



Dimitra Newsletter

RURAL WOMEN AND DEVELOPMENT

NEWSLETTER N° 2 – BRUSSELS, APRIL 1999

The Dimitra Web Site is accessible!!!

We invite you to access the Dimitra website at the following Internet address:

<http://www.fao.org/sd/dimitra>

The site is accessible in English and French and contains different kinds of information: a historical overview of the project, the Dimitra Newsletters, links with other sites which are of interest for the subject of rural women and development, and, most importantly, the Dimitra database.

The database is now accessible in a format which will be improved over the coming months. It contains all the data which will also be published in the next Dimitra Europe Guidebook. Information on NGOs, research institutes and information centres based in Africa and the Near East will be added as we collect the data.

The database is divided into three main parts, which are interlinked: organisation profiles, projects and publications. On the website, several search possibilities are offered: by the name of an organisation, by the organisations in a given country, on the

countries of intervention, intervention sectors, project or publication titles, etc.. In each instance, there is a link between the projects and the publications, and the organisation which implements/publishes them. The search procedure is simple, and Boolean criteria are applicable. The project has decided not to include any images or photos in order to restrict downloading time. The European organisations which are at present included in the database are kindly invited to check the content of their record. The data provided are based on the questionnaires which they have filled out and sent

to us. Due to the speed with which information changes these days, we will not be able to keep the profiles of those organisations which have not sent us their updates much longer. They can still do so, however. Other organisations which wish to be included in the database can contact us and will be sent a questionnaire (by post or e-mail).

Do not hesitate to write to us and give us your impressions, suggestions and recommendations on the website and database. Your comments will be taken into account as we continue to work on improving the site. □

foreword

Dear Readers,

First of all, I would like to thank you for your warm welcome of the first DIMITRA Newsletter. In the last six months two important components of the project have been completed: the establishment of partnerships with local organisations in Africa, and the creation of the Dimitra homepage on the Internet (<http://www.fao.org/sd/dimitra>). We would also like to inform you that the updated version of the Dimitra Guidebook Europe will be published by the end of this year.

The collection of information in Africa and the Near East started recently. The African partner organisations which assist us with this are at present: Enda-Pronat in Dakar (Senegal) covering West Africa; FAN in Nairobi (Kenya) for East Africa; and IRED in Niamey (Niger), working on the countries of the Sahel. Southern Africa will be covered by ZWRCN, the Zimbabwe Women's Resource Centre Network, and PRODDER (South Africa). Partnership agreements are being negotiated with organisations in North Africa and the Near East.

In this issue, you can read more about Enda-Pronat, FAN and IRED, about their working methods and the countries they will be covering within the framework of the collection of information for the Dimitra project.

Furthermore, you will find several articles in this issue covering a wide range of subjects of relevance to women. An in-depth article examines the impact of gender on the situation of women in Niger following the experien-

ce of the Swiss Development Cooperation Agency there. Doris Solis, President of the Ecuadorian NGO Sendas, contributes with an article on the way Sendas works to improve the status of rural women in Ecuador. In his article 'The return of the land problem', Paolo Groppo, Officer in the Land Tenure Service of FAO, tackles the issue of agricultural reforms, a problem which seemed to be resolved, but has returned in full force in recent years. Access to land is all the more important as it is fundamental for assuring food security. Food security is one of the subjects treated by the Cassava Safety Network of Uppsala University (Sweden), which has been working on the production of cassava for years. Certain bitter cassava varieties, if insufficiently processed, can cause a severe disease called konzo. The article stresses the importance of processing procedures for making the cassava edible. In the same field of food security, Care International in Jordan shares the results of one of its pilot projects in the field of permaculture. Finally, you will find an agenda, some short news items and some interesting web links to other organisations.

We hope that you will enjoy reading this Newsletter, and we welcome your reactions, suggestions and contributions. □

Marie Randriamamonjy
Chief, Women in Development Service (SDWW), Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

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FOOD AND AGRICULTURE ORGANIZATION OF THE UNITED NATIONS

In this issue, we would like to introduce you to three of the African partner organisations of the Dimitra project, which have started to collect information in their respective sub-regions.

The following articles will tell you more about their activities, objectives and goals.

our partners

ENDA-PRONAT

Protection Naturelle des Cultures

Pronat is one of the teams of Enda Tiers Monde. Its activities are focused on the agricultural field in general and on environmental protection. The launching of Enda's Pronat Programme dates back to 1982, although the actual idea of the project had germinated two years previously, in 1980. The aim was to set up a "project for communication amongst practitioners, decision-makers and experts on problems encountered in efforts to combat the scourges which plague men, livestock and harvests".

■ The beginning of Enda-Pronat

A communiqué was sent to 175 organisations and private persons in 53 countries inviting them to join in, and the response was very positive. Collaboration first took the form of exchanging information on experience and in particular on ecological agriculture in general and protection of the natural environment in particular, and this produced the embryo of a documentation centre on ecological agriculture and pesticides. Pronat then proposed the following strategies:

- organisation of meetings at the local, national and international level in the fields of pesticides and ecological agriculture;
- definition of a strategy for participating in the project entitled "how to be of use to peasants and grassroots groups";
- establishment of a network for communicating with grassroots groups, peasants' associations, etc.

■ Development of the programme of activities

Through this communication strategy the idea of the project gradually developed towards a concrete programme of activities with the following general objectives:

- developing methods for the natural protection of crops, livestock and harvests while seeking satisfactory productivity in sustainable farming practices;
- raising the awareness of peasants, development agents and decision-makers and informing them on the dangers entailed in the excessive use of agro-chemicals (pesticides and fertilisers);

- working with the peasant population, both women and men, to develop and promote an agro-ecological approach to rural development which takes account of both human beings and the environment.

Although the approach to problems and priorities for action have since developed further, the basic problems are still the same: it is in the interests of the countries and peasant populations in hot semi-arid regions to develop natural methods for producing and protecting their crops and harvests. It must be stressed at this point that Pronat has been carrying out extensive action to raise awareness and provide information and training throughout Senegal by means of workshops and seminars held at the local, national and international level on the dangers entailed in the excessive use of agro-chemicals.

