



COMMUNITY LISTENERS' CLUBS

Stepping stones for action in rural areas



FAO-Dimitra Project



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This publication has been prepared by the FAO-Dimitra team, together with Samwaki, ONG VIE, Olivier Bailly and Christiane Monsieur.

Dimitra thanks the women and men of the listeners' clubs, as well as the community radios and their staff. Their outstanding participation and deep commitment have made the success of the listeners' clubs possible.

Also, heartfelt thanks to the organizations which have enabled this experience to become a reality: Dimitra's project partners – ONG VIE, Samwaki and REFED-Katanga – as well as the King Baudouin Foundation and GTZ-Santé for the support they offered to the first listeners' clubs in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

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Preface

Many African rural communities, especially women, are excluded from the information and communication process. This situation, already highlighted in the *Strategy for Action (Gender and Food Security: The Role of Information, FAO, Rome, 2000)*, has intensified during the past decade, and it is clear that such exclusion increases food insecurity.

So one can only welcome the exceptional experience witnessed in Niger and in the Democratic Republic of Congo with the community listeners' clubs – highly participatory information and communication processes established by FAO-Dimitra. The goals of these listeners' clubs echo the recommendations of Member States of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations in its *Strategy for Action*: information as a decision-making tool, as a means of empowerment and as a tool in negotiation.

This timely publication offers several approaches for improving the access of rural men and women to the fundamental resources of information and communication and for helping to close the gender gap in agriculture.

I hope you will enjoy reading this publication.

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Introduction

It all began in 2003, in Goma, in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) during a meeting between FAO-Dimitra and Samwaki, a Congolese non-governmental organization active in South Kivu and interested in creating a space for exchange and discussion between rural women in the region.

This first meeting paved the way for a series of training and collaboration activities between Dimitra and Samwaki, leading up to the creation of community listeners' clubs in South Kivu in February 2006. In 2009, a similar initiative was launched in two regions of Niger, while other listeners' clubs were created in Katanga, DRC.

This publication presents the unique experience of the community listeners' clubs in the DRC (particularly in South Kivu) and Niger and the results that these initiatives produced. It is a unique experience because in a short time, these clubs succeeded in promoting social mobilisation of both women and men, as well as dialogue, collaboration and action on the part of rural communities, especially women. In this process, community radio is used as an information and communication channel, encouraging a flow of information and communication that places people at the centre of interactions.

The latest FAO Report on the State of Food and Agriculture (SOFA 2010-11) entitled "Women in Agriculture. Closing the gender gap for development" confirms the im-

portance of access for rural women to all resources that make improved production possible. Of these, information and communication are among the most precious.

The listeners' clubs have been pursuing this approach for several years now: facilitating information and communication, dialogue and action in an effort to achieve greater economic and social empowerment for rural communities, especially the most marginalised, and improving their livelihoods. Sharing information and ideas has a direct impact on gender equality and plays a major role in improving the status of rural women.

For these rural communities, it is sometimes a question of survival. Exchanging knowledge on agricultural practices, nutrition, the struggle against HIV/AIDS, access to land, etc. is even more crucial for women as a way of reducing their isolation and providing them with a means for taking action. If information is the gold of the XXIst century, then the community listeners' clubs are deposits waiting to be mined.

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