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Burkina Faso: UN-backed project boosts education, health care for women farmers



Women pounding rice in Burkina Faso

6 May 2010 – A United Nations-backed pilot programme that supplies electric generators to rural women farmers in Burkina Faso, freeing them from lengthy chores so that they can devote more time to education, childcare and health care, is to be adopted on a national scale.

“I think this technology makes a huge difference to women’s lives,” UN Development Programme ([UNDP](#)) Administrator Helen Clark told beneficiaries yesterday in Kienfangué, a town of 2,500 inhabitants near Ouagadougou, the capital of the poor West African country. “Pounding rice by hand is very hard and it takes a long time, but the generator can do it quickly.”

The energy and food processing programme, which is turning the women into entrepreneurs while promoting local access to energy, 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,” UNDP said in a news release issued today.

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

Recognizing these results, the Government has already signed on to scale up to national level a programme that is also under way in Mali and Senegal. Six other countries in West Africa – Benin, Ghana, Guinea, Mauritania, Niger and Togo – have introduced their own pilot versions of the programme.

“Having tools like this right across the villages of Burkina Faso would make a huge difference,” Miss Clark said. “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 Kienfangué, the technology is used by 30 women who have created a cooperative called Association Faso Solidarité. They use the generator to grind cereal, pound rice, and charge dozens of batteries as well as generating electricity for several buildings. They thus 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,” Maminatou Tassembédou said. “A 50-kilogram sack of rice could stay with me for two weeks without being sold and I would only make \$1.47 per sack. Now it only takes me 30 minutes to pound the rice and I can sell two sacks in a single day, coming home with \$4.90. 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.”

Miss Clark, on a four-country visit to Africa which began in Mali earlier this week and will also take her to Tanzania and South Africa, also said she had seen huge progress in combating HIV and AIDS in Burkina Faso, in bringing clean drinking water to people, and in education.

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