■ Experimenting with ecological agriculture

Many peasant organisations and local NGOs have since been prompted to try out methods of ecological agriculture.

In the more specific context of Pronat action in the Niayes region, it was the womenfolk who were the first to agree to try out market-gardening methods without agro-chemicals, and on the basis of the results obtained we are now working with a group of about one hundred women in the village of Sinthiou-Dara to promote organic agriculture.

In the same Niayes zone, a farmers' federation composed of women and men is developing the same approach in six villages of the rural community of Diender.

■ The active role of rural women

Women's interest in this form of agriculture is due to the fact that

- it is to a large extent the womenfolk who have to cope with the harmful effects of pesticides on human health;
- the consequences of soil degradation, which entails a decrease in yield and production and aggravates food insecurity, affect women to a much greater extent.

Faced with all of these difficulties, it is always the rural women who set about seeking alternative solutions for survival; one of these is ecological agriculture, which takes account of most of their concerns. □

If your organisation is located in Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, the Gambia, Guinea, Mali, Mauritania or Senegal and you would like to be included in the Dimitra Guidebook, please get in touch with ENDA-PRONAT at the address below. They will send you a Dimitra questionnaire.

ENDA-PRONAT

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FAN

*Forest Action Network
Nairobi, Kenya*

Forest Action Network is a non-governmental organisation established in 1995, which works to ensure that forests are treated with the respect they deserve. The organisation works towards the sustainable management of forests and natural resources. In order to achieve this, FAN examines issues that affect natural resources such as land tenure, community participation, gender analysis and development, land policies, and conflict management with a view to improving resource management.

■ Information, a key element

As a network, FAN brings together community-based organisations, researchers, foresters, policy makers, and social scientists to enable them to participate actively in the sustainable management of natural resources and to address any conflicts which arise. This is done through relation-building workshops, training, meetings on specific topics, exchange visits, farmer-initiated research and extension, relevant case studies, and publications.

FAN recognises that information is a key to enabling people to make meaningful decisions regarding their resources or, even better, their situation. Information aims at building capacities for them to deal with the current issues facing them. They are able to make choices when the information also provides alternatives.

With regard to household energy, FAN publishes Regional Energy News (REN), a quarterly newsletter on renewable energy. The newsletter highlights areas of women's involvement in income generation from energy activities; this includes the sale of improved stoves and the construction of biogas plants through organised groups.

■ FAN's Activities

FAN has conducted a Sectoral PRA on strengthening the role of women in natural resource management, which examined the effect of land subdivision on pastoral lifestyles in Kajiado District. This exercise was carried out to enable women to participate in decision-making on natural resource management. They were co-opted into the committee to discuss the future sale of land in the district since it was established that women are often left out when decisions regarding the sale of family land are made, leading to impoverishment and despair when the family is left landless.

Gender Analysis Workshops are organised for our members to enable them to develop skills in the design of gender-responsive projects. Once projects adopt gender plan-

ning, they are able to fulfil the strategic gender needs (productivity rather than subsistence) of all members of the community and are thus more likely to be successful.

Farmer-Initiated Research and Extension was done once it was realised that farmers carry out spontaneous research and extension methods on their farms which are often effective but are disregarded by modern researchers and extensionists. The findings of this research are often shared with fellow farmers. This indigenous knowledge base should be highlighted and documented for others to benefit from. It includes afforestation innovations, adaptive agroforestry practices, methods of controlling pests and diseases, improved water-harvesting techniques, and the use of selected tree species for milk treatment. This activity was unique as it was able to target those who actually do the farming. It is quite common for women's involvement to be overlooked when farmers' training is carried out, as it is usually the men who attend the training. Publications have been produced as a result of this activity and circulated to our members and those sending in requests.

If your organisation is located in Ethiopia, Kenya, Malawi, Mozambique, Tanzania or Uganda and you would like to be included in the Dimitra Guidebook, please get in touch with FAN at the address below. They will send you a Dimitra questionnaire.

FAN

Forest Action Network

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■ Farmers' Exchange Visits

Farmers' Exchange Visits have been carried out by FAN for women and farmer groups, who benefit a lot by learning about various interventions that others are undertaking to increase the family income and raise living standards. This action has included mixed farming, zero grazing, adult literacy training which has increased the willingness of both men and women to work towards common goals, fish farming, and involvement of women's groups in water tank construction to reduce the costs of installing tanks in their homes. The exchange visits are highly informative for participants, since they can implement some of the good ideas that they have seen and thus significantly improve their lifestyle. The visits are very effective for those community members in the rural areas who depend on natural resources for their survival, are semi-literate or illiterate, and lack access to print or electronic media. They have proved to be very popular.

■ Fair Trade and Sustainable Production

In order to promote improved income generation from non-timber forest products, FAN is working with forest user groups and interested organisations in the certification and marketing of these products to ensure that they are harvested in a sustainable manner and that the producers get fair prices for them. This will give the goods recognition at international level, where there is considerable emphasis on fair trade and sustainable production. Many women depend on these products both at subsistence and commercial level.

The above activities work towards improving the livelihood of local communities and especially women who have no control of most resources and have limited means of survival. □

IRED *Development Innovations and Networks*

■ A vision

A world where social and economic justice is built up with people and their associations, which are the main agents in the decisions taken to promote sustainable local development.

■ An identity

A movement geared to change at both macro and micro-level with a view to achieving social and economic justice. The IRED is an association of organisations and persons who believe that poverty and exclusion can be fought by involving populations in the elaboration and running of their projects at the local and world level.

■ The IRED is

- a world network and a movement involving some 1000 partners, who want to achieve social and economic justice by promoting economic, social and political initiatives and participating in decision-making processes; these partners belong to grassroots organisations, peasants', young people's and women's associations as well as national and regional networks;
- a forum through which the partners can act together at the regional and world level to exchange their ideas and share their experiences, create solidarity and together analyse their problems in order to develop proposals and formulate alternative solutions.

