to reach their own diagnoses of problems linked to the environment and work together to find solution. These training sessions are therefore part of efforts to strengthen community empowerment all the while involving local people in the decision-making process.

The training initiatives that were undertaken have led to a number of results that have benefited women and young people, notably the installation of three composters, the purchase of small items of equipment by women’s groups, inter-community exchange visits, the purchase of some 46,000 saplings to protect the three headwaters and the restoration of two quarries and the conservation of three community forests in the villages of Tabounna, Koba Pastoria and Koliady.

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Why invest in women and young people for local development?

Rural women and young people are central to bringing about the profound economic, environmental and social changes needed for sustainable development. But limited access to credit, health care and education poses significant challenges, which are further exacerbated by global financial and food crises, and climate change. Women and young people account for a large majority of agricultural labour worldwide, and their contribution is critical to improving food security and eradicating poverty. However, they only play a weak role in decision-making processes. Empowering them is therefore crucial, not just for the well-being of individuals, families and rural communities, but also for economic productivity in general.
In the small village of Wacho, Mamitu Gashaw meets with a group of women once a week to discuss various issues – from women’s rights and the role of women in decision-making processes to women in business and climate change adaptation strategies.

Mamitu is 30 years old and is one of 20 members of a local self-help group called Women Support Association (WSA). It is the sole platform of its kind to provide women in the village of Wacho with an opportunity to come together, give voice to their concerns, express their needs and collect money for income generating activities.

Through her participation in the WSA, over the last two years, Mamitu has managed to save about 20 Birr per week (1 USD), for a total of 1200 Birr (60 USD).

One year ago, Mamitu obtained from the association a loan of 1000 Birr (about 50 USD) to start onion cultivation, something that was previously impossible to her because of the high prices of seeds.

From such activity, she managed to turn a profit of 2000 Birr (about 100 USD) after having repaid the loan and deducted the cost of fertilizer, seeds and labour.

“I never thought that I would be able to see such change for me and my family. Now I have a proper house, with concrete floor, iron door and I have even got some furniture in the house” Mamitu proudly said. Her plan now is to expand the land for the onion production by renting a plot of land from her neighbours – just like they used to do in the past when she could not cultivate by herself, due to lack of oxen and other finances.

Mamitu’s dream is to guarantee a good education for her three children, expanding her farming business and ensure a good and quality life to the whole family: “… after I joined the Women Support Association I could write, read and perform some numeracy skills. But now I would like to learn more. I would like to be able to help my children in their education and properly record the costs and benefits of my business.”

Thanks to her participation in the local self-help group, Mamitu’s relationship with her husband has changed: “earlier it was my husband that took all the decisions, as it is in most rural communities in Ethiopia. Now we are equals” She also explained how her greater economic capacity had a major impact on her decision-making power within the family and in her life: “My husband and I share the struggles and the happiness, we are both proud of what we have achieved (…) my ability to generate my own income enabled me to equally decide on issues that affect my life (…) I can only thank the Women Support Association”.

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Self-help groups in Ethiopia proved to be key instruments for participatory development of local populations, as well as a necessity for rural women’s socioeconomic empowerment. The story of Mamitu, in the Amhara Region, is an example of how collective participation is at the core of a sustainable development and a condition for change in male-female relations.
Increasingly complex social and economic needs, coupled with new challenges such as climate change, pressure on natural resources, significant soil degradation and depletion and an ageing workforce mean that agriculture can no longer rely solely on traditional models. There is an urgent need for more targeted and specific investments and interventions. Young people are the key to rebooting the agriculture sector in Cameroon. They represent the future. However, the young (both girls and boys) face a number of constraints, including inadequate access to land, financial services, markets, information, knowledge, education and decision-making bodies. These hurdles are particularly marked in the case of young women.

Since 2007, the Alternatives Durables pour le Développement (ADD) association has been working on issues linked to young farmers, and has been especially active in strengthening their capacities. At the end of 2014, ADD launched a young farmers’ training centre, the Centre de Formation des Jeunes aux Métiers Agropastoraux de Mbalmayo (CAPAM), in a town on the banks of the River Nyong, about 50 km south of the capital Yaoundé.

