

Combating Desertification:
«Connecting Community Action with Science and Common Sense»,
CAPETOWN April 2002

COMMUNITY ACTIVITIES OF THE SAHEL REGION
by SAHEL DEFIS

I. PROGRAMME FOR WOMEN AND YOUTH IN THE SAHEL REGION

COMBATING POVERTY AND DESERTIFICATION

1. Sahel DEFIS is a network of field-based NGOs involved in both rural and urban projects, including anti-desertification activities such as : soil regeneration, composting, training and environmental education. Most of them have participated in national or international negotiations for the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification. They are involved in economic projects, capacity building, employment generation for women and youth groups, through such activities as agricultural production and food processing, animal husbandry, reforestation, soil and water conservation, small trade and rural credit.
2. Many studies conducted since the start of structural adjustment programmes in West Africa have shown that one major problem which needs to be immediately addressed is poverty in both rural and urban areas, especially for two target groups : women, whose important role in local economies needs no further demonstration , and the youth, whose future is jeopardised by the lack of proper education and training, and of employment opportunities.
3. Targeting poverty alleviation as a goal is also one of the positive outcomes of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification. Its Resolution on Urgent Action for Africa calls on governments, international institutions and NGOs to take specific steps for pursuing that purpose.
4. Following the recommendations of Agenda 21, the Convention has made it possible for United Nations Agencies, along with many public and private research institutions and NGOs, to make significant contributions to the negotiations and to draw attention on poverty alleviation as a means to reduce the pressure on natural resources in drylands, and as an effective alternative measure for combating desertification.
5. Traditional coping mechanisms developed by people living in the drylands have included rural exodus and seasonal migration towards richer countries for labour or for trading commercial goods. Migration of seasonal workers is no longer feasible because of the economic crisis prevailing almost everywhere. Alternative coping mechanisms have included loans and grants among family members and between social groups.
6. These have proved to be effective insurance strategies which have often made it possible for many families to live though hard times and to overcome poverty. They have also enabled some of the most performing community members (often women) to develop a number of active trade businesses.
7. The Women and Youth Programme attempts to build on these experiences, in order to help achieve sustainable development through long lasting employment and income generating activities. NGOs are

often in a good position to carry out this type of work, because many have gained expertise in working closely with rural communities and urban populations. Some are also prepared to add a new dimension to the solution : a training component in the fields of project design and implementation, financial and business management and technical training.

8. Starting in 1993, Sahel DEFIS undertook to provide on request financial support in the form of short-term, low-interest loans, as well as technical training to specific women and youth groups involved in small scale employment and income generating activities in six West African countries : Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Mali, Senegal and Togo. The initial funding came from Member fees and from cultural events staged by Sahel DEFIS in France (Performance of African Artists, sale of traditional crafts, etc.)
9. Since 1995, some 30 projects were launched in Benin, Togo, Burkina Faso, Mali and Senegal. They are being supervised by Sahel DEFIS representatives in the field. Sahel DEFIS has mobilised its own resources and public funds from UN sources, France and Venezuela for a total of US\$ 254,000. To date, over 30,000 people, including a majority of women are benefiting from the programme.

