



# Dimitra Newsletter

RURAL WOMEN AND DEVELOPMENT

BULLETIN NO. 1 • BRUSSELS, OCTOBER 1998

## Brief historical summary of the Dimitra Project

The Dimitra Project on Rural Women and Development started in 1994 at the King Baudouin Foundation in Brussels, Belgium, with the support of the European Commission. The Dimitra Guidebook, printed in 1996, contains information on 255 European NGOs, research institutes and information centres working with and for rural women in the South. It provides information on organisations located in the member countries of the European Union plus Norway and Switzerland.

The main goal of the project was to contribute to the improvement of the living conditions of rural women through the dissemination of information, focusing in particular on the crucial role they play.

Some specific objectives were:

- to present detailed information on the project experiences of organisations, and to give some indications of the methods used.
- to contribute to the promotion of dialogue and the exchange of information between NGOs, research institutes, national or international development agencies, and all development actors in general.

The book provides different types of information: project experiences, indications on the methods used, countries and sectors of intervention, bibliography, etc. Over 3500 copies of the Guidebook in English (out of print), Spanish, French and Dutch have been distributed to large and small organisations all over the world, triggering very positive reactions both North and South.

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UNITED NATIONS

## New Phase of the Project

These positive reactions to the Dimitra Guidebook Europe prompted FAO-SDWW (Women in Development Service) to proceed with the project and extend it, in an initial phase, to the regions of Africa and the Near East. The project is now executed by FAO with funds from the Belgian Administration for Development Cooperation (BADC). It is still located in Brussels at the King Baudouin Foundation, which continues to provide office space and material support.

The new phase consists of updating the Dimitra Guidebook Europe and its extension to NGOs, research institutes, information centres and networks in Africa and the Near East. The project will again aim to make the information provided relevant and easily accessible to all. We hope that it will contribute to gender awareness raising among policy makers and practitioners.

In this new phase the project has added two very important components:

1. Accessibility of the information on line, via the Internet, under SD Dimensions, FAO Homepage in the coming weeks.

The information collected on Europe, Africa and the Near East will be freely accessible on the Internet. The project will also use the Internet and e-mail for obtaining, communicating and sharing information between Southern and Northern organisations. The project endeavours to make the database an on-line information exchange forum and to let information circulate through its Website and the dissemination of a Newsletter published twice a year (in English and French).

2. Partnership with local organisations for the collection and processing of information in the Africa and Near East region.

Local organisations in Africa and the Near East will collaborate on the collection and dissemination of information with the project.

With this strategy we hope to ensure that the information will remain relevant for all development actors and that the priorities defined will indeed be their own since Southern organisations will take part in the process of identifying and selecting the issues to be treated.

The data collected on the 3 regions will also be published in book form, since many people (especially in the South) are not yet connected to the Internet. These publications will be widely disseminated. The publication of the second Europe Guidebook is scheduled for the year 2000, and the Africa/Near East Guidebook for 2001. At the end of the project, a CD-ROM will allow cheap and fast updating for all regions.

Is your organisation located in Africa, the Near East or Europe? Are you interested in providing information on your projects or research studies? Do not hesitate to send us your information.

**I**t is my great pleasure and privilege to present the first issue of the Dimitra Newsletter, produced by the Dimitra Project, named after the ancient Greek goddess of agriculture, which is supported by the Service for Women in Development (SDWW) of FAO. This project is the continuation and extension of the Dimitra Project on Rural Women and Development, previously operated by the King Baudouin Foundation with the financial support of the Commission of the European Union.

*One of the main objectives of the project is to systematically emphasise the multiple roles and the essential contribution of rural women to the development of their country and to contribute to information exchange among development actors. The history, aims and objectives of the project are detailed in this Bulletin and I will not proceed further in this matter.*

*This project supports the priorities set up by FAO's Plan of Action for Women in Development (1996-2001). It constitutes a handy working tool for increasing collaboration between FAO, NGOs and civil society organisations. The Dimitra Project also fits well with FAO's Plan of Action for Women, as it will allow the dissemination of information on the nature of projects implemented with or by rural women.*