The centre opened partly as a result of a partnership forged with Belgian NGO DISOP Dienst voor Internationale Samenwerking aan Ontwikkelingsprojecten, which provides 80% of funding for the training unit.

Today, the CAPAM centre has 26 young people undergoing three-year training courses, 18 of which are boys and 8 girls, all aged between 12 and 20. While the first two years of the programme focus on agriculture and livestock-keeping, students specialize in one of the two subjects in their last year of studies.

The methodological approach adopted in this centre alternates between theory-based lessons in class and practical follow-up with a farmer, who will become a focal point. The training course follows a very precise framework, whose ultimate goal is to transform students into real rural entrepreneurs, able to practice second generation competitive agriculture, in line with the goals of national agriculture policies. The clear objective is to offer opportunities to young rural dwellers, and enable them to flourish while continuing to live in the countryside.

Open training

In order to promote a participatory approach between students and the rest of the community, the Alternatives Durables pour le Développement association has set up a parallel organization to ensure financial self-sufficiency for the centre. This association groups together the parents of students, all the focal points or supervisors – the farmers who follow the students – as well as any human resources likely to be able to contribute to the sustainability of the initiative, in the form of material or financial support. Members of this organization meet once every three months to mobilize their various contributions to CAPAM (funds, ideas or material).

This training model, based on collaboration with local actors and on multiple partnerships developed with pioneer stakeholders, has resulted in the training centre being widely acknowledged in institutional circles.

In addition, impending recognition of the centre by the government of Cameroon will enable young people trained to receive an official diploma on their departure, offering them the chance to showcase their skills, apply for work in the agriculture sector, launch their own enterprise or continue with similar training courses run by CAPAM partners.

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In Bas-Congo, many girls are victims of gender-based violence. Most have to interrupt their studies due to traditional cultural practices, which relegate women to a subordinate role in society, or for purely financial reasons, since poverty means that their families are unable to afford school fees.

In this light, the activities of NGO Levain des masses mainly focuses on strengthening the capacities of local communities through specific training initiatives on childcare, as well as on household hygiene standards and practices.

However, the flagship programme of Levain des masses is especially designed to bring about the socio-economic reintegration of vulnerable girls. In fact, the NGO has been stepping up efforts to raise awareness against stigmatization and social exclusion for the last five years.

Learning a trade to combat social exclusion

Thanks to this reintegration programme, 45 girls and young women living in extremely difficult conditions have seen their livelihoods and prospects improve considerably.

It is at the Levain de masses’ training centre where women have learned trades such as cutting and sewing, information technology, the art of cooking and processing agri-food products. Women can also simply follow literacy courses. Following the completion of their socio-professional training, the NGO directs them towards other bodies, such as the processing centre, called “Centre de Transformation des Produits Agroalimentaires (CETRAPAL)”, where they can learn about techniques for packaging and preserving agri-food products in greater depth. Those who complete training in cutting and sewing are steered towards workshops as part of training courses, which, in some cases, lead to a job.

Sometimes, Levain des masses supports women in setting up income-generating activities, such as sewing workshops, selling food products to markets and offering parking facilities for heavy goods vehicles, etc. These projects are set in place by individual women or groups of women, with support from the NGO. Technical and financial management support are also offered for a three-month period, so that women can become familiar with their new trade, manage the financial side of the business and ensure that it is profitable.

In addition, the newly trained girls and women are given full membership of Levain des masses, which entitles them to benefit from a range of training sessions on women’s rights, responsible citizenship, environmental health, reproductive health and family planning organized by LDM. The training sessions are generally held once every three months and allow women to share their different experiences and find solutions to problems encountered while practising their trade.

The efforts of Levain des masses in combating the social exclusion and stigmatization of vulnerable women or victims of sexual violence in Bas-Congo Province has certainly produced some encouraging results. However, there are still significant challenges to be overcome. LDM will maintain its commitment to contributing to women’s empowerment and will work together with the authorities to ensure an environment that protects women and girls from all forms of violence and offers them greater opportunities for the future.

