

## The Dimitra experience in sharing information and networking

Gracey J.

in

Hamdy A. (ed.), Sagardoy J.A. (ed.), El Kady M. (ed.), Quagliariello R. (ed.), Bogliotti C. (ed.).

Training of trainers in INtegration of Gender Dimension in water management in the Mediterranean region. INGEDI project

Bari : CIHEAM

Options Méditerranéennes : Série A. Séminaires Méditerranéens; n. 64

2004

pages 51-53

Article available on line / Article disponible en ligne à l'adresse :

<http://om.ciheam.org/article.php?IDPDF=6002375>

To cite this article / Pour citer cet article

Gracey J. **The Dimitra experience in sharing information and networking.** In : Hamdy A. (ed.), Sagardoy J.A. (ed.), El Kady M. (ed.), Quagliariello R. (ed.), Bogliotti C. (ed.). *Training of trainers in INtegration of Gender Dimension in water management in the Mediterranean region. INGEDI project.* Bari : CIHEAM, 2004. p. 51-53 (Options Méditerranéennes : Série A. Séminaires Méditerranéens; n. 64)



<http://www.ciheam.org/>  
<http://om.ciheam.org/>

## THE DIMITRA EXPERIENCE IN SHARING INFORMATION AND NETWORKING

**J. Gracey\***

\* Project Officer, Gender and Development Service (SDWW), FAO, Brussels

Rural women are the driving force of rural economies in developing countries. However, the fundamental role they play is often not accounted for, nor valued.

In Africa, women contribute over 70% of total agricultural production and yet their property rights, their control over land and natural resources and the return on their own labour are minimal.

This situation needs to be documented and explained so as to sensitize all development partners and this is the reason why the Dimitra Project was set up.

Dimitra is an information and communication project implemented by the Gender and Development Service of the FAO. Its goal is to **improve rural women's living conditions and status and highlight their contribution as essential partners for food security and sustainable development.**

Dimitra local partners collect detailed quantitative and qualitative information on organisations and projects concerning rural women in their country and sub-region. This creates a body of knowledge and information which provides an overview of priorities and activities of NGOs, networks and grassroots organisations throughout Africa and the Near East as well as valuable data on who is doing what, where, and how.

By **combining the use of new information and communication technologies** (online database, electronic forums, CD-ROM, etc.) **and traditional communication techniques** (rural and community radio, theatre, posters, newsletter, etc.) the Dimitra network spreads information as widely as possible and help make the voices of rural populations heard.

Dimitra partners translate material into **local languages** and decide on appropriate communication techniques to reach out to rural women. The project focuses particularly on **exchange of experiences, resources and knowledge.**

The Dimitra database and website (<http://www.fao.org/sd/dimitra>) contain **a wealth of information which is regularly updated and free to access.** The database contains detailed descriptions of organisations based in Europe, in Africa, and in the Near East which have rural development projects or programmes involving rural women. Dimitra publications include: a guidebook on organisations based in Europe, a guidebook on organisations based in Africa and the Near East; bi-annual newsletters. A CD-ROM of the website and database will soon be available.

### DIMITRA IS A FACILITATOR

- providing an interface for accessing and sharing information;
- helping to reinforce capacities of intermediary organisations that have direct links with grassroots organisations;
- acting as a two-way communication channel helping to connect grassroots organisations to decision-making level and vice-versa;
- pooling technical resources and expertise from FAO services, UN agencies and other organisations to benefit the network;
- combining traditional and new information and communication methods.

## NETWORKING METHODS

Dimitra exchanges experiences and knowledge and encourages South-South exchange of expertise. Dimitra also contributes to the organisation of workshops on topics requested at grassroots level.

One example of a recent event was the International Workshop « **Rural Women and Land** », which took place in Thiès, Senegal from 25-27 February 2003.

100 participants from throughout the country attended the workshop, around 70 of whom were rural women and men.

The workshop was unique as it was conceived and organised by the Rural Women Network of Senegal (a network of grassroots organisations) with the support of Enda Pronat and FAO-Dimitra. Its main goal was for rural women to speak out and make known to decision-makers the problems they encounter in regard to accessing cultivable land, natural resources and land acquisition.

Rural populations, especially women, spoke for themselves.

- Participants' experiences and initiatives were promoted through exchange;
- Rural women's status and activities were documented and made visible;
- Partners, religious and traditional leaders and policy makers listened to rural women tell what they experience in their everyday life;
- Women spoke of the persistence of tradition and religion which reject gender parity in spite of the laws already passed;
- Thanks to the very strong dynamic of the workshop, the resulting recommendations and action plan focus on very concrete activities.

The Technical Support Unit (which gathers together all the intermediary organisations of the workshop) and the Board of the Rural Women National Network of Senegal are translating the workshop recommendations into an action plan over a period of three years, with deadlines for implementing activities.

This action plan will form the basic working document for the Network and the next meeting of rural women will be held in 2006 in order to evaluate the implementation of the recommendations.

Direct results of the workshop included:

- A seat for the Rural Women National Network of Senegal on the National Commission for the Revision of Land Tenure in Senegal;
- Repackaging of information on current land laws, dissemination to grassroots and lobbying decision-makers, donors, traditional chiefs, etc.

## ACTIVITIES OF THE DIMITRA PARTNERS

- Listening to rural populations, respecting indigenous knowledge, understanding local culture to help develop local content for change;
- Equipping community centres with access to internet and linking them to rural community radio (ongoing pilot project);
- Helping build stronger links between grassroots organisations, NGOs, civil society and decision makers.

The management of natural resources is closely linked to the distribution of power in a community and to gender roles. The FAO **Gender and Development Plan of Action** includes commitments from FAO Divisions to promote gender equality in access to, control over and management of natural resources. Land and water resources form the basis of all farming systems and their preservation is crucial to sustained and improved food production. Although women are usually responsible for providing water for domestic use and agriculture, tradition often excludes women from managing water.

Among the recommendations of the *Plan of Action* regarding 'Land and water':

- Take gender equality into account in the development of training materials, manuals and participatory training programmes for low-cost water control technologies (pumps, micro-irrigation);
- Give special attention to women's effective representation in water user associations and the restructuring of irrigation schemes;
- Improve women farmers' access to integrated soil and nutrient management technologies.

Rural women's difficult access to information further restricts their already limited participation in decision-making processes and their access to resources.

This situation presents a major obstacle to sustainable development, considering that information is a critical tool in the fight against hunger and poverty and an essential factor for progress.

## **BENEFITS OF SHARING INFORMATION**

- Access to information reinforces women's influence in their communities and their ability to participate in decision-making;
- Information improves women access to resources (e.g. e-learning, production and conservation techniques, credit, training, reproductive health, etc.);
- Modern and traditional information and communication techniques increase the power of rural populations and women in particular.