

# CAPITALIZATION **CALEBASSEDESOLIDARITÉ** : A SOCIAL AND SOLIDARITY STRATEGY



## PRESENTATION OF THE UGPM

The Union des Groupements Paysans de Meckhé (UGPM) was created in 1985 in response to the changing context that made life in rural areas increasingly difficult.

UGPM's vision is a "social development" in which the economic dimension is not an end in itself, but a means among others to contribute to the development of families and local societies.

Four objectives characterise the project of the MUMM territory:

- Managing and restoring the environment;
- Developing income-generating activities
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- Fighting the rural exodus ;
- Valuing the peasant identity and strengthening solidarity and mutual aid.

The UGPM has more than 4500 male and female members in the communes of Meckhé, Koul, Méouane, Mérina Dakhar and Ndande.

## CONTEXT AND METHODOLOGY OF THE CAPITALISATION

The Union of Peasant Groups of Meckhé (UGPM) chose the theme Solidarity gourds (CDS) for a capitalization meeting following an exchange of experience. This capitalisation meets different objectives, namely

- ▶ To collect the experience of 5 UGPM member groups that have set up a solidarity calabash: Ngankal, Tabby, Ker Medoune, Ndiandiar and Coure Mbatar.
- ▶ Have a common understanding of the key concepts of a CDS.
- ▶ Identify the problems faced by CDS.
- ▶ Define resource mobilisation strategies.
- ▶ To share the CDS experience with other UGPM member groups;
- ▶ Disseminate this fundraising strategy to other farmers' organisations.

The methodology for carrying out this capitalisation work was divided into several stages:

- ▶ Elaboration of the terms of reference by a small working group within the UGPM;
- ▶ Document review: explanatory documents, reports, training materials for the management committees of the solidarity gourds, national capitalisation carried out by the partner Action de Carême;
- ▶ 5 interviews with calabash managers and members of groups that have benefited from the funds of a solidarity calabash;
- ▶ Mixed meeting between the different actors responsible for the calabashes, members who have benefited from the funds of a calabash and UGPM facilitators who have accompanied the dynamics in the groups;
- ▶ Clarification questions and exchanges with the UGPM facilitators on the functioning and support of the calabashes;
- ▶ Summary of the information gathered by the small working group.

## 2 HISTORY AND GENESIS OF THE CDS AT THE UGPM

It all started in January 2003 with a diagnostic phase on the phenomena of hunger and indebtedness (two key indicators for measuring poverty) in the UGPM area. The exercise covered six villages and 18 families in three rural communities. For six months, from January 2003 to July 2003, the team found that 85% of the families were in the lean season, which lasted between 6 and 7 months.

Based on these results, a transitional phase of in-depth diagnosis began in July 2003 with the aim of documenting the local strategies identified to get through this period. This work allowed :

- ▶ To see that the welding had become widespread in the 82 member villages of the UGPM;
- ▶ Identify and analyse in-kind savings strategies;
- ▶ Identify and analyse forms of solidarity;
- ▶ To realise the level of production potential of family farms per village (human resources, land resources, animal and material resources to measure economic potential) in 82 villages.

Therefore, in November 2003, a programme phase with the orientation to fight against impoverishment through solidarity and self-help activities was decided upon with the general objective of developing common strategies for self-defence and implementing proven local strategies.

It was in January 2005, with the two-year programme developed by UGPM and its partner Action de Carême entitled "Contributing to the reduction of precariousness and inequalities through the strengthening of family farms", that the concept of solidarity funds was adopted as a strategy for strengthening solidarity within communities without discrimination.

Thus, during this biennial, the strengthening of solidarity through savings and credit, adapted to our realities, became effective through 24 solidarity funds which later took over the responsibility of the government.

the name of solidarity calabash, the word calabash having a whole cultural dimension.

The calabash, like the other strategies of the programme, continues to contribute to the reduction of precariousness and inequalities through the strengthening of family farms and solidarity in the villages of the Meckhé area.

Today, the UGPM has 60 solidarity calabashes.

### **3 KEY CONCEPTS: AVA, INTEREST-FREE LOANS, SELF-GOVERNANCE ETC.**

The solidarity calabash is a voluntary emanation of people, living together and **trusting** each other. It is translated into concrete gestures of solidarity.

The solidarity calabash is a community-based system for strengthening solidarity, reducing inequalities and protecting against all forms of usury based on the principles and values of **solidarity, transparency, confidentiality and equity**.

Members define a **vision and mission** which may be written down or simply discussed at the outset, while taking into account the need to innovate and adjust along the way.

Depending on the specific context, calabash members meet either once a week, once a fortnight or once a month and 'put their hands' into a cloth-covered calabash.

This gesture is called **Voluntary and Anonymous Contribution (VVA)**. It respects confidentiality. No one knows what the other has put in the calabash, so they cannot appreciate the contribution of others.

At the end of the meeting, the contents of the calabash, the size of which is linked to the socio-economic context of the moment (less than a thousand to a few tens of thousands of CFA francs), are poured into the middle of the square.

