

Ghana | Starting Dimitra community listeners' clubs in West Gonja

Ghana is the first English-speaking country where Dimitra community listeners' clubs are being created. Their establishment form an integral part of FAO's Programmatic Regional Initiative in Ghana, in particular where the strengthening of rural organizations and the empowerment of the rural women and men of West Gonja are concerned. The activities started with a four-day training workshop in October 2013. The listeners' clubs will be a tool for social mobilisation and good governance.

The Dimitra community listeners' clubs (CLCs) in Ghana are created as part of FAO's Programmatic Regional Initiative to Reduce Rural Poverty (PRI). This Initiative focuses on rural poverty reduction and strengthening rural livelihoods, using the cassava value chain as entry point. It seeks to promote decent rural employment and income creation. Using an integrated approach, the PRI looks at the linkages between social protection, agricultural production, strengthened rural organizations and people's empowerment, particularly of women and youth. It is piloted in 18 communities of the West Gonja District, in the Northern Region of Ghana.

The Ghanaian Association of Church Development Projects (ACDEP) is in charge of accompanying the creation and functioning of the CLCs in West Gonja, with technical support from the FAO-Dimitra team.

Start of the activities

The launch workshop took place in Tamale, capital of the Northern Region, from 8 to 11 October 2013. An official launch with words of welcome and encouragement by Hon. Kassim Ali Bakari, West Gonja District Chief Executive, Issahaku Shaibu Alhassan, West Gonja District Director of the Ministry of Food and Agriculture, Malex Alebikiya, Executive Director of ACDEP and the FAO team kick-started the workshop.

Two thirds of the workshop participants, 10 women and 10 men, had been nominated by their communities by virtue of their active participation to community life. Other participants included ACDEP staff and facilitators, representatives of the Gender Desk, an extension worker of the Ministry of Agriculture and two representatives of community radio stations (Radio PAD and Simli Radio).

Understanding by doing and participating

The workshop's main objective was to raise awareness on the guiding principles of the Dimitra listeners' clubs such as gender equality and participatory communication, and to build capacities regarding the establishment and functioning of the clubs.

Participation and learning by doing were at the core of the workshop, using group work and participants' concrete experiences as an

entry point. Several innovative learning techniques and methodologies were used such as collective reflection based on visual tools, graphic recording of discussions, a "radio talk show" as a knowledge-sharing tool on the Dimitra listeners' clubs in Niger and the DRC, etc.

On gender

As a basic principle of the CLCs, gender equality was a crucial subject of the training. A process of collective and individual reflection was launched through various exercises on the meaning of gender, men's and women's roles in rural societies and gender bias and stereotyping.

A well-appreciated exercise was that of the daily activity clock, where participants were requested to draw a 24-hour clock and fill in the activities – one clock for women's and one for men's activities. They were asked to compare the clocks in terms of household, productive and community-related activities, as well as the time allocated for relaxing and sleeping. This analysis clearly showed that both women and men are busy, but when looking more in detail, the balance tips and shows that on top of productive activities, women also bear the brunt of household chores and care giving, and hence have little time left for leisure!

So these clubs, how do they work?

After talking through the basic steps regarding the creation and functioning of the clubs, different scenarios were proposed to participants who were invited to act them out in a role play.

Two groups enacted the first meeting of a CLC and had to decide on a name for the club, appoint Committee members, discuss Internal Regulations, etc. Another group played a CLC discussion, with members identifying solutions to a local development problem. The last group discussed a radio programme on the importance of formal education for boys and girls, in the presence of a journalist.



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The role plays were extremely useful to represent concrete situations and provide participants with perspectives to be explored and discussed. Through this and other exercises, their understanding as to the "what and how" of the Dimitra listeners' clubs grew progressively.

Reactions and commitments

The final evaluation was resoundingly positive, both with regard to the content as the participatory methodology. Some quotes: "We learned how to bring community members together for development", "We learned about the importance of community listeners' clubs, and how to form them", "Women and men together can achieve success".

Participants also committed to transferring what they learned and setting up CLCs in their respective communities. Doing so, they will contribute to the social mobilisation of their communities and to their empowerment, both crucial objectives of FAO's Programmatic Regional Initiative.

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