

Benin | Micro-gardens against malnutrition



David Tohou waters his micro-garden.

His reaction at the Fair: “The micro-garden is what really caught my attention. Honestly, I want to try it out myself. It’s a very simple, easy and practical concept, which we need to experiment and develop in Benin.” Indeed, following his return home, he created several of his own, following the guidelines he had been taught at the Fair. Since then, he and his family have been producing different kinds of vegetables (tomatoes, peppers and amaranth, etc.), with relatively little effort and using just small amounts of water.

Even David, the youngest member of the family, has been caught up in the enthusiasm. When still very young, he would pull up young plants and pick tomatoes before they were ripe. But now, after watching his mother go about

In 2010, Martin Tohou, Executive Director of the NGO GRAAB and focal point for FAO-Dimitra in Benin, participated in the Knowledge Share Fair in Niamey (Niger). He was particularly captivated and inspired by the cultivation of vegetables in micro-gardens, and decided to create them at home, in Benin.

her daily work, the young boy has begun to cultivate micro-gardens alongside her, watering the plastic tubs that he can manage to reach. He now insists on being given water each day so that he can sprinkle some on his own garden!

But the experience has not been limited to the family circle. Through his NGO, Martin Tohou has set up training sessions for low-income farming households on micro-gardening techniques and small-scale animal husbandry. With support from the NGO’s partners, 30 women have each been given four micro-gardens, together with seeds and an animal husbandry kit, consisting of sheep and local chickens. The results have been encouraging: the members of each household are now self-sufficient in vegetables throughout the year and sell their surplus output. The micro-gardens alone earn an average weekly revenue of 2 500 FCFA for each woman, without counting the income generated through the raising of small livestock.

The activity is now being extended. In Agbangnizoun, in central Benin, GRAAB (Groupe de Recherche et d’Appui à l’Autopromotion durable à la Base) has just built a training room, a well and a water tower on one hectare of land specially destined for training in above-ground micro-garden cultivation techniques

Sylvie, a micro-garden pioneer

My name is Sylvie Afazonnou. I am 37 years old and am married with four children. I attended a two-day training course organized by GRAAB on micro-garden and small-scale animal husbandry techniques. When the training ended, I received four plastic tubs to build my own garden. To make compost, I collect household waste and manure from my livestock, and I use plastic sacks for above-ground cultivation. Since I started, my children, husband and I have eaten vegetables from my small garden on a daily basis. That means I can save 200 FCFA per day. My neighbours buy the surplus, from which I earn an average of 2 500 FCFA each week. Other women have already asked me to train them in the technique, so that they too can produce vegetables at home. I would like to thank GRAAB for its support.

and small-scale animal husbandry. The NGO has obtained financial support from the FAO 1% for Development Fund to train and set up micro-gardens for 50 women in the commune of Agbangnizoun.

In all, GRAAB is planning to reach 200 women in each of Zou Department’s nine communes, making a total of 1.800 women. In turn, each of these will take on the task of training one or two more women, and gradually setting them up. This programme will make a substantial contribution to tackling malnutrition, hunger and poverty in a sustainable and effective manner.

Spurred on by his experience, Martin Tohou is now a strong advocate of regular knowledge share fairs, so as to foster this kind of exchange and promote the adoption of good practices.

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Training of women on micro-gardening techniques.