Levain des Masses is a member of the Women and Development Network of Bas-Congo Province, which in turn is part of the National Committee for Women and Development (CONAFED).

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In the diamond-rich province of Kasai Oriental, land conflicts are concentrated in areas where there are economic interests (diamond mines, natural resources and protected forests). Land-related problems aside, rural communities – notably women and young people working in subsistence agricultural food production – face specific challenges in carrying out their farming activities. A number of constraints hamper their empowerment, such as poor technical capacity in agro-pastoral production, insufficient agricultural inputs, weak structuring of producers’ organizations (POs) and failure to integrate gender issues into POs and producer households. In an effort to help local communities to overcome all these obstacles, REFED/Kasaï Oriental is conducting capacity-building activities at local level.

The gender approach in rural areas

Generally speaking, REFED works on issues regarding the role of women in agriculture, the extension of agricultural techniques and their participation in decision-making. To this end, a number of listeners’ clubs have been set up in various villages, so as to stimulate discussions on themes linked to gender relations and the difficulties facing both men and women farmers. To help achieve this goal, the clubs have been equipped with ten radio sets to serve as communication channels.

For several years now, REFED/Kasaï Oriental has been working to raise awareness among producers’ organization members and offering them training to develop gender-sensitive sectors (cassava, cowpeas, potatoes, maize and beans).

Other initiatives have been launched to offer technical support to agricultural cooperatives based on cooperative principles and those of good governance, including the principle of gender equality. With support from REFED, two agricultural cooperatives, 50% of whose boards of management positions are occupied by women, have been set up in the region. The results of these training initiatives have been monitored by all the partners involved in development in this area.

An approach that puts “role model couples” in the spotlight

Regarding specific issues linked to gender equality, REFED has set in place a core of 20 gender-sensitive pilot households known as “model couples”, working on the fair division of tasks between men and women in families, with the aim of easing household burdens and tasks linked to agricultural production for girls and women. The overall goal is to increase the time that women have available so that they can become more closely involved in community life and cooperative activities.

Lastly, REFED is always in the frontline of advocacy initiatives aimed at persuading political, administrative and customary authorities to take more into account the gender perspective in land allocation and succession. One example was the organizing of a number of events as part of the International Year of Family Farming and the International Day of Rural Women with the theme: “Empowering rural women to develop family farming so as to increase agricultural production and combat malnutrition and hunger in DRC.”

Empowering women farmers in an area wrecked by cultural tensions and land conflicts is a long and arduous process. Unwavering commitment and the involvement of a number of actors are crucial and REFED/Kasaï Oriental is working tirelessly to achieve this.

REFED/Kasaï Oriental is part of the National Committee for Women and Development (CONAFED).

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In this section, you will find factual information about current activities taking place in different Dimitra Club projects.

**BURUNDI**

**Launch workshop**

In Ngozi, located in the north of the country, Dimitra organized an inauguration workshop for Dimitra Clubs as part of a programme to combat malnutrition and to strengthen the resilience of communities. An essential stage in the process of setting up Dimitra Clubs, the workshop took place in March and brought together members from 15 Dimitra Clubs in the region, as well as focal points for the project, radio stations, authorities and other partners. They were informed and given explanations about the Dimitra Club approach. Their capacities were strengthened on the founding principles of the approach, especially in regard to gender, participatory communication, structuring, collective action, partnership and networking. The participants also received guidance on operating methods for clubs and other practical aspects of activity implementation, with a view to setting up new clubs in project areas.

**Clubs in action**

In the region of Zinder, Niger, the Clubs are developing strategies for more effective resistance to climate change

Delayed rainfall prompted Dimitra Clubs in the village of Gamdou (department of Mirriah) to discuss new strategies to cope with drought linked to climate change. Men and women Club members agreed that they expended much of their energy in producing their staple food, millet. Millet relies heavily on rainfall and its distribution over time and requires rich soil in order to grow well. Dimitra Club members suggested working collectively on alternative crops adapted to local conditions. The women decided to protect natural spaces on the edge of the village, where a wild plant grows. This is Corchorus olitorius, commonly known as Nalta jute or tossa jute, and highly prized throughout Niger as an ingredient for sauces. The women have calculated that, working together, they can harvest large quantities to sell at market when the price is high. A share of the resources generated by this activity will go towards supporting more vulnerable community members when they face difficult times.