■ A strategy

- to create a far-reaching movement to promote change;
- to put grassroots organisations operating at the national, regional and world level in touch with university and research institutions;
- to back up and create alternative proposals for organising the economy and society differently;
- to carry out action at the local and the world level;
- to promote dialogue between grassroots organisations and decision makers.

■ Programmes

The IRED/SEAG, which is based in Niamey (Niger), has three priority programmes which aim to fight poverty: an economy based on solidarity, democratisation at grassroots level, political analysis and measures to strengthen institutions. These programmes focus on specific topics such as food securi-

ty, participation of the people in development, the informal sector economy, decentralisation, democracy, partnership for development, networking, action to strengthen institutional capacities, and the collection, processing and circulation of information on grassroots development.

■ Partners

In western and central Africa the principal IRED partners are NGOs, young people's and women's associations, and information and research institutions and centres. The IRED classifies its partners in three categories:

1. Associations and organisations of the marginalised and the excluded, peasants' organisations, local development initiatives, women's organisations, cooperatives, craftsmen. In particular the Association des Femmes Juristes du Niger, WEYBI, NAAM (Burkina Faso), the RDFN (Rassemblement Démocratique des Femmes du Niger).
2. Unions, federations, collectives and NGOs. In particular the Fédération des Unions de Groupements Paysans du Niger, the CCA - Comité de Coordination des Actions des ONG au Mali, the FUPRO - Fédération des Unions de Producteurs du Bénin, the CBDIBA - Centre Béninois pour le Développement des Initiatives à la Base, RAFIA - Recherche, Appui et Formation aux Initiatives d'Auto-développement (Togo), COPODIN - Coalition pour le Développement des Initiatives Populaires au Nigéria, CESAO - Centre d'Etudes Economiques et Sociales de l'Afrique de l'Ouest (Burkina Faso), the IPD/AOS - Institut Panafricain pour le Développement/ Afrique de l'Ouest et Sahel (Burkina Faso) and CONGAFEN - Collectif des ONG et Associations Féminines au Niger.
3. Resource persons, leaders of public opinion and information and research institutions.

The IRED supports its partners according to their needs and to the concerns they express. The partners' needs are registered by means of surveys and also at meetings which are held periodically for dialogue between the IRED and its partners.

IRED participation in the FAO/Dimitra Project, Rural Women and Development, is absolutely in line with the strategy of exchanging and sharing information amongst all development partners.

■ Activities

- creation of internal and external synergism at the regional level;
- circulation of information so as to demystify processes and global policies;
- facilitation of economic links between partners;
- technical support amongst partners;
- provision of technical support to promote economic activities – e.g. marketing, market links;
- documentation and circulation of information on initiatives which can help to build up alternatives;
- promotion of partnerships for local development;
- action to strengthen the partners' ability to influence policies. □

If your organisation is located in Benin, Burkina Faso, Chad, Niger or Togo and you would like to be included in the Dimitra Guidebook, please get in touch with IRED/SEAG at the address below. They will send you a Dimitra questionnaire.

IRED

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For further information on the IRED offices in Asia, Latin America and Northern Europe please contact IRED/SEAG.

NIGER:

social analysis of relations between men and women

an amalgam of tradition, religion, transformation and innovation

Niger society has been undergoing major transformation for the last hundred years bringing changes in the economic, social, cultural and religious fields.

■ Gender Training

At the beginning of the 90s, the Swiss Cooperation in Niger studied how women were being taken into account in projects and by partner institutions. The conclusion was that in spite of some attempts to integrate them, women often remained beneficiaries or second role players. It was thus necessary to review the approach to include not only women, but also the relations between men and women in the projects and to refocus towards more balanced gender development.

Despite theoretical adherence to the concept, everyone was very aware of the distance between theory and practice in Niger. People expressed their fear of taking risks, of exposing themselves, of daring to shake up the traditional distribution of roles between men and women, and anxiety was shown to have to put into question social relations based more on dependency than on equity.

Realisation of these resistances led to the organisation of a new form of training, this time created by a team from Niger. This training was centred on personal, concrete and real life experiences in order to ascertain men and women's aspirations, and to better understand the relations between men and women within their cultural environment. The role-play technique was used for the first time. At the same time, efforts were made to make proposals that would promote and combine acceptable working practices, at both personal and occupational level, with balanced development.

At the end of these training sessions, the question remained as to how to transpose and apply this concept in the projects in terms of interventions, not only from the point of view of extension workers but also from that of the villagers and the working partners.

The choice was made to continue work on training, this time targeting the people directly involved in the field, i.e. the projects' extension workers, their NGO partners or public services. A training workshop was organised for each project and each partner organisation.

The social analysis which we carried out in the course of our workshops allowed us to study the impact of the far-reaching changes which have come about in the past few

decades on women as a social group and on the community as a whole. In the present article we present the results of our analysis, which we conducted on the basis of income-generating activities for women in the rural world of the Hausa of the Tahoua and Maradi regions.

■ Traditional role distribution

At the economic level it is the men who have to meet the basic needs of their families (housing, food and clothes), whereas the womenfolk are in charge of reproductive activities. The income-generating activities which they carry out in parallel are intended to provide them with the means of covering social expenditure (christenings, weddings) and their personal expenses (items for personal hygiene, clothes/care and education of the children). This distribution of roles is still socially accepted and consistent with Islamic principles, but things are often very different in reality. The social order has been changing radically over the last twenty years as the result of deteriorating economic conditions and demographic pressures.

■ The growing pressure in the field of land ownership and its consequences for women

- Gamana¹ yield is often low; the fields that are lent to the women are those which the menfolk are not interested in having. Indeed it often happens that *whenever a woman obtains good results in a particular field it is taken from her and she is given a less productive piece of land*. Women are thus the main victims of the competition over arable land.
- Since agricultural production is becoming more and more risky and fields are getting smaller and smaller, the menfolk are having to *diversify their activities*.
- The men are taking over profitable activities hitherto reserved for the womenfolk (off-season crops, mirichi marketing, and, more recently, the condiment trade). Activities which have become unprofitable (salt and kaolin extraction, collection of cassiterite), on

the other hand, fall to the womenfolk and are now the only resource they have for meeting their own needs.

