

Burundi | New Dimitra listeners' clubs, an example of synergy

Building on the resounding successes in Niger and the Democratic Republic of Congo, several FAO programmes and UN Women have joined forces to launch an ambitious Dimitra listeners' clubs project in Burundi. FAO in Burundi has asked for the support of FAO-Dimitra to launch these listeners' clubs, which seek to empower rural communities, especially women and young people. The actors and the contexts may differ, but the approach, based on previous experience, remains focused on participation, gender, social mobilisation and knowledge sharing.

For more than a year, the FAO Representation in Burundi has been working to set up a network of Dimitra community listeners' clubs. The FAO programmes "Peace-building Fund for victims of conflict" (United Nations), "Addressing the problem of HIV and gender inequality through a food security and nutrition response in Central and East Africa" (Sweden), "Agro-economic empowerment of vulnerable households" (Sweden) and "Urban and Peri-urban Horticulture" (Belgium), have decided to jointly implement this innovative approach. UN Women is also providing financial support.

A successful example of collaboration between several FAO programmes, the initiative aims to improve access to information and communication of rural communities, especially women and youth, so as to contribute to their socio-economic and political empowerment and food security.

In concrete terms, FAO is setting up 35 Dimitra listeners' clubs as part of a pilot project, targeting the following provinces in Burundi: Bujumbura Rural, Bujumbura Mairie, Bubanza, Muramvya and Cibitoke. The project has the support of – and offers support to – the FAO Farmer Field Schools. On the one hand, the clubs are set up "side by side" with the Farmer Field Schools, with the support of existing stakeholders. On the other, the listeners' clubs will allow the Farmer Field Schools to network and exchange good practices. The Farmer Field Schools and the listeners' clubs are complementary approaches used by FAO. Both are based on the participation of rural communities, recognizing their needs and interests. It is an example of a win-win partnership.

The setting up of Dimitra listeners' clubs is a medium to long-term process. As well as distributing solar-powered wind-up radio sets, creating the clubs and offering suitable training, support is needed for 6 months to one year, in order to ensure real participation, sustainability and gender sensitivity in the project. The length of time required depends largely on the local context (socio-cultural, institutional, etc.).

At the start of this process, Dimitra facilitates a "community listeners' clubs workshop". This workshop represents a crucial step in raising awareness and sharing information on the listeners' clubs. It is the time when the FAO-Dimitra team can increase awareness and strengthen capacities, but also adapt, together with the men and women participants (the actors in the project), the approach of the listeners' clubs to the local context. It is also useful for refining the role that each person will play in subsequent phases.

In Burundi, the Dimitra community listeners' clubs workshop was held from 5 to 8 March 2013, with the aim of adapting the Dimitra approach to the local context and actors involved, strengthening the capacities of participants in terms of gender sensitivity and social communication and better identifying the practical aspects of setting up such clubs.

The workshop was held in Bujumbura and brought together about 30 women and men participants: local club leaders, FAO Farmer Field School facilitators, representatives of partner organizations (UN Women, UNICEF, UNFPA) and radio producers.

Despite the differing levels of the participants, the teaching method used (active training, based on participants' experience) led to rich exchanges on the situation of rural women in Burundi. Particularly striking were results based on the daily activity clock exercise, which clearly showed the disparity between men and women in terms of workload.

For participatory communication – another key aspect dealt with during the workshop – a role playing game allowed the group to work on specific areas of the media situation in Burundi, as well as communication in general. In Burundi, the media is concentrated in the capital and the absence of community radio as such poses a challenge.

The workshop ended by identifying the next stages in the creation of the clubs, including the setting up of a creative partnership with several national radio stations, and the roles and responsibilities of the actors involved.

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