For their part, the men each decided to set aside a corner of their field, marking off an area to leave unsown, so as to encourage the development of a grass used throughout the region to fatten animals. This grass can be conserved as hay and fetches high prices at certain times of the year in the region of Zinder. Sales are likely to compensate for a large share of the lost revenue from cereals. The men from the Dimitra Clubs will cut the hay and, like the women, will use the revenue generated to make cereals available for the village and provide support for community members.

**NIGER**

**New Dimitra Clubs**

30 new Dimitra Clubs have been launched in 2015 as part of the Joint Programme for Economic Empowerment of Rural Women in Niger. The clubs are one of the main entry points for the Programme, as part of a participatory and gender-sensitive approach adopted together with WFP, IFAD and UN Women.

**Forum of Dimitra Clubs on economic empowerment of rural women and poverty reduction**

The Forum was held in Niamey in February 2015, as part of activities linked to improved resilience and disaster risk management, particularly through community early warning systems. Some twenty members – both women and men – of Dimitra Clubs from the regions of Zinder, Tahoua and Dosso met to share experiences and exchange ideas on the themes of resilience and preparation for the risk of disasters linked to climate change. The participants listed their main achievements:

In the region of Tahoua, the Dimitra Clubs:
- made half-moon-shaped depressions to combat desertification, with a view to restoring plant cover;
- launched an annual horticulture plan to improve community nutrition;
- set up mini-cereal banks, as a strategy to combat risks of food insecurity;
- built an access road to the nearest market, for easier sales of agricultural produce (Kalalé).

In the region of Zinder, the Clubs:
- clubbed together to contribute 550 kg of cereals, which they put aside to combat food insecurity;
- supported the management boards of several schools, helping with the construction of sheds and latrines;
- sunk 10 sumps for horticulture;
- collected acacia albida seeds for reforestation and soil fertilization.

In the region of Dosso, the Clubs:
- set up a literacy centre partly funded by the government;
- established collective rice fields, with sales producing financial resources for the community;
- conducted awareness-raising for girls’ education;
- encouraged a woman leader of the Dimitra Club to stand for election as city councillor in the municipality of Tanda. And she won!

**In the region of Zinder, Niger, the Clubs are developing strategies for more effective resistance to climate change**

- Delayed rainfall prompted Dimitra Clubs in the village of Gamdou (department of Mirriah) to discuss new strategies to cope with drought linked to climate change. Men and women Club members agreed that they expended much of their energy in producing their staple food, millet. Millet relies heavily on rainfall and its distribution over time and requires rich soil in order to grow well. Dimitra Club members suggested working collectively on alternative crops adapted to local conditions. The women decided to protect natural spaces on the edge of the village, where a wild plant grows. This is Corchorus olitorius, commonly known as Nalta jute or tossa jute, and highly prized throughout Niger as an ingredient for sauces. The women have calculated that, working together, they can harvest large quantities to sell at market when the price is high. A share of the resources generated by this activity will go towards supporting more vulnerable community members when they face difficult times.

- For their part, the men each decided to set aside a corner of their field, marking off an area to leave unsown, so as to encourage the development of a grass used throughout the region to fatten animals. This grass can be conserved as hay and fetches high prices at certain times of the year in the region of Zinder. Sales are likely to compensate for a large share of the lost revenue from cereals. The men from the Dimitra Clubs will cut the hay and, like the women, will use the revenue generated to make cereals available for the village and provide support for community members.

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On 6 March, the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) hosted the celebration of International Women’s Day in collaboration with the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and World Food Programme (WFP). Several leading experts shared testimonials of innovative interventions carried out by the Rome-based UN agencies that have empowered women, made a difference to rural livelihoods and contributed to food and nutrition security.