DETAILED DISTRIBUTION OF PROJECTS

<i>Geographical Programme</i>	<i>Detailed Activities</i>	<i>Responsible Party</i>
Benin/Togo	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Traditional cotton weaving : Women Abomey Kalavi, Southern Benin ■ Cassava processing Women Houégan II ■ Poultry farming : Women, Agotimé-Nytoé, Togo ■ Agricultural production and sale : AFSD Cotonou ■ Tree nursery : Benin 21 	Sahel DEFIS Togo : Dr. Héléne Labitey
Mali/Senegal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Production and sale of Wire Fencing : Women of Timbuktu Mali ■ Tree nurseries and rural credit for women at Nara, Mali ■ Environmental Education centers at Gao, Timbuktu, Nara ■ Revolving loans, tree nurseries, Thiès/Tivaouane, Sénégal 	AFAD/MALI : Mrs. Maïga Sina Damba Sahel DEFIS SENEGAL : Mr. Samba BA
Burkina/Niger	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Fruit gardening at Djomga Oasis, Northern Burkina Faso ■ Sheep fattening and small trade for women's group in Dori ■ Spice and butter production and sale by women in Kokologo, Burkina ■ Private water fountain administered by local NGO in Djibo, Northern Burkina ■ Small enterprise by youth group : electricity and masonry in Ouagagougou ■ International trading of local arts and crafts production (fairs), Ouagadougou ■ Environmental education in Eastern Burkina Faso, Koupéla, Burkina ■ Natural resource management, tree nurseries in Pô, Southern Burkina ■ OIL seeds production, processing and sale by Women in Samorogouan ■ Wood production and sale by youth group in Toma Niémié, Burkina ■ Reforestation and processing of forestry products by women foresters, Burkina ■ Collection and sale of arts and crafts by local women's 	« Needi » Women's Association + Sahel DEFIS/Burkina : Mr. Lassina Sanon Mr. Ousmane Aldiouma Mrs Léocadie Traoré

	association in Gorom Gorom, Northern Burkina ■ Farming school for unemployed youth in Bagassi , Western Burkina ■ Alternative activities for combating desertification in Niger	
--	---	--

ADDENDUM : PLANNED ACTIVITIES

DJOMGA 2002 CRAFT DEVELOPMENT WORKSHOP

Applied Arts and Craft Workshop for rural Sahelian artists and crafters for Djomga 2002 in co-operation with NGO experts from South Africa, Cape Verde and the Sahel Region at large

(June 2002 in Burkina Faso)

Summary:

Contemporary Sahelian Art and craft is a relatively untapped resource in the rural communities of the Sahel. It is an alternative to income generation and offers options to having to make a living off the already degraded land. Products will be developed in a dynamic relationship between the crafters and the designers and a «Djomga 2002» identity will be developed. Techniques and lessons learnt will be shared and taken forward to brand Sahelian contemporary applied arts and craft and market them at the World Summit on Sustainable Development, Johannesburg, August/September 2002. This international conference has a marketing and crafters component.

Background information:

Rural communities are finding it harder to make a living off the dryland areas and alternative income generation projects are developing skills and traditional techniques in a new sustainable way within local integrated development plans with the aim of improving people's livelihoods.

Concrete Objectives:

- To strengthen local economies and conserve natural resources
- To add value to products using existing skills and techniques and readily available resources
- To make more accessible the traditions and culture of the Sahel by interpreting them into contemporary products which have a broad market appeal

Activities:

- Discuss applied arts and craft as an income generating activity,
- Evaluate products brought by participants and the existing producer base
- Make recommendations where appropriate for suitable product ranges and identify training needs and potential trainers for production and market principles and basic business skills
- Visit existing craft groups to evaluate the suitability of extending or establishing small enterprises
- Evaluate potential markets and linkages

Possible outputs:

- Contemporary Art: -small investment but maximum return, distinctive to the community, ethnic group or region, building on what is already being done or developing techniques or visions of the communities
- Designer Ware: accessories: (silver jewellery, hand bags)
- Home-ware: (textiles: table mats and cloths, metal: cutlery, photo frames etc)
- Clothing Range: men's shirts, women's gowns, hats, children's ware etc using fabric designs taken from the area or group
- Packaging and labelling: of existing products or products that have had value added to them
- Small tourism articles: paper products, gourds, basketwork, religious art objects, objects already made and sold, using traditional techniques and natural resources for local tourism or setting up an identity for National Parks, Djomga 2002 e.g., (a logo on a specific range of products sold on site, at airports and craft fairs)

**CONTACT : TAHIROU DIAO SAHEL DEFIS : CCD1196@wanadoo.fr ; saheldefis@free.fr
www.sahel-defis.org OR ROBEN PENNY :**