



PRESS RELEASE

Technology provides rural access to energy, empowers Burkinabe women

Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, 6 May 2010—On the first day of her official visit to Burkina Faso, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) chief Helen Clark met yesterday with rural women farmers who benefit from a regional energy and food processing programme that is turning them into entrepreneurs while promoting local access to energy and rural development across the country.

Through this scheme, UNDP has helped to install 441 diesel-run generators mounted on a chassis to which a variety of processing equipment can be attached, including mills, alternators and battery chargers. By easing some of the women's most difficult and time-consuming chores, such as fetching water, grinding and milling, the scheme has helped to free up a daily average of two to four hours for these women, which they have been able to spend on education, childcare, improving their health and generating additional sources of revenue.

“I think this technology makes a huge difference to women's lives. Pounding rice by hand is very hard and it takes a long time, but the generator can do it quickly,” said Helen Clark. “Having tools like this right across the villages of Burkina Faso would make a huge difference. The women are able to get into business activities, they have more time. I understand that more women are learning to read because they have more time. It has many, many benefits.”

In reducing the time required for processing agricultural outputs, women farmers have also had less need for their daughters to help with household tasks, resulting in increased school attendance. An evaluation conducted in 14 villages in the Eastern region of Burkina Faso shows that the literacy rate has risen from an average of 29 percent to 39 percent after the installation of the generators.

Recognizing the results, the Government of Burkina Faso has already signed on to scale up the programme to the national level. The programme is also active in Mali and Senegal and six other countries in West Africa —Bénin, Ghana, Guinea, Mauritania, Niger and Togo have introduced their own pilot versions of the programme.

Kiengangué –A Success Story

Helen Clark met with the beneficiaries of the programme in Kienfangué, a town of 2,500 inhabitants situated on the periphery of Ouagadougou. The technology there is used by 30 women who have created a cooperative called Association Faso Solidarité. The women use the generator to grind cereal, pound rice, and charge dozens of batteries in addition to generating electricity for several buildings around the town. Thanks to the time they are able to free up, the women have raised additional revenue, most of them by selling increased quantities of rice.

“I used to have trouble selling my rice because it would take me a whole day to pound it by hand and the result was of poor quality. A 50 kilogramme sack of rice could stay with me for two weeks without being sold and I would only make US\$1.47 per sack,” says Maminatou Tassembédou. “Now it only takes me 30 minutes to pound the rice and I can sell two sacks in a single day, coming home with US\$4.90,” she adds. “With this money I can buy millet to eat at home and soap. I can also pay for my children’s schooling and even place some of my money in a savings fund.”

With increased revenues, the people of Kienfangué were able to build a new unit for battery charging, welding and refrigeration. Since the generator was installed, four millers have been hired —two men and two women— who are also in charge of maintaining the equipment. In total, the group has accumulated savings worth US\$12,111 which continue to fund the activities of the cooperative.

In 2009, these generators helped increase the owners’ annual income by an average of US\$55, producing net profits of US\$248 per unit. In addition, more than 800 women have been trained to improve their skills in small business management. The generators also provide light for literacy centres, allowing the women to attend classes after dark, when their household chores are finished.

Commenting on her visit to Burkina Faso, Helen Clark said “I have come for three nights and to look at the progress on the Millennium Development Goals. We see huge progress on HIV and AIDS, which is a very successful programme here in Burkina Faso, and also a lot of progress in bringing clean drinking water to people, and on education.”

Miss Clark is on a four-country visit to Africa which began in Mali earlier this week. From Burkina Faso, she will proceed to Tanzania and then South Africa.

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