

‘Communicating gender for development’: Dimitra’s new training module

For the past few months, Dimitra has been developing a training module on gender-sensitive communication. A word of explanation...

Further to requests from its partners, Dimitra began to develop a training course which emphasised the links between ‘gender’ and ‘communication for development’. The course is also rooted in Dimitra’s own experience.

Through the implementation of its many activities over time, Dimitra identified a need among its partners in this field. Staff at the ministries and many other parties involved in Dimitra’s activities wanted to improve their communication methods, information tools and gender knowledge to raise the profile of and better explain the challenges related to gender equality, especially in the area of agriculture and rural development.

The gender concept and approach

The concept of gender is complex and often misunderstood, it carries many stereotypes and raises numerous questions. Despite the amount of information available on the subject, few social actors truly understand gender-equality issues. Although the media have a major part to play in information diffusion, awareness-raising and social extension work, particularly at local level, they show little interest in gender issues. Furthermore, the communication capacities of NGOs working for rural development are often limited. Ministries too often confuse ‘gender’ and ‘women’ and find it difficult to integrate gender into their national policies.

One of the keys to reducing and removing persistent inequalities between men and women is access to information. Such access enables men and women to understand the issues at stake and seize opportunities for changes in behaviour at the social, economic, technical and political levels. However, such change can only take place if both men and women are involved in the transformation process.

Principles of the training course

The goal of the ‘Communicating gender’ training course is to contribute to development efforts for gender equality by promoting information and communication that take gender issues into account.

Its general aims are to:

- build the capacity of government personnel to transversally include gender issues in agricultural and rural development policies and measure their differentiated impact on men and women, including vulnerable groups and female-headed households;
- ensure equal access for men and women to resources, goods, services and decision-making in rural areas;

- help governments to formulate agricultural and development policies that take gender equality into account, exclude no one and are participatory.

At the end of the training course, all participants will have:

- basic knowledge of gender issues and communication;
- increased their ability to analyse a communication situation from a gender perspective and develop a strategic vision of communication;
- been encouraged to change their behaviour in the workplace and ensure that their communication actions are more gender sensitive.



The ‘Communicating gender for development’ training course aims to contribute to development efforts for gender equality by promoting information and communication that take gender issues into account.

'Communicating gender for development' training course

THREE PILOT WORKSHOPS IN SENEGAL, THE DRC AND NIGER

A key stage in the development of the 'Communicating gender for development' module, the organisation of pilot workshops in MBour (Senegal), Lubumbashi (Democratic Republic of Congo) and Niamey (Niger) has finalised Dimitra's innovative training module. Almost 60 participants from ministries, the media, grassroots and international organisations gathered with two purposes: increasing their gender and communication capacities and testing the training module. The training courses were facilitated by Agnès Le Magadoux and Yannick De Mol.

Senegal: the first step

Last June, the Dimitra team launched its series of training courses by organising a workshop on 'Communicating gender for development' at the Enda Made Sahel Centre in MBour. This first step confirmed the importance of anchoring gender training in practical and concrete experience. Although this training module is, in many ways, an introduction to gender concepts and the basics of communication, using examples drawn from participants' everyday lives is clearly a good way to proceed. Drawing from participants' experience and especially from awareness-raising campaigns they conducted in Senegal, the trainers ensured that all were able to participate actively.

DRC: at the request of and with the support of the Katanga Ministry of Agriculture

In early September, the second training course was set up in Lubumbashi, Katanga Province, in cooperation with REFED-Katanga, Dimitra's partner there, and the Provincial Ministry for Agriculture, Fisheries, Stockbreeding and Rural Development. Most of the participants worked for the provincial Ministry of Agriculture but the national ministries for Gender, Agriculture and Rural Development also participated, each sending two participants. Provincial Minister Mumba Gama demonstrated his interest in the workshop by opening the course and supplying staff and equipment to help out with the organisation.

The programme was adapted so that the participants could acquire basic gender approach and analysis skills through the step-by-step creation of a communication activity, such as a video forum or a series of radio announcements on issues they work on every day. It is very important to adapt the content to the local context.

Niger: the conclusion

The last pilot workshop was organised in Niamey at the end of September by Dimitra's partner organisation ONG-VIE, which works mainly in the field of informal education and literacy. Although quite similar to the one organised in Katanga, the main differences were related to the composition of the group – this workshop attracted a higher number of gender experts – and the improvement of the teaching materials. The group was particularly diverse, which influenced its dynamics. But, again, the development of a communication activity as a group, proved to be the appropriate approach. Positive feedback from the participants confirmed the fine-tuning of the teaching materials in line with the needs identified during the previous workshops. The contents of the training course will be used during the coming months by ONG-VIE within the scope of its project 'Creation of radio listeners' clubs for empowerment and leadership among rural women and young people in literacy centres'. (see page 7).