- The menfolk are beginning to market the natural resources hitherto exploited by the women for domestic purposes (firewood), with the result that the latter are having to cover longer and longer distances in order to find wood.
- The drift from the land is becoming widespread, with the result that more and more women are finding themselves in the de facto position of head of family without either the social prerogatives or financial means attaching to that position.

The impoverishment of the community is forcing women to carry out more and more income-generating activities in order not

gender relations

only to be able to continue to cover their social expenditure, which is traditionally their responsibility, but also to cover a growing share of the family's needs, which their husbands are no longer meeting in their entirety. In the Maradi region it frequently happens that a man now only provides for the subsistence of his wife and children for 4 months of crop cultivation and his wife manages for the rest of the time with produce from her field, small-scale trading and other activities.

The role played by women in maintaining the economic balance of the community is becoming essential, and it is this new situation which explains the *high demand for small-scale credit for women*, which is now observed in most development projects. Further analysis of small-scale credit for women reveals that, although it plays an important role in the functioning of the community, this role is of greater social than economic significance.

In a precarious financial situation women adopt strategies for minimising rather than accumulating risks. They generally work things so as to acquire a small amount of capital either by saving or by applying for a loan, with which they can carry out income-generating activities (sale of doughnuts, market-gardening). This capital or nest egg

(generally in the form of livestock) is used whenever they have to cover social expenditure (christenings, weddings). By using credit they can avoid using the capital necessary to their activities or selling their livestock at a loss if the market is low. The women also avoid the conflict caused by their husbands' requests for money and the shame of having to ask a relative for a loan, and they also keep their independence, since they are not indebted to any lender.

Credit enhances women's ability to fulfil their social obligations towards the community and enables them to maintain the system of exchange (biki) and material solidarity amongst the womenfolk, which is their sole form of social insurance. This is all the more the case since their husbands are finding it increasingly difficult to fulfil their family commitments. If a woman is unable to meet her social obligations towards others she is ostracised by the community.

Credit gives women the opportunity to keep their income at an acceptable level, but it does not promote the accruing of capital. All of the profit generated by the activity is reinvested in the household. The opportunity to borrow provides financial flexibility which prevents the women's incomes from dropping below the level they initially enjoyed - rather like a swimmer who manages to keep afloat but cannot get out of the water.

■ The effects of the growing involvement of women in productive roles

— on women's workload

In addition to the family and household tasks which devolve upon them traditionally, women devote further time and energy to productive activities. Although technology *alleviates household tasks*, it must be borne in mind that this alleviation has its *limits*. It often means that the activity acquires a monetary dimension and makes the workload a financial burden (private mills, water supply involving a charge for the water, purchase of wood).

— on education

Girls have to support their mothers in their dual role of production and family commitments and they are thus expected to contribute more, with the result that mothers tend not to send them to school. Technological improvements in the field of household tasks have also adversely affected education in that they enable children to carry out tasks which were formerly the duty of adults but have now become less arduous and less hazardous². Moreover, in view of the numerous tasks for which they are responsible, women regard educational or training activities as a waste of time.

— on family structures

The minor profits which the women obtain from their activities are invested in the household from day to day, but these sums are never entered in joint accounts discussed with the husband; there is no joint management of family expenditure. The woman's contribution has to remain in order to prevent *the man from withdrawing from his commitment* regarding this expenditure and also to avoid the risk that he could then afford to take a second or third wife. The situation is exactly the same in the urban environment, in families where man and wife are civil servants and have thus completed secondary or higher education. The husband covers most of the family's expenses and the wife contributes on an ad hoc basis, since she knows that if she increases her contribution she will be indirectly preparing the way for the arrival of a second wife.

Nowadays *polygamy* can also be regarded by men *as a means of increasing productive strength within the household*, since the expenses entailed by the additional household are being covered more and more by the women themselves. Likewise, in the urban environment, men tend to choose a second wife who is a civil servant in order to have a second salary in the household.

In this particular case it is a fact that action which is intended at the outset to improve women's circumstances can have a negative impact, even leading to a situation where the social status of men is strengthened.

— on the social status of women

Although Niger women remain dependent on their husbands, there are several signs which bring hope. Women who carry out a productive activity are beginning to acquire *greater financial and social autonomy* in relation to their husbands and they thus feel less dependent on them. Some are noticing a change in their relationship; they feel that their husbands regard them as more intelligent and better educated and ask their advice whenever there is a financial problem, since they are contributing towards the family upkeep.

On the other hand, as the result of the growing religious fundamentalism the *confinement* of women to the home is becoming increasingly widespread, although the practice is still a luxury which only the prosperous can afford: a man needs to have sufficient means at his disposal to be able to do without his wife's contribution and shut her off from society.

Is the future of Niger women to be seen in the choice between living without financial worries but cloistered with a rich

husband (generally a shopkeeper) or living more independently but slogging away 16 hours a day? Even if it is accepted that in Niger, as in other countries, women are having to pay for more equitable status by accepting a double day's work, it is only if social roles are transferred and the relationship between men and women changes that balanced development can be guaranteed in the long term.

■ Examples of Niger society

— Whenever men were able to obtain credit for carts in the context of the Maradi Project, some of them started to transport water and collect wood for their wives. *This action, which concerned only the menfolk, actually had a favourable impact on the womenfolk.*

— In Bani Goungou, near Kollo, the NGO Weybi supported a group of women in their efforts to devote thought to how their rice-producing community was operating. The women's principal activity was to process the paddy rice they bought from shopkeepers as their needs arose - at the market price, which varies from season to season. The men of the village, on the other hand, would sell the rice they produced to shopkeepers just after the harvest when prices were at their lowest. The credit the women obtained enabled them to buy the paddy rice from their husbands when it was harvested at a higher price than the price proposed by shopkeepers but still cheaper than the average price they generally used to pay for it.