FAO Dimitra was presented during a panel discussion as one of the four good practices for empowering rural women and achieving food and nutrition security. The presentation showed how the Dimitra Clubs create spaces for both women and men farmers at community level to discuss issues affecting their lives and livelihoods so that they could collectively decide on a strategy and take action to bring about real change. The session was followed by a Gender Share Fair where Bioversity International, FAO, the International Development Law Organization, IFAD, the International Land Coalition, the United Nations Women’s Guild, WFP and the World Farmers’ Organization showcased innovative experiences that have empowered rural women. The event was very well-attended, with many permanent representatives present, together with colleagues from the Rome-based agencies, civil society and universities. In addition, over 1000 people followed the proceedings via webcast.

Watch the video:
www.youtube.com/watch?v=swpm1yJPuko&feature=youtu.be

**DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO | BANDUNDU**

**Assessment and awareness-raising**

Since the beginning of this year, some twenty Dimitra Clubs were launched in the areas of Bagata, Popokabaka, Kenge, Idiofa, Masi-manimba and Kikwit, as part of the Hommes et femmes, progressions ensemble (men and women let’s move forward together) programme, which is aimed at reducing social and financial inequalities between men and women. After carrying out an assessment to take stock of the situation in targeted areas, especially regarding participatory communication and gender, awareness-raising activities were conducted in the community and with local actors. Communities in the targeted areas proved extremely receptive, despite some sociocultural constraints. As part of a collaborative arrangement with the national and provincial authorities, two government officials from Orientale Province, who were Club facilitators in their own province, were made available for several months by the Inspectorate for Rural Development. This enabled the Bandundu project to capitalize on the experience of the Dimitra Clubs in Orientale Province and help to strengthen national capacities.

**Launch workshop**

The workshop for the Dimitra Clubs was held over five days in Kikwit and brought together 36 participants, including 17 women. This important process helped to strengthen the capacities of participants on issues of gender and participatory communication in rural areas, and to have a better understanding of the Dimitra Club approach.

**Decentralized training**

A series of decentralized training sessions was conducted in the six territories of Bandundu by officials from Orientale Province. The sessions, which brought together Dimitra Club members and local leaders (25 people per session), dealt with the same themes as the launch workshop, but from a more practical perspective (focussing especially on how the clubs work and their specific features). Dimitra Club committees were set up on this occasion. The participants gave a presentation to the newly created Clubs.
The fifty-ninth session of the Commission on the Status of Women took place at United Nations Headquarters in New York from 9 to 20 March 2015. Representatives of Member States, UN entities, ECOSOC and accredited non-governmental organizations (NGOs), from all regions of the world, were among those who attended.

The session marked the 20th anniversary of the landmark Fourth World Conference on Women (CSW) held in Beijing in 1995. The main focus of the assembly was the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action as well as on the current challenges that affect its implementation, the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of women.

The Commission undertook a review of progress made in the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, 20 years after its adoption at the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995. The review (Beijing+20) also included the outcomes of the 23rd special session of the General Assembly, the first five-year assessment conducted after the adoption of the Platform for Action, which highlighted further actions and initiatives. The session also addressed opportunities for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of women in the post-2015 development agenda.

**For more information:**

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**Video:**

**Access to Water and Land Dimitra Clubs in Niger**

This video shows how the FAO Dimitra Clubs in Niger have improved women’s access to land and water - all the while contributing to nutrition, food security and gender equality - thereby reducing rural poverty. The Dimitra Club approach brings about behavioural changes in various aspects of daily life for individuals, households and communities in rural areas. Dimitra Clubs are groups of rural women and men who voluntarily decide to get organized to discuss the challenges they face, find solutions and take collective action. They help to promote empowerment for rural communities, especially women and young people, to enable them to improve their livelihoods and take control of their own lives.

Dimitra is currently making a series of videos about Dimitra Clubs. All the films, shot in DR Congo and Niger, will be made available online by the end of 2015.

*FAO, 2015*

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kaKQweThYP8
Duration: 6’47

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**59th session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW)**

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Empowerment.