Lessons learned

Generally speaking, the organisation of this series of pilot training courses made it possible to confront theory with practice and fine-tune a number of components, in particular by listening to participant feedback, during both the training courses and the final evaluation session. Here are the main conclusions:

- The effectiveness of the selected **teaching approach** was demonstrated: based on the principles of participatory communication, and integrating gender concept acquisition into communication activities that most participants experience/have experienced in their professional lives. This makes it easier to understand the direct link between gender issues and real life. Reflecting on simple, taken for granted concepts as well as on stereotypes and prejudices is indispensable.
- As far as **content** is concerned, the use of examples and case studies proved extremely useful. The composition of the groups has



The training is anchored in practice, using the concrete experiences of participants, notably by working on existing awareness-raising campaigns. The use of examples and case studies proved extremely useful.

Communicating gender for development: some basic principles

a significant influence on the synergies, and therefore the content, of the training courses. The dynamic varies widely according to area of expertise, especially when the participant is specialised in the areas of communication or of gender. Finding the right balance between communication and gender was a challenge faced during each of the training sessions.

- Concerning **logistics** and **organisation**, it is crucial to have two trainers (a man and a woman) to fully take into account the sensitivities and viewpoints of both the men and women attending the training course. It is also very important to create a good group dynamic. Ideally, the training courses should be residential and specific activities should be organised (games, events, outings) to foster this dynamic. It is useful to target those working in the field.

In the course of each workshop, the Dimitra team was surprised at the participants' level of commitment beyond the training course. It is therefore particularly important to give participants the opportunity to think of the post-training period and how their new skills will translate into their professional activity. The commitment displayed by individuals and groups shows just how timely the development of the Dimitra training module is and provides invaluable indicators for evaluation and follow-up.

The future: training courses and the publication of a teaching guide

The interest shown by the authorities and by development actors also augurs well for the future. Dimitra is already considering cooperation with several ministries so that the training courses can be replicated on a larger scale.

In the coming months, within the scope of other projects by FAO and international organisations, Dimitra will be able to implement and adjust the module in the coming months, notably by working with community radio staff.

As with all its activities, Dimitra capitalises on its achievements and experiences. Over the next few months, the training team and Dimitra will be developing a guide to be used as a reference on the subject of gender and communication in rural areas. The content will include the key components of the training courses so that others can use them, whether for training or other development activities.

- * For more information on the training courses, please contact the Dimitra team: dimitra@dimitra.org

Taking the gender dimension into account in a communication activity requires that the interests, problems, experiences and priorities of both women and men be considered and discussed.

'Communicating gender for development' is based on the premise that society should move towards equality between men and women. Thus, while removing discrimination and ensuring respect for the basic rights of all, the aim is for control of and equal access to:

- basic services, infrastructures, education and health to support **social empowerment**;
- productive resources and technology, in particular land and agricultural financing and diversification of tools and technologies (in particular loans and incentives), to promote **economic empowerment**;
- negotiating platforms, information and opportunities for communication, as well as decision-making bodies, to encourage **political empowerment**.

These three dimensions (social, economic and political) are indissociable and cannot be treated separately. What use would it be to encourage education while restricting access to a profession or the rights inherent to full citizenship? Conversely, what would be the

point of access to economic activities without the means to engage in them for lack of basic knowledge, resources and opportunities to make oneself heard? Gender equality can only be sought when all three dimensions are taken into account as a single, indivisible unit in which each component is of equal importance.

This is why taking the gender dimension into account in a communication activity requires that the interests, problems, experiences and priorities of both women and men be considered and discussed. This does not mean taking a biased approach in which only the interests of women are taken into consideration. On the contrary, sensitivity to different points of view is required to work together.

What is needed is a specific mindset, a critical approach and a commitment to equality. In practice, it means wearing 'gender spectacles' to render 'forgotten' or 'concealed' dimensions.

TO COMMUNICATE GENDER, IT IS CRUCIAL TO:

- know and understand the context;
- take several viewpoints, opinions and statements into account during the communication action: those of women and men and not only those who have authority and power;
- name all interested parties. The French practice of using the masculine plural to refer to mixed groups should be discarded;
- find the people who are "missing" from your communication activity;
- be aware of stereotypes and prejudices, especially sexist ones, that everyone holds, the trainers included;
- demonstrate the effects of gender relations;
- conduct research with experts and above all with field workers to better understand their specific needs.



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