*FAO's Special Programme for Food Security mentions as one of its main principles "the respect of women's contribution" and "to emphasise their important participation in food crop production as farmers and agricultural workers". The project will shed light on the role of rural women and will enable their organisations to participate in an international network. And, last but not least, by describing the multiple activities of rural women, the project will reinforce their essential role as protectors of the environment and guarantors for food security.*

*This year, the theme of FAO World Food Day is "Women feed the world". I see it as a good omen and I wish the Dimitra Project and its numerous participants good luck and success.*

Marie Randryamamony  
Chief, Women in Development Service (SDWW)  
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## FORWORD

# Project Descriptions and Research Studies

To contribute to the celebration of World Food Day, this edition of the newsletter will provide several examples of development projects or research studies which deal mainly with food security. You will find more details in the database and in the future Dimitra Guidebooks.

## WOMANKIND WORLDWIDE, United Kingdom

Ghana, Bawku (Upper East Region): Credit scheme. Aim: providing women farmers with greater access to credit, resulting in more stable and reliable forms of income. This region is one of the most deprived parts of Ghana, from where many men emigrate to find work in more prosperous regions. As a result, many households with dependent children in Bawku are headed by women. Income-generating projects are an obvious solution for women to support themselves and their families, but, with no access to credit, it is impossible to set up a small enterprise. In fact, access to credit through formal banking structures is very limited in rural areas. It is even more limited for women, who are often illiterate and lack collateral. Members of the Bawku East Women's Development Association (BEWDA) received assistance from WOMANKIND in setting up a Revolving Loan Fund to meet their need for credit. With these loans women have been able to establish small farming, food-processing, pito-brewing and marketing enterprises. From their profits the women make repayments which can then be given as loans to others. Training programmes help individual women and groups administer and manage their loans well. BEWDA has also set up different programmes to improve the standard of living of people in the community: literacy classes; health workers provide advice on birth spacing and raise awareness of harmful practices such as female genital mutilation; an environmental programme helps women learn how to restore their degraded land. The BEWDA project has already helped over 700 women. BEWDA's success comes from its emphasis on training women to train others. It has also provided the groups with special training programmes in credit management and organises visits with other NGOs involved in women's credit schemes. They also intend to step up the collaboration with government health institutions to organise educational workshops and increase the immunisation coverage for cerebrospinal meningitis on a regular basis.

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## WFD, WELTFRIEDENDIENST E.V., Germany

Mozambique: support for empowerment and training courses for women farmers in the provinces of Tete, Niassa and Cabo Delgado by the confederation of cooperatives Uniao Geral das Cooperativas (UGC) in Maputo. Goal: to train representatives of small-scale women farmers' cooperatives. The project consists of a 15-day training course for 37 participants on questions of agriculture and management in Tete, and of a 30-day training course for 5 women farmers (representatives for the Tete, Niassa and Cabo Delgado provinces) in organisation, management and accountancy.

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## VETERINAIRES SANS FRONTIERES, France

Guinea, Bissikrima: animal husbandry and natural resource management programme. General objectives: to work towards food security by increasing livestock and income; to work towards professionalising organisation of animal breeders; to work towards natural resource management by the villagers. This project is not specifically oriented towards women, but they are involved in all of the activities. The project intervention is based on a global strategy that consists of:

- *training in basic animal health, food complements, and literacy for the whole rural population, and for women in particular;*
- *specialised training for villagers (men and women) chosen by their communities: animal husbandry assistants, group managers, village literacy trainers, village leaders;*
- *support for the establishment and consolidation of rural organisations.*

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## CARE DANMARK

Bangladesh: LIFT, Local Initiative for Farmer Training. The objective is to improve the financial security and nutrition of small-scale farmers. This is achieved by means of bio-intensive production of vegetables, fruit and trees as well as by establishing systems for local supply and distribution of e.g. seeds and seedlings. The strategy of the project is to develop a network of local advisers to educate the other farmers in sustainable production techniques. Today 528 small farmers, including 262 women, work as local advisers. They introduce sustainable farming methods such as composts, raised beds, mulching and crop rotation. The local advisers receive only a small fee for their work. Their main motivation is the extra income from selling their own crops and seeds to the other families in the project area, as well as the higher status which their new role gives them in the community.