Schemes for women, particularly in the context of policy brief considers the concrete benefits of CT and decision-making in the household. Issued by CTs actually improve women's bargaining power is far from conclusive, particularly as to whether schemes have an empowering effect on women, reviews progress made since 1990 for every country 2015 Sustainable Development Agenda. The report needs to be done as we transition to the new post-
towards achieving the internationally established in the World report takes stock of progress made allocation of their time. It also looks into the available labour-saving technologies, practices and services that can support women to better address the demands derived from the domestic and productive spheres. The findings elaborated in this paper feed a set of recommendations provided for policy-makers and development partners. A gender-transformative approach at community and household level is suggested as a way forward to promote women’s increased control over the allocation of their time.

FAO, 2015

The State of Food Insecurity in the World 2015. Meeting the 2015 international hunger targets: taking stock of uneven progress.

This year’s annual State of Food Insecurity in the World report takes stock of progress made towards achieving the internationally established Millennium Development Goal (MDG1) and World Food Summit hunger targets and reflects on what needs to be done as we transition to the new post-2015 Sustainable Development Agenda. The report reviews progress made since 1990 for every country and region as well as for the world as a whole.

FAO, FIDA, PAM, 2015

The impact of cash transfers on the economic advancement, decision-making and capacity of women

It is often claimed that cash transfer (CT) schemes have an empowering effect on women, but available evidence on empowerment outcomes is far from conclusive, particularly as to whether CTs actually improve women’s bargaining power and decision-making in the household. Issued by the From Protection to Production programme, this policy brief considers the concrete benefits of CT schemes for women, particularly in the context of economic empowerment, economic advancement, decision-making power, self-esteem and social empowerment.

FAO, 2015
http://www.fao.org/3/a-i4726e.pdf

Interview - Women paving the way

A new method of drying fish using raised racks has enabled women across West Africa to increase their income to the benefit of themselves and their families. The method has been credited with empowering communities as well as preserving food security and nutrition. Interview of FAO Fishery Industry Officer Yvette Diei-Ouadi.

FAO, 2015

Fish drying method changes lives in Burundi

Documentary on a FAO project to equip small fishing communities with the tools and know-how to dry fish on raised racks that has changed lives along the shores of Lake Tanganyika in Burundi.

FAO, 2015

IFAD Annual Report 2014

IFAD’s 2014 annual report gives an overview of the operational, administrative and financial activities during the year and shares stories about some of the rural women and men IFAD has been working with. The report pays attention to the fact that women now represent about 50 per cent of beneficiaries in IFAD-supported programmes and includes successful IFAD approaches in addressing gender equality and women’s empowerment.

IFAD, 2015
www.ifad.org/pub/ar/2014/e/print.pdf

Progress of the World’s Women 2015-2016: Transforming Economies, Realizing Rights

Progress 2015 draws on the experiences of those working toward gender equality and women’s rights around the world. It brings together human rights and economic policy-making, and provides the key elements for a far-reaching new policy agenda that can transform economies and make women’s rights a reality. Through solid in-depth analysis and data, this evidence-based report provides key recommendations on moving towards an economy that truly works for women, for the benefit of all.

UN Women, 2015
www.progress.unwomen.org/en/2015/

UN Women Evaluation Handbook: How to Manage Gender-Responsive Evaluation

This Evaluation Handbook is a practical guide to help those initiating, managing and/or using gender-responsive evaluations by providing direction, advice and tools for every step in the evaluation process: planning, preparation, conduct, reporting, evaluation use and follow-up. It can be useful to international development evaluators and professionals, particularly those working on gender equality, women’s empowerment and human rights.

UN Women, 2015
www.genderevaluation.unwomen.org/en/ evaluation-handbook

The Millennium Development Goals Report 2015

This report is based on a master set of data that has been compiled by the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on MDG Indicators, led by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat in response to the wishes of the General Assembly for periodic assessment of progress towards the MDGs. The Group comprises representatives of the international organizations whose activities include the preparation of one or more of the series of statistical indicators that were identified as appropriate for monitoring progress towards the MDGs.


The Full Participation Report

Women and girls today have a much greater chance to live healthy and secure lives, and their fundamental human rights are now protected by law in many countries. However, too many obstacles limit the full participation of women and girls. Many countries still lack laws to safeguard women’s rights; implementation and enforcement often lag. The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the No Ceilings initiative of the Bill, Hillary & Chelsea Clinton Foundation joined forces to assess the evidence on the gains and gaps in progress for women and girls over the past 20 years.

