Open and Distance Programme for Rural Women

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THE CONTEXT

In the Upper Nkam culture in Cameroon, with about 200,000 inhabitants, women (51% of the population) are the core of the community, in charge, from generation to generation, of the management of the household and the transmission of cultural heritage. But when comes the time to take decisions that can influence the future of the community, because of the weakness of their resources, their illiteracy and cultural inhibitions, they are marginalised. Considering its advantages, open and distance learning seems to be the best solution to solve this problem.

The initiative described here, supported financially by the Seed Grant Smalkl Innovative Project of Global Knowledge Partnership, aims to use open and distance training programme through radio broadcastings and video tapes, to empower rural women by giving them the skills to be able to implement income generating activities and to practice effective local leadership.

METHODOLOGY

First of all, we tried through a participative approach, to identify the real needs of women that could be provided to through distance learning. After that, to enhance the appropriation of the project by the community, we identified good partners among groups of women and chose to work with them. We then elaborated a training programme and the training material most suitable to transmit the messages. After choosing the radio as one of the best ways to train the women (Daly, 2003; FAO, 2001; Girard, 2003), we set a contract with a community radio station usually listened to by the women. The training programme was then broadcast over that community radio.

Stakeholders in the Initiative

The main stakeholders in the initiative and their duties were:

- **PROTEGE QV**: Owner, in charge of the overall coordination, the administrative duties, the recruitment of experts, the contacts with the local women groups, the follow up and the evaluation.
- **ALTERNATIVE SANTE**: Partner, responsible for the medical content of the project.
- **RADIO RURALE FOTOUNI**: Partner, in charge of the broadcastings.
- **Women Groups**: Beneficiaries.
- **Local Trainers**: From women groups, in charge of transmission of messages to local groups, and support of the sustainability of the project.

In the Grassfield region of Cameroon, more than 90% of the women are members of at least one association or other women group. The Upper Nkam division of Cameroon has more than 100 women groups, with at least 30 members and with regular meetings on weekly or monthly basis. We chose those women groups as one of the best ways to contact the beneficiaries and inform the about the project. On the basis of their involvement in current development activities, ten women groups (653 members overall) were identified as potential partners.

Identification of the Real Needs

To ensure the relevancy of the training content, we used a participatory approach through field survey to identify the real needs of women. The questions in the survey form aimed to find obstacles to efficient involvement of women, and the most current needs in terms of training and support. It also permitted evaluation of the feasibility of different solutions (how many people have a radio set, what language is most suitable, what days and at what time do they listen to the radio, how many can read and write, what are the subjects they want to be informed on, etc.).

The survey was done by interviewing 500 women in the division during a week. Out of the 500 forms completed, 472 were valid and could be processed. The completed forms were processed and a report of that investigation was published.
Some important results of the survey are as follows:

**On the Sample**
- The women interviewed came from 31 villages.
- 67.7% of the interviewed women were aged between 26 and 50 years.
- 50% of them had not completed elementary school.
- 44% were in a polygamous marriage.
- The most spoken language was Féfé (77%), a local language, followed by French (72%).

**On Women Activities**
- The most current activity was farming (53%), followed by selling of products (24%).
- 85.6% of the interviewed women declared that the main difficulty encountered was finding funds for their businesses.

**On the Radio**
- The radio stations with the highest audience ratings are the national radio (CRTV) and Radio Rurale FOTOUNI.
- Women listened to the radio on Saturdays and Sundays especially before 9:00 a.m. and after 6:00 p.m.
- 52% of the interviewed women thought that there was a lack of information on how to prevent diseases like malaria, diarrhoea, cardiovascular diseases, and menopause related diseases.

**On Local Leadership**
- 98% of the interviewed women were members of at least one association.
- Only women who have completed elementary school and the first cycle and secondary school were in the staff of mixed associations (women and men).
- To be better involved in municipal councils, women knew that they needed some training.

**Elaboration of the Training Programme and Material**

To provide the needs identified through the survey, three main subjects were identified: local leadership, family health, and income generating activities. A training program was elaborated with three main axes:
- Using women groups for lobbying and practising leadership,
- Creation and management of Income Generating Activities (IGA), and
- Family health.

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**Table 1. Training material**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>THEME</th>
<th>AIMS</th>
<th>RADIO PROGRAMS</th>
<th>VIDEOS</th>
<th>HANDBOOKS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Income generating activities</strong></td>
<td>How to create and run income generating activities in rural area</td>
<td>What is an IGA*, IGA at home</td>
<td>Funding an IGA with a cooperative, “MC” of BANKA*, Finding funds for IGA, Using cooperatives to fund an IGA</td>
<td>How to evaluate the fund needs to start a business, Finding funds to start a business</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Family health</strong></td>
<td>First aid, family health and care</td>
<td>Why have interest in health</td>
<td>Mother to child transmission in the community, Child health care in little towns: Upper Nkam division example, Child way from home to hospital</td>
<td>Communication methods, Children health, Women health, Cardio-vascular diseases</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Local leadership</strong></td>
<td>Using women groups for lobbying</td>
<td>Presentation of the program</td>
<td>Speaking in public “GIC Essayons Voir”</td>
<td>How to create an association, The role of women groups in development, How to organize a training</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*IGA: Income Generating Activity*
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