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## THE HUNGER PROJECT, Switzerland

India: access to fishing for women in Bihar. In 1990, at a national strategy conference held in partnership with the Planning Commission of the government of India, The Hunger Project was given the mandate to begin its Strategic Planning-in-Action (SPIA) process in various states, beginning in Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra. After launching the SPIA process and catalytic projects in 6 states, SPIA extended in 1994 to Bihar. In that state, the Hunger Project Council decided that empowering women was the most critical action to be taken, since they had little opportunity to earn money. The participating Ministry for Fisheries informed the group that the government of Bihar was eager to increase fishing. It was then suggested that women should be trained to fish and

be given access to government-owned fishing ponds. This was impossible, since women were prevented by law from forming the cooperatives, necessary for fishing in government ponds. The Hunger Project was able to get this law changed and there are now 60 women's cooperatives (expanding to 800) with access to fisheries. The women cleared the ponds of excess dirt and The Hunger Project established a fish nursery to provide fingerlings and trained women in fish cultivation. The participation in this programme has transformed the formerly powerless, poverty-stricken women, who were not permitted to uncover their faces or raise their voices, particularly not to men. They have an income, their children are no longer hungry and they take part in the decision-making concerning their villages. A proud Bihar fisherwoman described how they have improved their fishpond and now assert their rights if necessary, recently even pressuring the police until they took action to stop poachers: "We dug the pond and carried the mud on our heads until all our hair fell out and we went bald. Now, we will fight for it."

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## CDS, CENTRE FOR DEVELOPMENT STUDIES, Ireland

### Research Projects

1. Ethiopia: Research on the Impacts on the Role of Women of the Meki Windmills Project. Both primary and secondary data were collected for this research. Secondary data was collected from the Ministries of Agriculture, Housing and Health concerning the Meki area. Random samples of 54 women were interviewed using structured questionnaires alongside interviews held with the project staff. The questionnaires attempt to find out the following information: (i) the respondents' background characteristics; (ii) the amount of time, money and energy saved as a result of the installation of the Windmills wells; (iii) the effects the project has had on the roles and needs of women in the area.

The study found that respondents had saved an average of 4.48 hours daily as a result of the water well installation. 74% of the respondents spent the extra time working on their farm. The practical gender needs of the Meki women have been met to some extent; however, had the women been included at all stages of the project cycle, the meeting of these needs would have been greatly improved.

2. Tanzania: The Role of Farm Women in Agricultural Development. This research focuses on the legal, political, economic and social factors that determine gender contribution to agricultural development in this country. The policy frameworks, which provide women with the right support, are also examined. The main findings of the study are as follows: more research is needed on rural women's actual contribution to the various types of agricultural production (i.e. their involvement in cash crops, vegetables, livestock, etc.). Efforts should be made to find ways of reducing the heavy workload of women working in agriculture. Participation in agricultural extension training programmes should take account of women's role in farming and in decision-making regarding farming and non-farming activities within households. Legislation towards improving the position of women in society must include measures

# FAO, World Food Day "Women Feed the World"

In order to promote understanding of women's crucial contribution to world agriculture and food security FAO has chosen "Women feed the world" as the theme for Word Food Day, October 16, 1998.

"Women feed the world" is the theme chosen by FAO to mark on October 16, the 53rd anniversary of the founding of the Organisation and the second Telefood, a global telecast in support of the campaign to end hunger around the world. The theme will serve to highlight the significant contribution women make toward household and national food security.

"When given the opportunities and resources women have proven to be active partners in development: efficient, dynamic and open to innovations. They represent a formidable potential that could help in meeting the challenges of food security in the 21st century", said FAO Director-General Jacques Diouf.

According to FAO, women produce more than half of all the food grown. In sub-Saharan Africa and the Caribbean, they produce up to 80 percent of basic foodstuffs, while they provide from 50 to 90 percent of the labour for rice cultivation in Asia. In countries in transition, the percentage of rural women working in agriculture ranges from about a third to more than half. Women in rural areas are almost exclusively responsible for the nutrition of their children. Women are also the principal producers and processors of food for their families.

