

FONDS SUEZ ENVIRONNEMENT Initiatives – Institut de France Awards

Winner of the category "**Access to essential services**"
2011-2012 Edition

"Mothers' Clubs Initiatives in the Savannah Region"

Structure

The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement is an international organisation that is represented in 188 countries. The **French Red Cross** is an independent non-profit association. It works on a daily basis to help those suffering from the increasing marginalisation and dehumanisation within our society, on both a national and international level. Each year, its 55,000 volunteers and 17,000 employees work to provide aid to over one million people, by systematically favouring a return to independence.

Created in 1958, the **Togo Red Cross** aims to prevent and lessen suffering, to improve the living conditions of the most vulnerable people, to provide assistance in the event of disasters and to promote human rights amongst the population.

Context

The Mothers' Club Initiatives is part of a larger project aimed at improving the resilience of the people of the Savannah Region, northern Togo; to better deal with a lack of food security and unstable access to drinking water (80% of the region's population do not have reliable access to drinking water).

Aims

General aim

The action of the Mothers' Clubs Initiatives provides stable access to water and improvements in sanitation and waste management, as well as promoting good hygiene practices.

Specific aims

- To contribute to a 25% decrease in the rate of waterborne diseases in the 60 villages targeted for the installation of improved water structures.
- To raise awareness amongst the 6,700 people living in the villages with regard to hygiene and water management.
- To reassure women in relation to their capabilities within the community and to provide them with greater independence within their homes.

Description of the project

A Mothers' Club is a coming together of around twenty women from the same area. These women are then educated on maternal and infant health, hygiene and sanitation, nutrition and the creation of income-generating activities. The training for the members of the Mothers' Clubs last for three days and is carried out within the community. The activities in which the members participate include educational discussions, the public cleaning of water access points, markets, public areas and roads, maintaining a Health Provision Fund (rural health insurance for the members of the club), the



promotion of good hygiene practices and the implementation and management of income-generating activities. The programme focuses on reinforcing women's organisational competences and abilities, which leads to an improvement in their self-confidence and the perception of their abilities in the community as a whole.

The Mothers' Clubs act as permanent hubs and focal points within their community for ensuring awareness of the importance of sanitation and waste management and for raising awareness of suitable hygiene practice. In addition, they provide support for the Water Committees responsible for the durability of the water structures, by creating a sense of responsibility within the community or even fulfilling the role of the Water Committee should the latter fail to do so.

The Mothers' Clubs also manage the various funds, which are augmented each month by only the contributions of the members: an operating fund, a health provision fund and a fund used for providing loans to members who wish to launch an income-generating activity (IGA). Thanks to support from the NGO RAFIA, the women in the Clubs have also developed agricultural activities in areas which had previously been considered to have poor productivity potential (slums).

Description of the innovation

This innovating organisation draws its originality from the possibility that it gives to women to actively participate in the development of the community and in the resolution of the economic, social and health issues that it encounters. Women, by virtue of their place within the community, represent a key inter-generational pivot for raising awareness amongst their peers, and in particular amongst children, in relation to community health, the management of water structures and good practices relating to water storage, hygiene and the general sanitation of the village.

Results

- The creation of 23 Mothers' Clubs Initiatives (480 members on start-up and 987 active members following the project) has made it possible to raise awareness throughout the communities (over 12,000 people) of the problems relating to sustainable water management, sanitation, hygiene and community health, and to teach good practices, implement agricultural transformation activities and create and sustainably finance 121 Community Health Representative positions to continue the work of raising awareness.
- The teaching of accounting and finance management has enabled the creation of three mutual funds that are financed exclusively by Mothers' Clubs members: microcredit fund, health provision fund and Club operating fund.
- The creation of a Club requires the specific training of a leader and the training of 5 Community Health Representatives; a Volunteer Coach from the Togo Red Cross is responsible for providing guidance support for the Mothers' Clubs locally.
- We have seen a decrease in the prevalence of diarrhoea (from 83% to 69% of the population) and in the percentage of families that are unaware of its causes and preventive measures (from 30% to 14%).
- 87% of households now draw water from improved wells that have been installed by the Red Cross.



Reproducibility

The establishment of a Mothers' Club is low-cost and easy to reproduce. In particular, its creation requires educational and communication materials, the organisation of training for the members and the institution of a group dynamic amongst the members. In addition, the capital required for the various funds (IGA fund, operating fund and Health Provision Fund) is provided exclusively through member contributions.

These benefits are long-lasting, as the women, who are traditionally the managers of the household, take on their role as a key inter-generational strategic pivot for the the institution of effective change. This is one of the major assets of this initiative.

Conditions relating to replicability

Location: this is more than a project; it is an approach that can be applied in numerous contexts. A project that aims to facilitate the Mothers' Club may be used in rural, suburban and urban environments. It is an approach that is less reliant on a community with well-defined outlines and more focused on a dynamic of individual and collective development, leading a group of people to take up a sustainable collective role within their neighbourhood.

Knowledge of local circumstances: the implementation of the project requires good knowledge of the social and cultural circumstances of the target populations. It is also vital that the group of women is large enough so as to be able to sufficiently train the other members of the community.

The support of appropriate volunteer human resources: for the creation of the Mothers' Clubs, it is also necessary to be able to count on the support of human resources that are well trained in relation to community leadership, water management, the promotion of good practices in relation to health and hygiene and accounting management. We believe that Mothers' Clubs Initiatives will be able to have noticeable effects after 1 year of effective existence. The key factors in determining the success of the establishment of a Mothers' Club Initiative reside in the ability of the Community Leaders to raise awareness amongst the women sufficiently in relation to the advantages of coming together socially and economically and to provide high quality educational training, in order to ensure that knowledge is effectively acquired on all of the areas covered.



The risk that could pose an obstacle to the success of this project is, sometimes, the low level of literacy of Club members. However, far from representing a difficulty, in contrast this issue represents an additional source of motivation for the members to gain training within the Club and to then instil the importance of education in future generations.

Contact

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Websites

- ❑ Prix Initiatives: www.prix-initiatives.com
- ❑ French Red Cross: www.croix-rouge.fr
- ❑ Togo Red Cross: www.croixrouge-togo.org