

Niger | From information to action.

The multifunctional platform in Gassedda

In Niger, 70% of the population lives in rural areas or in villages with fewer than 5,000 inhabitants. Some 90% of people living in these areas have no access to electricity. Until recently, this also was the situation in Gassedda, a village in the commune of Diantchandou, in the district of Kollo. But several months ago, the community benefited from a multifunctional platform, provided by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

A multifunctional platform (MFP) consists of a chassis onto which a simple and robust motor is mounted. This is fitted with a three-phase generator that supplies mechanical and electrical energy to various pieces of equipment. In Niger, 40 villages have benefited from a platform fitted with a huller, a grain mill and a battery charger. The platform can be used to power other tools, such as a grinder or a welding unit. It can also provide sufficient energy to power the electrical network of a village or to provide a water supply.

The inhabitants of each village benefiting from a platform must provide a shed or other shelter to house the material. They must also gather a fund of 200,000 FCFA to cover main-

tenance and any repairs that might be needed. In this way, UNDP ensures that the villages will be able to maintain the equipment in good working order, without having to use external finance. Installation of the platform goes hand in hand with training in management and literacy for the committee members in charge of the project. Each committee is made up of at least eight women, who take turns in the daily management of the equipment.

Each day, Inayata Garba, secretary of the Gassedda committee, carefully fills out details in a notebook, each time entering the name of the person asking to use the machine and the service requested. In so doing, she makes sure that everyone gets their turn and that the day's revenue is accounted for. After the accounts have been checked by a third party, the revenue is divided between management committee members and maintenance and depreciation costs of the material. With the surplus generated by the use of the platform, the committee will be able to buy more equipment for the platform.

But the platform is much more than just a new source of energy for the village. It is proving especially valuable in changing the lives of women. The huller and grain mill enable women to make significant savings on the amount of time they devote to daily household tasks. This gives them more time to spend on other income generating activities. Even the youngest girls benefit: now that they no longer have to pound millet, they have more time for their education.

"Before the machine arrived, our hands had callouses. Now they are smooth. Before, we never had time to do anything else. Now, we practise horticulture, and I leave each morning to water my plants. Now, all the women practise horticulture. Before, we used to spend all our time preparing meals," says Sofi Sidikou, one of the women in charge of the platform. "The machine has greatly improved our lives and now we are no longer ashamed to show our hands when we speak," she adds, laughing.

In early 2011, when the FAO-Dimitra project team visited women members of the Gassedda



listeners' club, these women spoke of their difficulties in translating words into action. They especially lamented the lack of water in their village, which prevented them from practising horticulture. Today, in March 2013, the water problem has still not been resolved, but the women of Gassedda have made progress. Since the arrival of the platform, the women have had more spare time. But they have not used it for resting. They have left for Gourou, a village situated two kilometres from Gassedda, where they have managed to obtain land to grow fruit and vegetables. Each day, some of them go to the site to water the land and later return with vegetables, which they consume or sell. The issue of water may not have been resolved, but the time savings have meant that the women are able to go and grow crops elsewhere. The women of Gassedda are already dreaming of installing a water supply system, once the costs linked to the platform have been paid off.

"It is thanks to the listeners' club that we were able to get this machine. The listeners' club changed us, and it is because they (UNDP project staff) saw that we were motivated that they gave us the machine," says



The secretary of the management committee makes a note of each service provided.



Sofi Sidikou talks of changes in her life. Behind her are training modules for platform management.



ACCELERATING ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT FOR RURAL WOMEN

Consultative workshop to launch a joint IFAD, FAO, WFP and UN Women programme in Niger



Hulling cereals.

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Hamsa Makido, treasurer to the management committee of the Gasseda platform.

In the district of Téra, western Niger, 17 villages had expressed interest in having a multifunctional platform. There were eight platforms available and all were given to villages with listeners' clubs. Said Ali Abdoulaye, coordinator of VIE Kande Ni Bayra which accompanies the women: "I can only say that those women who know how to mobilize themselves, how to express themselves and how to plan their activities, have been taken into consideration in the selection process for villages able to manage a platform in an effective manner." In Gasseda, the first few months using the new platform proved to be a resounding success. The platform has also been the subject of discussion in a number of debates organized by the listeners' clubs.

✳ **For further information:**
VIE Kande Ni Bayra
Ali Abdoulaye, Coordinator
BP 349
Niamey, Niger
Tel: +227-20-752560 - Tel/Fax: +227-20-755448
viebayra@intnet.ne – www.viebayra.org

Women play a major role in developing rural areas and national economies. However, they only have limited access to resources for production, such as land, agricultural inputs, financial services and credit, extension services and technologies, a factor that creates an obstacle to an effective agriculture sector.

Against this background, the three Rome-based agencies – FAO, IFAD and WFP – decided to team up with UN Women to offer a more global and integrated United Nations response by supporting economic empowerment for rural women through joint action. The five-year programme will be implemented in seven countries: Niger, Ethiopia, Liberia, Rwanda, Guatemala, Kyrgyzstan and Nepal. Its aim is to create synergies arising from the mandates and comparative advantages of each of the agencies, and to improve livelihoods and strengthen the rights of rural women, in the context of sustainable development and the Millennium Development Goals after 2015 (post-MDG 2015).

The launch of a joint programme in Niger

A consultative workshop for the joint programme in Niger took place in Niamey from 27 to 28 November 2012. This launch workshop was organized together with all stakeholders – Representatives of the Ministries of Agriculture, Population, Promotion of Women and Child Protection and the 3N Initiative (Nigeriens feed Nigeriens), representatives of technical and funding partners (donors and international NGOs) and representatives of grassroots organizations already working with the four agencies, coming mainly from the two targeted regions of Maradi and Dosso.

Challenges and good practices

The workshop methodology was participatory and alternated presentation sessions with open discussions, working groups and plenary feedback sessions.

Following the working groups and during the plenary sessions, participants identified five main categories of requirements and challenges: capacity building, rights, access to information and resources, participation and

representation of rural women at all levels, and programme management (capacities and good governance).

Good practices already in place in Niger held special attention: the FAO-Dimitra listeners' clubs, CARE's Matu Masu Dubara microfinance programme, the UNFPA husbands' schools, CTB's project for Increasing Women's Financial Income in Dosso, and the capitalisation of good practices and gender mainstreaming in FAO's community development programmes.

The next steps

The four agencies are now mapping their project and programme activities in the two target regions and developing a common concept note for Niger.

✳ **For further information, please contact:**
Eliane Najros, FAO-Dimitra Coordinator
Eliane.Najros@fao.org



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