

## Example of good practice



During the workshop, the experience of the listeners' clubs in South Kivu, in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), was often cited as an enriching experience, an example of a good practice to be shared. This project shows to what extent information and communication are essential elements for awareness raising and mobilisation, for the empowerment of rural women, for them to know and recognise their rights, for their capacity to organise themselves and for a better acknowledgement of their role within the community. By way of illustration we present a few excerpts from an article which was published in the Dimitra Newsletter, Issue 14 (March 2008)

### South Kivu – *Solar radios change the lives of women in rural areas*

Communication equipment – more specifically solar-powered radios, recorders and digital receivers – was recently provided to listeners' clubs for men and women, women's networks in rural areas and community radio stations in the Province of South Kivu in the DRC. The solar radios have been put in the care of women. This means that radios are no longer the exclusive possession of the men of the villages. Whole evenings can now be spent round the fire listening to the radio; the radio wave has entered people's kitchens and can even be listened to by farmers – both women and men – as they work their fields. (...)

The listeners' clubs and women's networks are based in eight rural districts within the province. Their members were delighted to receive the solar radios. The women, who are in charge of the radios, are particularly pleased that they will now be able to stay abreast of activities carried out by women in other areas. This in turn will better arm them to tackle their main concerns: safeguarding the daily survival of their families and promoting the development of their communities. (...)

#### Sharing knowledge and experiences of development

Mrs M'Bisimwa is a member of the Mugogo Communication Axis (a unit that brings together two or more women's groups so as to enable them to exchange information and share experiences). Together with the other members of her group she recently listened to a programme broadcast on Radio Maendeleo on breeding guinea pigs. She learnt a lot from it and within just two weeks' time she had started breeding them herself. For now she has only a few animals, but she already manages to feed her children with the meat at least once a week, which is good for their health.

Again thanks to a radio programme, the members of the Rhuhinduke listeners' club in Mugogo learned of a twofold initiative undertaken by a group of women from Fizi. On the one hand they had created a mutual assistance fund for women and, on the other hand, had begun to manufacture corrugated tiles which



they placed onto their kitchen roofs, without any intervention by their husbands. The mutual assistance fund is capped at USD 100. The 150 women who are members of the fund keep it afloat by paying in USD 0.20 each week. Those who are most in need are then given an interest-free loan which they can pay back over time.

After discussing what they had heard during the programme, the members of the Mugogo listeners' club took the idea launched by their counterparts in Fizi one step further: they decided to create a savings and credit cooperative. They calculated that, without being overly ambitious, by breeding 20 rabbits they could earn the group a sum of USD 1500 over a period of 12 months. They are already collecting the money to buy the first 20 rabbits, which will be distributed amongst the 20 members of the club, 15 of whom are women and 5 men.

### Breaking the silence in families on HIV/AIDS

Many members of listeners' clubs and women's networks in rural areas report that those men and women who take part in activities to raise awareness of how to combat HIV/AIDS, very often tend to pass on and discuss the relevant information within their group only. A large majority is hesitant to broach the subject



within the family unit, in front of their spouse and children.

One evening, when it was her turn to take the solar radio home, Mrs Iranga, who is a member of the Ciherano Communication Axis, took advantage of the opportunity to talk about HIV/AIDS with her family. Her husband, children and neighbours all listened to a programme on HIV/AIDS broadcast in Mashi, the local language. She had expected that everyone would leave, preferring not to be confronted with this sensitive issue, but was surprised to see how attentively they all followed the programme, even her husband. And before she could speak at the end of the broadcast, one of her neighbours had already set the tone. The entire group then chimed in, young and old alike. Ever since, Iranga has felt much freer to talk about HIV/AIDS within her family and with her neighbours. *“My neighbours are impatiently awaiting my next turn for the radio. Once it has made its way round the 42 other members of my group, it will come back to me and we will listen to more programmes, particularly sketches. This has become my task and I feel responsible for it”*, she explains.

In Uvira, as in Kalehe, various listeners' clubs have discussed specific traditional practices that can favour the spread of HIV/AIDS in their area. These include tattooing, polygamy and discrimination against women and girls. Using illustrations, the facilitators of the Kalehe listeners' club analyse the transmission chain of HIV/AIDS and clearly demonstrate that if people do not become aware of the problem, the scourge can be passed on to an entire community in no time by one individual who may even be a stranger to them.

### Equality in expression and in division of tasks

*“This is the first time in the many years I've been a member of various groups that I have participated in a debate on gender awareness. I had always thought this was a topic that favoured women and went against men!”* This observation was made by one of the members of the Kalehe listeners' club at the end of a debate on the roles of women and men in running the household. The discussion was held during a SAMWAKI training session for the members of the Kalehe listeners' club and women's networks in September 2007. At the end of the training session, in view of the many ambiguities and misunderstandings put forward by the participants on the notion of gender roles, a debate was held during which the men and women became quite entrenched in opposition to one another and were no longer really listening. In order to defuse the situation, the facilitator suggested that they make a table of the different activities carried out by the men and the women.

Once they had accounted for all 24 hours in the day, fresh momentum was given to the discussion and the participants recognised that the well-being of the family can only be attained through cooperation between men and women, specifically by fair distribution of tasks within the household.

### Conclusion

Solar, crank-powered radios provide the people, and in particular the women, of the rural areas of South Kivu with access to information and enable them to share ideas and practices. The members of the listeners' clubs now have at their disposal a tool that will enhance their knowledge in a host of areas related to community development. Combating HIV/AIDS, gender education, agriculture, animal husbandry and food security, protection of the environment, hygiene, habitat, human rights and women's rights are just some of the issues being debated within the listeners' clubs and grassroots organisations. (...)