No ceilings: the full participation project, 2015
Girls, not brides. Lessons Learned from Selected National Initiatives to End Child Marriage

The Global Partnership to End Child Marriage is a partnership of more than 500 civil society organisations from over 70 countries. It aims to raise awareness of the harmful impact of child marriage by encouraging open, inclusive and informed discussions at community, local, national and international levels. This report starts by briefly introducing national strategies/initiatives in four selected countries (Egypt, Ethiopia, Nepal, Zambia) and then summarises lessons and challenges that have started to emerge from those countries.

The Global Partnership to End Child Marriage, 2015

Gender and Food Security: Towards Gender-Just Food and Nutrition Security

This BRIDGE Cutting Edge Overview Report makes the case for a new, gender-aware understanding of food security, arguing that partial, apolitical and gender-blind diagnoses of the problem of food and nutrition insecurity is leading to insufficient policy responses and the failure to realise the right to food for all. Showcasing effective and promising existing strategies, the report suggests that in order to truly achieve food security for all in gender equitable ways, responses need to be rights-based, gender-just and environmentally sustainable.

Institute of Development Studies, 2014
www.bridge.ids.ac.uk/ids-document/A6gB8y?lang=en

Gender equality & women and girls empowerment: considerations for the post 2015 agenda

Women’s Major Group (WMG) position paper on the delivery of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the Post-2015 development agenda. This position paper outlines the WMG’s vision and priorities, including themes, goals, targets, and indicators, for the delivery of SDGs and the Post-2015 development agenda.

Women’s Major Group, 2015
www.uoacn.org/system/files/WMG%20POST%20UPD%20POSITION%20PAPER-FINAL.pdf?file=1&type=node&id=1302

Advancing gender equality: The co-operative way

An online survey conducted by the International Labour Organization’s (ILO) Cooperatives Unit and the International Co-operative Alliance shows 75 per cent of survey respondents feel that women’s participation in co-operatives has increased over the past 20 years. Key findings indicate that co-operatives are having an increasingly positive impact on women: 80 per cent of survey respondents felt that co-operatives are better than other types of private or public sector business in advancing gender equality.

ILO and International Co-operative Alliance, 2015

Claiming Women’s Economic, Social & Cultural Rights


www.esc-net.org/sites/default/files/Editors/WMG%20%20Women%E2%80%93ESCR%20-%20Final.pdf

Social protection for maternity: Key policy trends and statistics

This policy paper: (i) provides a global overview of the organization of maternity cash benefits and maternity care in 188 countries; (ii) analyses trends and recent policies, e.g. extension of maternity protection coverage in a large number of low- and middle-income countries; (iii) describes the negative impacts of fiscal consolidation and adjustment measures in a number of higher-income economies; (iv) presents the costs of a universal benefit to all pregnant women in 57 low and middle income countries; and (v) calls for the expansion of maternity protection to accelerate progress on women’s rights and enhancing the well-being of new mothers, promoting inclusive development and social justice.

ILO, 2015


Inspired by the launch of the African Women’s Decade (AWD) in 2010 and by the Beijing Platform for Action, an outcome of the 1995 Fourth United Nations World Conference on Women (which recommended the creation of mechanisms to monitor gender equality and the advancement of women), Make Every Woman Count’s Annual Review of the AWD evaluates the progress - or lack thereof - being made to include and promote the rights of women at country, regional, and Pan-African levels.

Make Every Woman Count, 2014

The State of Social Safety Nets

Over the last decade, a policy revolution has been underway in the developing and emerging world. Country after country is systematically providing non-contributory transfers to poor and vulnerable people, in order to protect them against economic shocks and to enable them to invest in themselves and their children. The statistics and analysis in The State of Social Safety Nets 2015 capture this revolution, and reveal its many dimensions at the country, regional, and international levels.

World Bank, 2015
https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/223101

Note: Most of the publications mentioned here are available on-line for free (unless otherwise specified). Most web links are too long to provide in their entirety. If the publications are hard to find on the organisation’s websites, it usually suffices to do a google search.