Despite their contribution to food security, women's work is poorly understood and often underestimated in official statistics and, as a result, women tend to be invisible actors in development. There are many reasons for this. Prevailing attitudes make the plight of rural women worse by denying them political power and social representation. Gender-biased legal and social structures and illiteracy, are

other factors that prevent women from improving their economic situation, thus increasing the feminisation of poverty.

All too often women's work is not recorded in statistics or mentioned in reports. When data is collected for national statistics, gender is often ignored or the data is biased in the sense that it is collected only from males who are assumed to be the heads of households. However, with more men migrating to urban areas in search of work, many women have become heads of household. In some regions of Africa, women now head 60 percent of households.

Women may feed the world today but, given all the obstacles placed in their path, will they be able to produce the additional food needed for a world population expected to grow by three billion by 2030?

World Food Day and Telefood form the vanguard of FAO's follow-up to the World Food Summit of November 1996, in which FAO was charged with raising public awareness on the issues of food security and mobilising people to work to end world hunger, malnutrition and food insecurity.

This year's World Food day and Telefood 1998 activities will provide a timely reminder to governments and all sectors of civil society and the international community to reassess and reaffirm the commitments taken at the World Food Summit. They will represent a renewed appeal to all men and women to stress their responsibility for achieving food security and for ensuring that "food for all" becomes a reality. These commitments cannot be fulfilled without first recognising and reinforcing the invaluable contribution of that half of the world's population which is being celebrated with the slogan "Women feed the world".

to abolish discriminatory practices, both customary and modern, in areas such as inheritance, property and marriage rights. The training of women based in NGOs and WID/gender units in key ministries ensured that a gender dimension is mainstreamed into all sectoral and sub-sectoral policies. What is now needed is greater coordination amongst the different stakeholders (i.e. governments, donors, local communities and women's groups) to continue their support and to enhance their efforts in assisting rural women at all levels, politically, economically and socially.

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## IAC, INTERNATIONAL AGRICULTURAL CENTRE, The Netherlands

Research: Rights of Women to the Natural Resources of Land and Water

The purpose of the study is:

- to describe the problems surrounding women's rights to natural resources and to devise an analytical (conceptual) framework for analysing the status of women in terms of their rights to the natural resources of land and water;
- to suggest ways of strengthening these rights and of encouraging the application of law in favour of women.

The paper focuses specifically on the legal aspects of women's rights to natural resources and their practical effects. It also illustrates the links between

these legal aspects and their socio-economic and political context. It examines not only processes with a direct and explicit bearing on the rights of women to natural resources, but also processes whose primary aim is to achieve a more productive, intensive and/or sustainable use of natural resources. Governments and NGOs are responsible for many of these latter activities, mostly in the context of development cooperation. And although this aspect is often neglected, these 'purely agricultural projects can have particularly significant indirect and implicit legal implications for the changing rights of women to natural resources.

A study conducted by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, NEDA 1997, The Hague, Keebet von Benda-Beckmann (Erasmus University, Rotterdam/Sanders Institute), Mirjam de Bruijn and Gerti Hesseling (Africa Studies Centre, Leiden), Han van Dijk (Africa Studies Centre, Leiden/Wageningen Agricultural University), Barbara van Koppen (Wageningen Agricultural University), Lyda Res (IAC).

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## CCCRW, CENTRE FOR CROSS-CULTURAL RESEARCH ON WOMEN, United Kingdom

Research:

1. Occupational Change in Sub-Saharan Africa. Dr. Deborah Bryceson is coordinating a network of researchers who are studying occupational change in Sub-Saharan Africa. Research findings are varied

as would be expected in a continent the size of Africa. However, it is clear that African rural peasant populations are themselves moving away from heavy reliance on agriculture. 'De-agrarianisation' takes the form of urban migration as well as the expansion of non-agricultural activities in rural areas, which provides new income sources, occupations and social identities for rural dwellers. In the process, the gender division of labour is undergoing some interesting twists. In some areas, women's entry into trade and small-scale industries have provided them with rising incomes whilst men engaged in the production of Africa's traditional cash crops have experienced declining returns. This contributes to new gender identities as well as social tensions between men and women.

