



a 22-kilo sack of onions. When asked how far they had to carry their loads, the women say they have come from villages near Kalonge, around 40 to 50 km away from the market in Mudaka. They left home at around 5 p.m. the previous day, rested between 11 p.m. and 3 a.m., and then resumed their strenuous journey until they came across us at 11 a.m. That makes a 14-hour walk!

#### The weight of tradition

When we asked the women why only they, rather than the men, do the carrying, most explained that this was "the tradition, custom or culture", and that carrying is one of the tasks usually reserved for women. Other women, selling cassava chips, bunches of bananas or charcoal, cited economic reasons, saying that they serve as carriers out of

necessity, because their living conditions are so tough.

Asked why their men do not help them carry produce to the market, the women replied that transporting goods, especially agricultural produce, is women's work. One even gave a physiological justification, claiming that "men's heads, and even more so their backs, are unsuitable for carrying, and that women are destined and trained for this kind of work from a tender age".

---

#### For more information, please contact:

**Free Advice asbl**

François Vaxelaire & Eliane Beeson

info@free-advice.be

<http://free-advice.be>

**L'Observatoire de la Parité**

Esperance Mawanzo, Director

Tel.: +243 9999 41197

[contact@observatoiredelaparite.org](mailto:contact@observatoiredelaparite.org)

[www.observatoiredelaparite.org](http://www.observatoiredelaparite.org)

## Benin – Empowering women to help them guarantee food security



**The aim of the Groupe de Recherche et d'Appui à l'Autopromotion durable à la Base (GRAAB ONG – Research and Support Group for Sustainable Grassroots Self-Advancement) is to help improve the material well-being and livelihoods of the most destitute people in Benin, especially women and children, by fostering a participatory, self-help approach. The organisation is also the Focal Point for Dimitra in Benin.**

GRAAB ONG maintains that any human being, whether male or female, can aspire to and actually become socially, economically and culturally better off. Wanting to achieve this is an entirely legitimate aspiration, but the only way of breaking the long chain of social imbalances in the world is to consider the millions of marginalised people – the poor, women, children or members of any other vulnerable social group – as individuals who have the dignity, duty, ability and resources which can be strengthened in order for them to thrive.

#### Women's empowerment: a tangible activity

In the context of a women's empowerment project implemented by GRAAB ONG and financed by l'Organisation internationale de la Francophonie (IOF – International Organisation of La Francophonie), 120 women

were trained to raise rabbits and learn basic accounting to help them better manage their activities. All the women in question came from low-income households in Golo-Djigbé, in the municipality of Abomey-Calavi. After receiving their training, they were given a helping hand to set up their activities, with each woman receiving a breeding kit comprising two cages with four compartments, eight feeders, eight drinking troughs, a plastic bucket, a machete and four rabbits (one male and three females). Six months later, the women had to return the four rabbits they had been given, enabling other women to start breeding under the same conditions.

The women's activities are monitored by a female veterinary extension worker who visits each participant at home on a monthly basis,

providing any veterinary care the animals may require and offering practical guidance on a case-by-case basis. She organises meetings to plan the dates of various activities with the women and to make sure that all the women take responsibility for their particular duties. Weekly meetings between the women give them an opportunity to exchange experiences, assess whether their activities are on track, highlight any difficulties and seek solutions together.

#### The involvement of women from the inception phase of the project

The content of the project was based on proposals made by the women themselves and took into consideration the difficulties they face in meeting their needs. It was they who chose the rabbit because of its short reproduc-



tive cycle. The women were involved in every stage of the project process and each participant is responsible for her own affairs.

Prior to the implementation of the project, an in-depth socio-cultural study confirmed that breeding rabbits and eating their meat did not pose a problem in the community in question. From the technical and environmental points of view, local materials are available which women can use for free in food and for veterinary care. Financially and economically, the resources they need to start breeding rabbits are relatively modest and can be recovered quickly. Furthermore, the high demand for rabbit meat in restaurants, hotels and even some families exceeds the supply available.

#### Positive results

And the results have been positive: after six months of breeding each of the women had an

average of 45 rabbits, enabling them to regularly prepare meals of (highly nutritious) rabbit meat and to sell some animals as well. A rabbit weighing 2 kg sells for 3,000 CFA francs (roughly 4.5 euros or 6 USD). The women use the proceeds of such sales to meet their needs and make sure that their children get an education. In addition, the women have teamed up to form village associations, and they meet up once a month to exchange news and views on their activities and problems.

#### For more information, contact:

GRAAB ONG  
Martin Tohou, Executive Director  
BP 2355, Goho (Abomey)  
Republic of Benin  
Tel.: +229 95 42 88 19  
E-mail: [graabta@yahoo.fr](mailto:graabta@yahoo.fr)



Each of the women received a breeding kit comprising two cages with four compartments, eight feeders, eight drinking troughs, a plastic bucket, a machete and four rabbits.

The women participating in the project were trained to raise rabbits and in basic accounting to help them better manage their activities.

## The story of Catherine Aguin,

25 years old and mother of four

I found out there was an information meeting for women about a rabbit-breeding project at the GRAAB office in Abomey-Calavi on 20 October 2006, so I decided to attend it in my capacity as president of the Gbénonkpo group. At the meeting, the people running GRAAB and the extension workers gave a presentation on the project.

After hearing what they had to say, other women from my group and from the village decided, like me, to sign up for a five-day training course arranged in our village. A month after that course, each of the 20 (female) participants was given a breeding kit. Six months later, I had 54 young rabbits, 30 of which weighed 2 kg. Selling at 3,000 CFA francs each, this earned me 90,000 CFA francs in 6 months, which is wonderful. I managed to step up my own breeding programme to include 10 females and 3 males. Now my husband, my children and I eat a large rabbit every other week. I myself pay for what my children need for school and make sure they can have breakfast at the school. Moreover, I use the (fully organic) rabbit droppings as fertiliser on the small field I tend beside my house. The other women participating in the rabbit-breeding project and I get together once a month to discuss any problems to do with our activity.

This activity has not prevented me from continuing my other activities, as it does not take up much time and is home-based, where my children can help me. I'm very happy and think the project can really help women take charge of their lives and face up to their situation. What I found particularly remarkable about the project is not only that it provides training, but that after being kitted out each woman receives individual assistance for six months. Subsequently, and after returning four rabbits to GRAAB to enable the organisation to help other women, too, each woman is fully responsible for what she achieves.