This action, which concerned only the womenfolk, had an impact on the community as a whole and strengthened the women's social status in that community. □

Chrystel Ferret Balmer

Expert attached to the Swiss organisation Atelier Changes in the context of the projects run for the Swiss Cooperation in Niger.

The major part of this experience has been included in a leaflet entitled: "Genre et Développement - Une Approche Nigérienne". A Tool-kit for NGOs and development projects is being prepared and it constitutes the logical follow-up to the initial research. All of these documents are available from: Coopération Suisse, B.P. 728, Niamey, Niger.

¹ Field which is cultivated by the woman and which is lent by either her husband or her brother.

² The installation of a pump instead of a well makes the task less dangerous and means that a little girl can be sent to fetch water.

JORDAN:

Permaculture 'Women's Home Gardens' Pilot Project for Husun Refugee Camp, Irbid

CARE International in Jordan

CARE Jordan approaches sustainable agricultural development and environmental management through a community development framework. The aim is to generate projects that are ecologically sound as well as economically viable. By offering practical, community-level solutions to the problems of water scarcity, the excessive use of chemicals, land degradation and household food insecurity, CARE aims to have a positive impact on national policy and thinking by contributing to the national debate in Jordan on sustainable farming practices.

The Permaculture Pilot Project for Refugee Camp Women's Home Gardens aims to work with groups of refugee women in Husun Camp on testing and developing an innovative concept of home gardening comprising measures to integrate and diversify the various components of home gardening on the basis of economically and ecologically diverse production. By introducing a diversified production basis and sound water and energy conservation techniques, the household is less dependent on the success of one single crop for either sale or consumption and is more domestically sufficient as regards water resources. This increases food security for families and the women's capacity for income generation. As well as providing a reliable income source, sustainable farming systems which protect the environment mean that the resource base remains viable for future generations also to use productively.

A total of some 200 women were trained on permaculture techniques through the project. Thirty-nine have adopted a total of 10 permaculture techniques (composting, rooftop water collection and storage, intercropping and rotations, creation of microclimates, rooftop gardening, integrated pest management (IPM), companion planting, seedling nurseries, domestic animal husbandry and poultry-raising methods and bee-keeping), and were given the money and resources

required for applying those techniques in the form of interest-free credit, which is part of the revolving fund of the project. The repayments are spread over a period of 18 months from when the credit is received. Average loans are for JD 340. A number of women are also implementing these techniques on their own without any direct financial support from the project.

Fifty workshops, meetings and training sessions were conducted on various permaculture techniques and project-related sessions over a period of 12 months, including a visit for 25 camp women to the permaculture site in Ein Elbaida-Tafila Governorate (which is also one of CARE's projects). The training sessions covered an introduction to permaculture, water-harvesting, water re-use, composting, bee-keeping, integrated pest management, organic farming, microclimates and rooftop gardening. All Permaculture workshops are documented, and leaflets are produced for each session. A monthly permaculture newsletter is distributed dealing with issues related to sustainable agriculture and permaculture practices and techniques. A permaculture manual is soon to be published

and distributed to the farmers and other organisations in the country.

The project is well known to the Extension Department (Ministry of Agriculture) and to other local and international NGOs as well as the UNRWA. CARE has also started an informal network for NGOs related to agriculture; several social workers from Irbid are visiting the project. All of this is important for the potential inclusion of the new model of home gardening in future local and national environment and urban renewal plans.

The project is being supervised from Amman and is regularly visited for the purpose of conducting activities, consultation and monitoring.

permaculture

The project coordinator is based in Amman along with one field officer, a further community mobiliser and assistant, who have contacts with the women on a daily basis, being located in the field. Consultation visits to the women's houses are carried out regularly and on request.

With the collaboration of an external trainer, CARE International in Jordan conducted the first Permaculture Design Course in the country in November 1998; this course was for extension officers, farmers, UNRWA staff, CARE staff and several persons from the private sector. □

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Lack of food security and Konzo

the disease caused by badly processed bitter cassava

Cassava is a high-yielding root crop which is the main staple food for 400 million inhabitants in the tropics. Bitter varieties, if badly processed, can cause the disease called konzo.

Konzo is characterised by the abrupt and permanent paralysis of the lower limbs. The disease has been reported only from poor rural communities in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Mozambique, Tanzania and the Central African Republic. The majority of konzo onsets occur during the dry season, especially after drought years.

■ Clinical manifestations

The name konzo is derived from the local designation used by the Congolese (ex-Zaire) population affected by the first reported outbreak, in 1936. In the Yaka language, konzo means 'tied legs', a good description of the effects of the disease.

The onset of konzo is sudden and in 90% of cases the duration of onset is less than one day. Often a long walk or hard work seems to trigger the onset. The initial symptoms are described as trembling or 'cramping' in the legs, heaviness or weakness of the legs, a tendency to fall or an inability to stand.

Various studies have revealed *an association between konzo and dietary cyanide exposure from exclusive consumption of insufficiently processed bitter cassava*. Cassava is a high-yielding root crop which is the main staple food for 400 million inhabitants in Africa. *Bitter varieties containing large amounts of the cyanogenic substances are preferred in many areas with low agricultural suitability because they provide the best food security*. However, roots from these potentially toxic varieties can be rendered safe by mechanical grating or fermentation followed by drying or heating.

■ Treatment

There is no known cure for konzo. A good and varied diet and immediate treatment with high doses of multivitamins, but especially vitamin B, is recommended. Physical rehabilitation with crutches has proved successful in achieving independent locomotion. Schooling is crucial for all affected children, as they do not have any mental deficit. A community-based rehabilitation programme can achieve social integration of

affected subjects and should be initiated in all affected communities.

■ Prevention

Konzo is not a major public health problem in Africa as a whole, but is so in affected communities. *There is a risk of konzo epidemics in parts of Africa where agro-ecological problems make bitter cassava the major source of calories and where food shortage may tempt the population to resort to shortcuts in cassava processing*. Applying effective processing of the cassava root can probably prevent konzo.

There are three predominant cassava processing methods:

- 1) fermentation by soaking in water, followed by sun-drying or cooking;
- 2) grating and fermentation of fresh pulp under air exclusion followed by heat drying to make gari;
- 3) direct sun-drying of fresh roots.

