



DEVELOPING THE KNOWLEDGE, SKILLS AND TALENT OF YOUTH TO FURTHER FOOD SECURITY AND NUTRITION

The following case study was received as a result of a call issued by the Committee on World Food Security for case studies highlighting examples of initiatives aimed at 'Developing the knowledge, skills and talent of youth to further food security and nutrition'. The cases received provide the background for a discussion of lessons learned and potential policy implications at a special event on October 15th, 2015 during CFS 42. Find out more at www.fao.org/cfs/youth.

Background

In several sub-Saharan countries, FAO-Dimitra supports a gender-sensitive participatory communication approach called the Dimitra Clubs. These clubs contribute to improve access to information and communication for rural communities, especially women and youth, so as to promote their socio-economic empowerment and community governance.

In Niger, this approach has yielded outstanding results in terms of socioeconomic empowerment of the most marginalized groups and it has been crucial for ensuring access to land and agricultural innovations. This is the case of Bankadey, an isolated village of the Tillabéry Region, where the young members of one of the Dimitra Clubs in the area have gained secure access to a plot of land of an acre to practice horticulture. The landowners agreed to lend a plot to the youth group: an agreement that was formalized and registered in Niamey in a lease contract for 99 years.

Challenges

In Niger, young people in rural areas traditionally suffer from a lack of access to productive resources, especially land. This case shows that access to information and the use of an innovative participatory communication approach, such as the Dimitra Clubs, can trigger new social dynamics and development processes where youth issues are taken into account. As the whole process is participatory and empowering, the youth have gained the complete ownership of their project. This makes the outcomes sustainable.

Approach Used

Dimitra is a participatory information and communication programme that promotes individual and collective socio-economic empowerment of rural populations, women and youth in particular, through the Dimitra Clubs (DCs). The DCs are informal women, men or mixed groups that meet regularly to discuss their development priorities and challenges, exchange their experiences with other DCs, make informed choices and take collective action to solve their problems – related to agriculture or other issues - with their own resources. In this approach, community radio is used as a relay to improving flows of information, communication and networking.

The DCs transformative approach has been implemented in several countries in sub-Saharan Africa. In Niger it has proved to be successful in increasing self-confidence of members, boosting smallholder



farmers' productivity, improving nutrition, access to information, market, credit, extension services and helping informal groups to transform or join formal producers' organizations. In terms of short-term impact, the DCs have led to major changes in individual and collective behaviours and agricultural practices, particularly in the relations between women and men, and between generations.

A few Dimitra Clubs were set up in 2010 in the isolated village of Bankadey, in the Tillabéry Region, with the support of FAO-Dimitra. The initiative was soon a great success, attracting the participation of many of the village's inhabitants. The clubs' members met on a regular basis and identified and discussed topics such as food security, sanitation, access to water and land, nutrition, market gardening, early marriage, etc. Discussions were always followed up by a meeting at the village level with the village chief and where collective action would be decided.

After hearing discussions on the radio and various visits to the nearby village of Banizoumbou, where a group of women had obtained a 99-year land lease contract from eight local landowners, the young members of the Dimitra Club in the village of Bankadey decided to follow in the footsteps of Banizoumbou's women. They created a farmers group and successfully lobbied their own local authorities to get a secure plot of land of an acre for 99 years: The first "Jardin Potager African" run by young farmers (women and men) was born in the village of Bankadey.

Thanks to the support of a local NGO (CADEF), the youth group also obtained a solar water pump and the fence of the plot.

However, no support on agricultural techniques was provided. This created many problems in terms of crop yield, during the first year of activities. Therefore, through discussions within the Dimitra Club, the young farmers asked and obtained the technical support of a local expert from the neighbouring village of Banizoumbou.

Thanks to this support, the young people of Bankadey were able to improve their skills in agriculture and increase their knowledge of agricultural techniques. Today their harvest is looking quite good and they will be able to produce sufficient quantities of agricultural products, to ensure their livelihood and that of their families and to sell the surplus on the local markets.

Outcome and Impact Achieved

Thanks to this highly empowering process, a group of young people in an isolated village of Niger changed the way in which agriculture is perceived, not as a means of survival anymore, but as a source of income, food security and improved nutrition.

Lessons Learned/Opportunities for Scaling-Up

This approach is context-specific and requires a lot of flexibility and adaptation. Attitude and respect are a must.



This is an endogenous process of capacity development in different areas (analysis, synthesis, listening and expression) and in collective action and networking. This requires close support and guidance from external facilitators, hopefully organised in a network, to provide efficient support. Guidance is indispensable and needs to be in line with the principles of the Dimitra Clubs (such as action-oriented, participation, ownership, gender equality, etc.).

Training at all levels, with the different stakeholders, facilitates successive partnerships (with public, private actors, civil society, etc.).

Policy Implications

The Dimitra clubs are very active at the village level. The changes are tangible and the programme has also attracted the attention of political institutions at local and national level.

The High Commissioner for the 3N Initiative (Nigériens nourish Nigériens) has recognised this approach as a good practice to be up-scaled and has declared that it feeds into the national 3N strategy.