

Mali | Empowering women herbalists in Bamako and Segou

Aide au Développement de la Médecine Traditionnelle (Aid to Development of Traditional Medicine) – Aidemet for short – is a Malian NGO whose main goal is to develop and enhance the use of traditional medicine’s resources in the health, environment, social and cultural sectors. It was launched in 2003. A recent action-research project aimed at social and economic empowerment for women through the development of local knowledge of plants has increased income, knowledge and self-esteem for women herbalists in Bamako and Segou.

Since 2005, Aidemet has focused its studies and activities on strengthening the financial autonomy of women herbalists and gaining greater recognition for the role they play in society. The idea has been to help them lift themselves out of poverty and insecurity. Objectives included providing them with better quality plants, reducing pressure on natural resources and promoting the transfer of knowledge to younger generations.

With the support of various donors and in partnership with associations of stakeholders in traditional medicine, Aidemet launched a campaign to ‘adopt’ herbalists in Bamako. The initiative provided kiosks for more than 25 herbalists, to serve as a sales outlet for medicinal plants; most of the herbalists were women. Subsequent studies showed that the monthly income of herbalists with kiosks was 51.550 FCFA (about 78 euros), 38% higher than that of herbalists without kiosks.

In the light of these results, the Italian Development Cooperation, working through UNOPS (an operational arm of the United Nations), agreed to fund an action-research project called “Economic autonomy and empowerment of women through the promotion of local knowledge about plants”. The project, which involved 20 women herbalists, was carried out in Bamako and Segou between March 2011 and June 2012.

The project’s main activities involved supplying 20 kiosks so as to improve the presentation, sales and storage of medicinal plants and training women herbalists in techniques for harvesting, storing and processing medicinal plants, as well as in simple financial and accounts management. Close support was provided and a self-managed microcredit fund was set in place. The experience was documented in a brochure.¹

To launch the microcredit fund, the project deposited a total of 5 million FCFA (about 7.600 euros) into two savings accounts opened in the name of the women herbalists at the BNDA in Bamako and Segou. Although the money was secured at the bank, it remained the property of the women herbalists, who organized themselves to ensure its management. There was a



Two herbalists, a grandmother and her granddaughter, in front of their kiosk.

set interest rate of 7%, to cover administration charges (3% for the Federations of Therapists and Herbalists of Bamako and Segou, which arranged monitoring, and 4% for the women’s groups).

An internal evaluation study, carried out when the project ended, showed that the 20 women who benefited from the initiative were well satisfied with the kiosks and their quality. The most frequently cited cause for satisfaction was the high quality of the plants, due to good drying and storage techniques. Comments were also made on the increased number of clients and improvements in sales, due to greater public awareness of the work done by herbalists. All the customers interviewed made positive remarks about the kiosks. Most of them said they preferred herbalists who had kiosks and claimed they had found no difference in prices between the products sold by the two groups.

During a workshop to mark the end of the project, Prof. Rokia Sanogo, Chairwoman of Aidemet, said: “The project confirmed that women herbalists have been better able than men to adapt to the challenges of urbanization: they have jointly demonstrated the intelligence and flexibility needed to convert their traditional knowledge, accumulated over time and handed down by generations of women, into a commercial, but also a social and economic activ-

ity, that has a presence in every town market. They respond to a social demand for medicinal plants and offer communities a customer-centred service at very affordable prices, while generating extra income which is used to support the household budget, mainly to cover daily expenses for clothes, health, nutrition and education for their children”.

A new project to support 200 women herbalists in Bamako and Segou was due to have started in the first three months of 2012, with funding from the Italian Development Cooperation and the Italian Region of Umbria. Unfortunately, the political and security crisis in Mali has led to the funding being frozen for the time being.

* For further information:

AIDEMET
Prof. Rokia Sanogo and Dr Sergio Giani
BP 9279, Bamako
Mali
Tel/Fax: +223-20232903
Mobile: +223-76131273 - 66756534
aidemet@afribonemali.net
www.aidemet.org

1 R. Sanogo and S. Giani, *Women and Plants*, Edimco Edition, Bamako (Mali), July 2012.