The first two procedures effectively reduce the toxic cyanogens to negligible levels if the procedure is allowed sufficient time. Soaking of cassava should continue until the roots are soft, which usually requires 3 full days; and longer if the water is cold. Fresh pulp fermentation should also be allowed sufficient time; at least 2 nights.

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Absolute desiccation (= drying) is as important as adequate fermentation. Direct sun drying is an inefficient way to eliminate the toxins, especially if the drying is rapid and incomplete. Food science competence is needed to elaborate locally applicable and effective advice on processing methods.

■ Counter-measures against a suspected konzo epidemic

A health education message should be broadcast in the affected area when people are suffering from food shortage, emphasising

health

1) the non-infectious nature of konzo, to prevent irrational isolation of affected individuals; 2) effective cassava processing; 3) the importance of a varied diet. Even a limited amount of relief food may effectively reduce cyanide exposure. Advice to switch to some other staple crops is futile, as nothing can compete with cassava in terms of yield and food security; any such sudden change could cause extensive famine. □

Based on a long-term study carried out by the Cassava Safety Network.

Summary and excerpts based on an article published in the "Weekly Epidemiological Records", N°30, July 1996.

This and additional information on konzo is available on the Internet at the following address:

<http://www.nutrition.uu.se/studentprojects/konzo/index.html>

The return of the land problem

As this century draws to a close, the field of agricultural development would seem to be marked by the resurgence of a subject hitherto thought to be a thing of the past – land and the reform of agrarian structures.

This topic was very much the order of the day in the 1960s, particularly in Latin America, as a result of the revolution in Cuba and the Punta del Este Agreements (1961) signed in the context of the Alliance for Progress¹. In the following decades the subject eventually became a marginal item on the agricultural development agenda² for two main reasons: in the field of economic theory, the new neoliberal creed, which relegated the United States to a subordinate position, did not deem it necessary to intervene in a problem which should have been resolved by the market; and on the other hand the decline of the Soviet empire, which was considered to be the principal “exporter” of the revolutionary danger, and its subsequent collapse in 1991 meant that it could be concluded that agrarian reform no longer had any *raison d'être*.

However, contrary to this vision, it was exactly the opposite that happened. Freed from the “political” burden, the question of the reform of agrarian structures rediscovered its full importance for a growing number of countries, irrespective of the orientation of their governments. The most striking feature of this multitude of calls for aid was their diversity, which increasingly reflected a variety of problems, the outcome of complex and diverse agrarian histories. In parallel with the countries of the former Soviet empire, practically all of which called on international cooperation bodies for assistance, many other countries, which were less marked by East-West confrontation, such as Brazil, the Philippines and a large number of African countries, rediscovered the need to devote attention to the land problem.

This renewed interest caught quite a few development cooperation organisations unawares, which explains why the strategies that have been elaborated and tested to date are still far from meeting expectations. Some countries, on the one hand, chose to focus intervention on the variable which seemed to mark the return to a State governed by the rule of law: the legislative aspect³. And on the other hand, several countries (essen-

tially South Africa and Colombia and, to a lesser extent and more recently, Brazil) adopted an approach derived from the prevailing economic theory, focusing their policy on access to land through market mechanisms. Although these two approaches have been implemented only very recently, we feel that it can be said that neither of the two will suffice to meet demand, for two reasons: first, the diversity of the histories which produced the agrarian structures that are to be modified requires that a theoretical framework of concepts be elaborated which is based on direct knowledge of the realities in the field with which the peasant population is confronted. On the other hand, those same realities have revealed their complexity to us many times, their areas of social, ecological and economic overlap, which suggest that intervening on the basis of one variable alone which is considered to be the key to change, without taking account of the systemic dimension of the problem, is unlikely to achieve a great deal. We thus consider that there are three priorities for meeting expectations in land matters more satisfactorily; we could regard them as indispensable postulates for a new theory to be elaborated:

- the historical dimension, which is the cause of a large proportion of the differences observed from one agrarian structure to another;
- the geographical dimension, which provides an explanation for another large proportion of the diversity of agrarian structures; and
- the systemic dimension, which characterises all societies and obliges us to apprehend them with different tools, which have to be elaborated.

In conclusion, this approach must be elaborated “with” rather than “on” the peasants, men and women who must be regarded as full-fledged subjects of the strategy; or, to put it more simply, who must become elements of the solution rather than of the

problem. Efforts are currently underway to conceptualise this approach and put it into practice in countries as different as Brazil, Mozambique and the Philippines, in partnership not only with these respective States but also with the organisations of civil society close to the groups concerned.

agrarian reform

It can be stated in conclusion that although it is obvious to all of us that the equation which can combine all of the social, economic, technical and ecological variables has not yet been worked out, it is also clear that it must be sought rapidly, because the conflicts which are causing more and more bloodshed are, sadly, on the increase throughout the world. □

Paolo Groppo
Ph.D., Land Tenure Service (SDAA), FAO,
Editor of the magazine: «Réforme agraire,
colonisation et coopératives agricoles»

¹ Cooperation treaty stimulated by the United States and aiming to implement agrarian reforms in most Latin American countries as a preventive measure against the danger of the Cuban revolution being exported to other countries in the region: the “agrarian reform = danger of communism” equation, which was to characterise the historic period up to the end of the 1980s, dates from that era.

² It even got to the point where there were calls for the abolition of the FAO unit in charge of the subject.

³ We include in this category both measures to privatise land in the countries of the former Soviet Union and the land laws elaborated in Guinea-Bissau, Tanzania, Bolivia, etc.

SENDAS-ECUADOR

An experience which has improved and reinforced the economic, social and political status of rural women

■ Invisible women and their workload

In Latin America, and in Ecuador in particular, much time and effort has been needed to reveal the many and varied contributions of rural women. It has not been easy to induce both public policies and development programmes and projects to accept the idea that the peasant economies are family systems rather than masculine systems (Boserup) and that they are becoming more and more a matter for women, not only because of the increasing responsibilities of women in agricultural and livestock production, but also because 20% to 30% of Latin American rural households are headed by women.