2. Women Plantation Workers. During two months in Oxford as a Visiting Fellow, Professor Shobhita Jain completed editing a book of essays by international scholars about female labour on tropical plantations. These essays on women's productive and reproductive work under plantation regimes fill a major lacuna in existing literature by providing historical and contemporary case studies. While indications show that family life is slowly changing as authority is shifting from patriarchs to conjugal pairs and from family heads to earning members of the household, class and gender inequalities remain central to the plantation sector. This book will appear in CCCRW's Berg series.

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## Amsterdam, 22-26 August 1998, Know How Conference on the World of Women's Information

The mission of the Conference was to improve the visibility and accessibility of women's information at the global and local level and to develop a strategy whereby women involved in information could promote the empowerment of women at the global level. The Conference gathered around 300 women and men from 83 countries and seven continents. A common Draft Declaration, based on the results of many workshops held during the Conference, was prepared and adopted by all participants, who represented the global community of information specialists, librarians, archivists, politicians, development specialists, women and gender specialists in the field of women's information. IIAV (International Information Centre and Archives for the Women's Movement) which organised the Conference, has started a new database called "Mapping the World of Women's Information" which is an inventory of women's information services available throughout the world. It also provides gender-specific information and connects government policy agendas with those of civil society. For access to the minutes of the Conference, the Draft Declaration and the database "Mapping the World", check the following website: <http://www.iiav.nl> (under Know How Conference).

We are pleased to publish the following information for the Women's World Summit Foundation

## World Rural Women's Day - 15 October

### Global Awareness Campaign to increase knowledge and empowerment

Following the 4th UN World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995, three INGOs - all equally concerned with the situation facing women in rural areas - proposed to designate a specific day each year to highlight the largely unrecognised contribution of rural women - mainly farmers - the world over, to food security and to the development of the rural areas.

Because of their key role in the production, management and use of food and natural resources, it was suggested that World Rural Women's Day fall on 15 October - the day before World Food Day. Celebrated for the first time in 1996, the two organising organisations, IFAP in Paris, and WWSF in Geneva, have launched a world-wide awareness and information campaign to make World Rural Women's Day a truly global event. Using different networks to ensure as wide an impact and as broad an outreach as possible, this information drive is an essential first step to make the Day an annual and ongoing global event to raise the profile of rural women and bring them out of obscurity, to sensitise governments and the public to their crucial role, and to promote action in their support.

For more information on the 1998 campaign and to order your poster, contact the coordinator:

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url: <http://www.woman.ch>

## News in brief

### The renewal of the Lomé Convention

Are you aware that as of September 30 the Commission of the European Union and the ACP Group will be renegotiating the Lomé Convention? The new Convention will involve very important changes, particularly as regards trade issues for ACP countries. 15 farmers' organisations from 14 ACP countries have already prepared a position paper on this issue.

For more info, please contact:

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### New book: "Woman, Know Your Place"

This research report from the Women in Music Project provides a fascinating insight into Zambian popular song lyrics. The team analysed 94 songs - reproduced in full English and vernacular- to ascertain how gender relationships, morality and social networks are depicted in song. This lively and entertaining book suggests action which musicians might take to change their musical outlook on women.

First published in 1990 and just reprinted by the Zambian Association for Research and Development (ZARD), P.O. Box 37836, Lusaka, Zambia.

Contact: Salma Ginwalla, Librarian  
Tel/Fax: 260-1-222883  
e-mail: [zard@zamnet.zm](mailto:zard@zamnet.zm).  
Price: 20 US \$ (approx.) ISBN 9982-818-27-9

### REQUEST FOR INFORMATION UPDATE OF THE DIMITRA GUIDEBOOK EUROPE

To all European NGOs, research institutes and information centres

Please do not forget to fill in and return the questionnaire on your organisation to us promptly, so as to be included in the forthcoming Guidebook.

In the next issue of the Dimitra Newsletter: projects or research studies of African NGOs and research institutes, particulars of partner organisations in Africa and the Near East, etc... Do not hesitate to send us articles, comments and suggestions. This Newsletter is meant to be Yours!

15 October 1998, World Rural Women's day

16 October 1998, "Women feed the World", FAO World Food Day

22-25 October 1998, 4th Meeting of the International Steering Committee of First Ladies  
for the Economic Advancement of Rural Women,  
Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

22-27 October, "Women in Africa",  
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14-16 November 1998, "International Conference on Women and the Child",  
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