

Democratic Republic of Congo | Listeners' clubs in Orientale Province to tackle poverty

In the district of Tshopo, rural communities have organized with great enthusiasm into the first 43 Dimitra listeners' clubs in Orientale Province. These have been set up in the framework of a project implemented by FAO-Dimitra and funded by the government of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), together with the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD). Their launch was warmly welcomed by the rural populations of this landlocked region, which suffers from extreme poverty and faces particularly difficult living conditions.

About fifty people, one-third of them women, crowd into the entrance of the training room in Yanonge, a village on the left bank of the Congo River, about 60 km from Kisangani, the capital of Orientale Province. Among them are members of the area's nine new Dimitra listeners' clubs, as well as community leaders, traditional and religious chiefs and radio producers. They come from the Isangi-Est area and have just finished a training session organized by the "Listeners' clubs, combating poverty, food security and gender" project. The topics of the training included participatory communication, gender and the Dimitra listeners' club approach.

After the session, the comments are enthusiastic. "This training has helped me to understand all the operational stages of a Dimitra listeners' club. Our meetings will be more dynamic as a result," said one participant, Maguy Aliloma, facilitator of the Kima Bobola listeners' club ("Fighting poverty"). Said Sister Berthe Mangala, treasurer of the Etumba na nzala listeners' club ("Tackling hunger"): "I must say that I found everything of interest in this training session, especially the gender approach to local governance. Equal opportunities between men and women must allow both sexes to aspire to the same rights to improved control of their environment within a harmonious development process."

The Yanonge workshop was one of the decentralized training sessions organised for the recently launched Dimitra listeners' clubs. Other similar workshops have already been organized in recent months for six listeners' clubs in the Isangi-Nord area. After Yanonge, it will be the turn of clubs in the Isangi-Ouest, Basoko and Isangi-Nord areas.

A total of some 60 Dimitra listeners' clubs will be launched in the district of Tshopo. These will enable men, women and young people to develop leadership skills, gain self-confidence, engage in participatory communication within their own and with other clubs. The goal is the development of their community, notably through collective action aimed at resolving problems that they themselves have identified and through community governance.



Official launch of the project in Yangambi by the National Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, the Provincial Minister of Rural Development, the Environment and Tourism, the administrative authorities and the FAO Representative.

Launch of the Dimitra listeners' clubs project in Orientale Province

The project in Orientale Province is being implemented by FAO-Dimitra, with funding from the government of the DRC through the Agricultural Rehabilitation Programme in Orientale Province (PRAPO), and a grant from IFAD. It aims to strengthen the socio-economic power of both men and women producers, their livelihoods and food security, through better access to information, communication and sharing of practices and experiences, including those linked to agricultural issues, all of this with a gender perspective.

The project was officially launched in Yangambi on 30 October 2012, before the National Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, the Provincial Minister of Rural Development, Environment and Tourism, the FAO Representative for the DRC, FAO-Dimitra and representatives of 20 listeners' clubs already in place. The officials emphasized the importance of access to information and the dynamics of participatory communication

as crucial factors for triggering a sustainable socio-economic development process in rural areas. They also distributed solar-powered and wind-up radios to the delegates of the Dimitra listeners' clubs.

Synergies between Dimitra listeners' clubs and farmers' organizations

Jérôme Bitilaongi, President of the Union of Farmers' Organizations of Agricultural Producers (UOPA), a beneficiary of PRAPO, believes the listeners' club project is of pivotal importance: "We have understood the role of the listeners' clubs in promoting agricultural activities. That is why we did not hesitate to send several members of the Maendeleo-Rome listeners' club for aquaculture training in Kisangani. Members of the Ba mama liboso listeners' club ("Mothers First") are planning training sessions for the launch of a savings and loans cooperative. We have also supported the Muungano club ("Union") in Yakamba with groundnut seeds. It has already prepared a field which will soon be sown. The Mwangaza club ("Enlightenment") for young people is being set up. The listeners' clubs have been our partners since they were first launched".



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The Dimitra listeners' clubs approach, participatory communication and gender equality were the focus of the decentralised training sessions organised by the project in Orientale Province.

Collaboration with radio stations

The Dimitra listeners' clubs in Orientale Province collaborate with a number of community radios (Boboto, Kulokoko, Mabele, RTBI, RTCB, Radio Yanonge and Mwangaza) to disseminate information and ideas. These radio stations have been involved since the outset, from the first training session organized in Kisangani for all stakeholders to the technical training sessions specifically organized for radio stations.

Butukari Batulongani, head of programmes at Yanonge community radio, is well aware of what is at stake: "We will never again develop our programming schedule without taking on board the expectations of the local communities, especially with regard to those programmes that cover the listeners' clubs' debates and the exchange of experiences and knowledge. The radio station will be at the service of the community".

Members of the new Dimitra listeners' clubs have already identified themes close to their heart – issues that they would like to see raised in the coming weeks and months during club meetings. Agriculture often tops the list, including the use of improved seeds, cultivation techniques, tackling plant diseases, fishing techniques and access to land. But other subjects are also considered important, such as food security (a review of eating habits, increased diversification of agricultural output, etc.), health (combating HIV/AIDS, watershed management, sanitation, etc.) and key themes such as youth unemployment and sexual violence.

First results

The project can take pride in the first results, which have been achieved in less than 10 months: 240 villages have been involved in awareness raising activities regarding the listeners' club approach, 43 Dimitra listeners' clubs have been launched and equipped with solar-powered and wind-up radio sets, eight radio stations have received training, seven of

them have been equipped with reporting kits, and about 300 club members and stakeholders have been trained in the methodology. Today, the 1,672 club members, including 701 women and 971 men, can start dreaming of a better future, of making their voices heard and playing an active role as women and men citizens.

The project has surpassed all expectations, reflecting the interest of the communities involved and their wish to make a difference and take action. All the more so because the initiative is set in a region that is totally cut off, where the canoe and the bicycle remain the only means of transport for local people, who generally feel excluded from the socio-economic development process. Against this backdrop, it should come as no surprise that, during the opening of the training workshop, the Yanonge village chief underlined "the impor-

tance of Dimitra listeners' clubs in such an isolated area".

In August 2013, a forum of Dimitra listeners' clubs in Orientale Province will be organized at Isangi, to enable club members to share their experiences and results and the difficulties they have faced. It is this participatory angle that Thérèse Ramazani, facilitator of the Etumba nanzala listeners' club, has understood from the outset: "Participatory communication has shown us how to share information with others and, above all, how to spread our knowledge and experiences so as to achieve a better control of our environment".

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