Peasant women are actually agriculturalists within the domestic and family unit, fulfilling activities ranging from production, animal care, seed selection, processing and post-harvest activities to natural resource management (water, moors, etc.). Many of these activities are connected with productive tasks within the domestic area, which means that their work and economic contribution are not fully appreciated since they are regarded as “domestic” and/or complementary, particularly in statistics, censuses and national assessments. Estimates nevertheless indicate that almost 50% of the income of the peasant family is obtained from the activities carried out by women, and that between 20% and 35% of rural households have escaped from poverty as the result of that income (FAO-1986).

At the same time, research carried out with a gender perspective has indicated that women have much longer working hours than men (an average of 60 hours a week), that it is virtually exclusively the womenfolk who attend to productive functions and that, due to the migration of the menfolk, women are having to cope more and more with community tasks, which means that they have a triple role.

It is also a fact that there is not always an equitable distribution of benefits and resources within the peasant family. Thus, when poverty compels to difficult decisions – concerning access to education and quantity of food, for example, the men are given precedence to the detriment of the women.

(Illiteracy in the rural areas of Ecuador occurs in a proportion of 60% for women and 40% for men.) Moreover, as the result of various discriminatory cultural and legal mechanisms, women do not have access to credit, capital or technical assistance.

In this context, SENDAS, an NGO started with the support of the Belgian NGO VECO (formerly COOPIBO), has been developing several programmes for the last 8 years aiming to improve the circumstances and status of Ecuadorian rural women.

■ Beyond access to productive resources, consolidation of status and political empowerment

Back in 1990 it was necessary first of all to make diagnostics which both gave an account of the productive systems of the rural areas selected (their potentials and limits) and clarified the gender relationships, roles, differentiated locations, and specific interests and needs of women and men. SENDAS decided to work directly in two Ecuadorian districts in the southern mountains, characterised by high poverty indicators and high male migration, and to concentrate on the productive activities of the rural women: fruit growers in Sigsig and rural craftswomen in Gualaceo.

In partnership with the European NGOs COOPIBO and Bilance and together with the Fondo Ecuatoriano Canadiense de Desarrollo (the Ecuadorian Canadian Fund for Development, FECD) we created technical assistance programmes in the fields of production (taking ecological proposals into account), associated commercialisation and marketing, irrigation works and the social organisation of water management, natural resource management and conservation, etc.

But, as practice and relations with rural women’s organisations taught us, improving the status of women meant more than merely endowing them with productive resources. To make the access for and control by women possible, it was necessary to invest in processes to make women more powerful and to increase their individual and collective autonomy. We also had to invest in processes to strengthen their individual and collective self-esteem, their degree of organisation and

their knowledge and ability to exercise their rights. Bearing this in mind, SENDAS has stimulated other programmes, such as: a training school for female leadership, a programme for preventing domestic violence, a local health services network that guarantees quality and a gender approach and the women’s contest ‘Images and Testimonies’. All of these activities have consolidated the position of rural women in these areas as persons with rights.

The results obtained are encouraging for the rural women and their organisations as well as for us ourselves as an NGO, since these experiences strengthen our technico-political role of contributor to local development: the diversification and the biological quality of the products has resulted in a 50% increase in their income, the women sell their fresh fruit and vegetables at better prices in the ‘comisariatos’ and on the local and regional markets, they have been endowed (with the support of SENDAS and FAO) with a small enterprise for the processing of fruit and vegetables, which has started to yield products of excellent quality, which are accepted on the market and even in demand on the international market. They have implemented an Experimental Production Centre (CPE) where, in partnership with the Local Council and the Agricultural Council, they are processing the garbage of the district market and are producing compost to improve their crop. They have energised their relationship with the Local Council, incorporating it into the support system for their productive activities, rephrasing its relationship with the peasant organisations and democratising the citizen’s opportunities for participation and for exercising their rights.

In the case of Gualaceo, Tejemujeres is a successful cooperative of rural craftswomen, who export their products and control the production and marketing process in their organisation, combining an entrepreneurial logic with a social and gender approach and providing not only better income for their women cooperators, but also space for personal growth and social participation. Tejemujeres also guarantees health and day care services for its members.

The violence prevention programme has had a considerable impact. It has not solved this serious problem, but has revealed it and has roused the district authority's awareness and concern about the problem. The alliance with the Church and the Health Services in the area has been decisive for the success of these actions.

The training centre for female leaders has already congratulated its fourth group of graduates: women and girls who are aware of their rights and who are bent on exercising them, leaders who are beginning to participate actively and positively within their organisations and to work towards development and power at the local level, leaders who are starting to change the social and political landscape.

■ Influencing public policies

While achieving these results, we realise that we have built up a model containing several aspects which call for a response from society as a whole. With that insight we have

come to realise that influence must be exerted on the state system and on public policies if we are to expand our activities and amplify the impact of our experience. Consequently, we are participating actively in the National Group for Rural Development, which draws up and puts forward public policy proposals for the new government. It was we who provided the incentive for the creation of the Red de Mujeres Rurales del País (the National Rural Women Network) and its linking to the Red Latinoamérica (Latin American Network). We coordinate with the Consejo Nacional de la Mujer (the National Council of Women, CONAMU), a leading organisation for national public gender policies, by presenting proposals that explicitly incorporate the needs and demands of Ecuadorian rural women into national public policies.

The invisibility of rural women is thus at last a thing of the past, at least in Sigsig and Gualaceo, but also throughout the country – albeit late, but better late than never. The

women peasant leaders who are in charge of cooperatives and associations are cooperating with local authorities, exporting their products, and making creative proposals – in fact, they are making history: the history of women exercising their rights, developing all their infinite potential and actively building their own development and that of their communities... □

Doris Solís Carrión – January 17, 1999

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interesting websites

■ GENDER IN DEVELOPMENT AT UNDP

This website is managed by the Gender in Development Programme (GIDP) and provides an overview of UNDP's policies and programmes for gender equality and the advancement of women at global and regional levels.

