

Cameroon – Women contribute to sustainable management of natural resources

Dimitra partner organisation Alternatives Durables pour le Développement (ADD - Sustainable Alternatives for Development) was founded in Mbalmayo, Cameroon, in 1996. ADD is active in three core areas: sustainable management of natural resources, local governance and health, in the country's Centre, South and East regions.

The sustainable management of natural resources is central to ADD's activities, with a focus on social and community forestry, sustainable agriculture and water, and basic sanitation. In this area, ADD aims to get local communities more involved in the sustainable management of natural resources by building up their capacities so that they can actively contribute to poverty reduction.

ADD also implements programmes on local governance and decentralisation (Social mobilisation and participation, Civic education and Promotion of good corporate governance) as well as community health and HIV/AIDS (Information/Education/Communication to foster a change in behaviour and access to primary healthcare).

Well-defined intervention strategy

ADD's intervention strategy is structured around research and action based on a well-established approach. The research component comprises studies which precede and determine the action. Local people, public services, civil society and other local stakeholders are involved in these studies. A negotiation stage follows during which anything can happen: nothing is ruled out in advance and the contributions of each party are determined by consensus and subject to constant scrutiny (this being a condition for implementation). The final stage is the action itself, which takes the form of interventions combining organisational development and technical aspects. Priority is given to women and young people, since they are the most marginalised categories in relations between social groups. The stakeholders are supported to enable them to play their role as fully-fledged participants in the development mechanisms.

Two flagship activities have been central to ADD's work: the multiplication of plantain off-shoots using the PIF method and the processing of cocoa into butter.

Multiplication of plantain off-shoots using the PIF method (PIF = planting stock derived from stem fragments)

ADD provided training on the PIF method to women from the Common Initiative Group¹ (GIC) ENTENTE in the village of Bizock in the Center region. Following the training, the women specialised in the multiplication of plantain

off-shoots using planting stock derived from stem fragments. They built a germinator and produced around a thousand off-shoots, which they shared out between themselves and planted on their respective plots.

Monitoring of these plots showed that the off-shoots derived from PIF multiplication grew much faster than those taken directly from the old plots, known as 'tout venant'. A reduction in the incidence of disease was also recorded. "Although the PIF off-shoots looked fragile compared to the tout venant when planted out, we noticed after two months that the plots containing PIF off-shoots were free of disease, and the off-shoots that had been fragile to start with had become stronger and thicker than those in the tout venant plot," a GIC ENTENTE representative explains.

In November 2009, the same women built another germinator and planted seeds. When asked why they chose the PIF method, they reply that it is very practical and yields the number, quality and varieties of healthy off-shoots that they need, in the right timeframe. It also allows them to tailor their production to market demand.

Processing of cocoa into butter

The GIC APROFAM (Agriculteurs pour la Promotion de la Femme à Andock-Minlaba – Farmers for the Promotion of Women in Andock-Minlaba), which consists mainly of women and is also based in the Centre region, has specialised in the production of butter from cocoa. Farmers in this region have been selling cocoa in bean form for some years. ADD provided training on processing cocoa into butter. Since then, the village women have continued to use this method, which is significantly more profitable and more valued by local people. As one of the group's members explains: "Cocoa processed into butter is more expensive than cocoa sold in bean form, and it has a lot of valuable properties. It is used in the manufacture of many pharmaceutical and cosmetic products and is recommended as a food-stuff because it helps with various health problems experienced by women. All we need is for our husbands to realise this and allow us to process a sizeable portion of our produce. The money raised from selling the butter goes a long way towards meeting our household needs."

The women produced around 15 litres of cocoa butter in 2008. In 2009, having acquired a



Woman from ADD grafting an avocado plant.

multi-purpose mill with the financial support of the NGO Nouvelle Planète Switzerland via ADD, they increased their butter production by 40% and expect to go even further this year.

The training provided in the communities of Mbalmayo has fostered the acquisition of new knowledge, skills and attitudes among local population in general and women in particular. It has also enabled joint and group initiatives to be run, which has strengthened social ties between the communities and local development actors and their involvement in the development process.

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¹ A Groupe d'Initiative Commune (GIC – Common Initiative Group) is an association under Cameroon law which engages in community or other activities and usually comprises several dozen members.