The site is organised in different sections:

- the newsletter "UNDP Gender Beat" (published every 3 weeks);
- conceptual and operational information about Gender Mainstreaming to achieve UNDP's gender equality objectives, including policy, training materials and other resources and workshop reports;
- the policy section makes UNDP's key policy documents on gender available online;
- information about global and regional-level Programmes;
- country-level information can be accessed from the sites of the Regional bureaux which link up to country-office sites;
- the Resource Room is a gateway to online information resources, including GIDP's monograph series on gendered aspects of policy and programme resources developed on a human-centred basis, and links to non-UNDP resources;
- a section on Who's Who provides information about various organisational levels dealing with gender issues at UNDP and links up to a directory of key gender focal points and their e-mail addresses.

The site address:

<http://www.undp.org/undp/gender>

■ SD-DIMENSIONS, WOMEN AND POPULATION

The Women and Population section of **Sustainable Development DIMENSIONS**, an Internet service of the Sustainable Development Department (SD) of FAO is very extensive and includes FAO's Plan of Action for Women in Development, as well as numerous on-line analysis papers on rural gender issues and a bibliography of FAO's publications in this area. Information can also be gleaned on current FAO activities in the area of gender and agriculture. The Dimitra project's new website is part of this section.

The site address:

<http://www.fao.org/SD/WPdirect/WPhomepg.htm>

■ GENDER STUDIES IN AGRICULTURE GROUP, WAGENINGEN AGRICULTURAL UNIVERSITY

This remarkable website provides information about the research, education, cooperation and networking activities of the Gender Studies In Agriculture Group of Wageningen Agricultural University, as well as bibliographies, databases and publications. The site also provides interesting links to many other sites of interest in the field of gender, agriculture and rural development.

The site address:

http://www.sls.wau.nl/crds/cent_gs.htm

news in brief

fight against female genital mutilation

After Togo, Senegal has now also banned female circumcision, after extensive campaigning and education programmes by Unicef and other (local) organisations, such as ENDA. Anybody found practising circumcision on girls now faces up to five years in prison. According to UNICEF estimates, around 700,000 women (a quarter of Senegal's female population) have suffered some form of genital mutilation between early childhood and the age of 16. Worldwide, up to 100 million women may have been subjected to the practice, mainly in parts of Africa, Asia and the Middle East.

agenda

4-9 July 1999:

9th International Conference on Gender and Science in Technology: From Policy to Action in Gender, Science and Technology for Sustainable Development in the 21st Century

Venue: Gender and Science and Technology Association (GASAT), Accra, Ghana.
More information: FEMSA Project, Girls' Education Unit, Ghana Education Service, P.O. Box M. 45, Accra, Ghana.
E-mail: gquaisie@africaonline.com.gh

31 July - 7 August 1999:

ZIBF, Zimbabwe International Book Fair with Focus on Women's Information

Events and initiatives include: marketing workshop for African women in publishing; women and information technology; women writers in Africa; African booksellers' convention; African publishers' network; children's reading tent,...

Venue: Harare, Zimbabwe.
More information: Trish Mbanga, Director, P.O.Box CY 1197, Causeway, Harare, Zimbabwe
Fax: 09263-4-702129
E-mail: zibf@samara.co.zw

26-27 August 1999:

Women Farmers: Enhancing Rights and Productivity - A Conference on the Roles, Constraints and Potentials of Women in Agricultural Development

The conference takes place in Bonn, and is organised as collaboration between the Center for Development Research (ZEF), Bonn (Germany), Tufts University, Boston (USA), and the University of Hohenheim, Stuttgart (Germany).

Venue: Center for Development Research (ZEF), Bonn, Germany
More information: Katinka Weinberger, ZEF Bonn, Walter-Flex-Strasse 3, 53113 Bonn, Germany
Tel: 49-228-731861 - Fax: +49-228-1896
E-mail: women.farmers@uni-bonn.de

9-20 August 1999

Women in Management and Leadership Seminar

and

22-26 March, 14-18 June or 20-24 September 1999:

Women in Management Seminar

Venue: Nairobi, KENYA
More information: The Coordinator, Modern Management Institute
Tel: +254-2-331702 - Fax: +254-2-245267

new books

Gender in Rural Water and Sanitation Projects in South Africa (1998)

This is the report of a study commissioned by the Mvula Trust to evaluate the participation of women in rural water and sanitation projects in 16 villages in South Africa.
Order from: Lizzie Masango, Mvula Trust
Tel: +27-11-4033425
E-mail: lizzie@mvula.co.za

Gender Training: The Source Book (1998)

Authors: S. Cummings, H. van Dam and M. Valk

Local and regional experiences are of growing importance to the development of gender training as a whole. Contributors thus include gender advocates from different regions (South Asia, the Middle East, Eastern and Southern Africa) and divergent fields. Regional studies are complemented by a case from South Africa - particularly interesting given this country's historical background and racial diversity. Each review covers current approaches and experiences, with emphasis on 'grey' literature in addition to published articles and books. Material from across the developing world is included in the extensive annotated bibliography, which is thus a unique source of publications on gender analysis and gender training. Also listed are institutions active in the field, Internet resources on gender and relevant new electronic groups.

Order from: KIT Press
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E-mail: e.v.t.leven@kit.nl

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news in brief

My House is my Husband, A Kenyan Study of Women's Access to Land and Housing

by Diana Lee-Smith (1997)

This university thesis is currently being used by many Kenyan civil society organisations within the preparatory work undertaken in connection with the Constitutional Reform and their fight for better access to land and property for women. The issue is how women obtain access to land and housing, and, more specifically, the social mechanisms that govern relationships between men and women as well as property.

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last call

LAST CALL to all EUROPEAN ORGANISATIONS who would like to be included in the Dimitra database. Please fill out and send us the questionnaire as soon as possible! If you have not yet received the questionnaire or have lost it, send us a message, and we will get back to you immediately!



FOOD AND AGRICULTURE ORGANIZATION OF THE UNITED NATIONS