In the UGPM villages, the funds collected in the calabash are mainly used to finance interest-free cash loans to individuals for expenses related to food, health and education of children.

The members of **the CDS board** are appointed by the people in a general assembly. Their responsibilities consist of managing the material goods (necessary for the holding of meetings or goods acquired through contributions in kind when the regulations allow it) and the financial resources of the calabash.

They ensure compliance with the rules of procedure, receive loan applications, analyse the reasons and grant loans to members as well as to needy non-members.

**The governance of the CDS** is disinterested in that it relies on volunteers. The solidarity calabash operates on the basis of **internal rules** drawn up by the members.

The rules of procedure define the responsibilities, the place and days of resource mobilisation meetings, the beneficiaries of the loans, the objects of the loan, the terms of repayment, the sanctions and the activities that it does not finance.

The main criterion for eligibility for the **loan** is the trust that the beneficiary inspires in the board members. However, because of their proximity, they often know the beneficiary's motivations in detail. The loans granted by the solidarity calabash are **confidential and interest-free**.

It is important to specify that some solidarity calabashes, depending on the internal rules adopted, allow non-members to benefit from loans.

To benefit from a loan, the applicant goes to one of the members of the Board and/or the Management Committee, expresses the reasons for taking out the loan. The member reports on the expression of needs in the strictest confidence and a decision is taken.

However, a third of the calabash fund is always kept for emergencies (prescriptions, purchase of food, etc.). The treasurer gives the loan to the beneficiary and the date of repayment is fixed by mutual agreement.

On the due date, the members of the Board and/or the Management Committee assess the borrower's ability to repay and decide on the recovery.

The CDS members responsible for carrying out this work have the trust of the other members. They have a duty **of accountability and transparency** to others.

## THEPMU'S CONTRIBUTION TO THE FUNCTIONING OF THE CDS

The UGPM's contribution is threefold:

1. The provision of a **facilitator** to accompany the process, from the sharing of the idea to the reflection on the operating mode and rules, to the development of management tools and their maintenance. In the follow-up work, the facilitators carried out a typology according to criteria (functional internal rules, respect for the meeting schedule, level of financial mobilisation, maintenance of management tools, level of repayment of credits) to determine the level of performance of the calabashes and define a personalised support strategy.

2. **Financial support** for the training of members, the organisation of exchange visits if necessary, and community animation. The latter itself has several objectives:

- ▶ Strengthen group cohesion;
- ▶ Support reflection on empowerment strategies and create new sources of income for CDS to supplement TAAs;
- ▶ Identify training themes for better financial management;
- ▶ The transfer of skills by the facilitator to the calabash ;
- ▶ And connecting them with specialist resource persons on certain subjects (health, water and forestry, religious guides etc.) and aspects of community life to strengthen members and enable them to know who to turn to in times of need.

Consuming locally is another strategy to combat hunger and debt, which reinforces the strategy of the solidarity calabash in order to combat the need to borrow. Training courses on the use of local products have been organised with the ITA (Institute of Food Technology).

Internal training in the CDSs has also been organised with the aim of reducing the budgetary items of family farms

hygiene and cleanliness; detergent manufacture, saponification etc.

3. **Increasing the visibility** of CDS actions through an internal and external network is particularly due to the fact that the solidarity calabashes are a factor of innovation in the groups.

Indeed, the introduction of the solidarity calabash in the grouping has opened up new controlled services. New simplified management systems are adopted by the group. Each grouping readapts its system according to the skills and capacities existing in the grouping.

The credibility and visibility of the group has increased greatly as non-members of the group benefit from the services of the calabash. This makes the group a leader in village development.

The group is seen as a tool for development, for strengthening solidarity and social cohesion in the village. This has repercussions in the terroir to which the village belongs.

In addition, the other member groups of the UGPM and the farmers' organisations to which it belongs constitute spaces of influence and visibility for the CDS.



This involves the bulk purchase, with funds raised by CDS, of basic commodities such as rice, oil or sugar, which are then sold on credit to the villagers at lower costs than those charged by the usual resellers.

It is the savings made by buying in bulk in the big city and transporting the goods that make it possible to apply more competitive prices. In addition, the deferral of payment via credit relieves households. The profits generated by this activity are put back into the calabash and help to strengthen it. With the forms of credit granted by the calabashes (food, health, education) and without interest, hundreds of poor people have been able to get through the lean period without resorting to usurious credit. In addition, with the development of the solidarity gourds, beneficiary populations have been able to free themselves from the grip of financing institutions that charge usurious rates.

In total, the impacts recorded include

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- ▶ Reducing dependence on external financing for production;
- ▶ Better access to basic social services (health, education);
- ▶ Improving the quantity and quality of food in quantity and quality;
- ▶ Improving the effective and credible participation of vulnerable groups in the decision-making process;
- ▶ A strengthening of dialogue, mutual aid and solidarity.

Today, collective work and the exchange of ideas are facilitated and, in many villages and neighbourhoods, frequent meetings are organised to find group solutions to problems.

The solidarity calabash has produced new ways of thinking and acting among people who have understood that empowerment is at the end of the effort and can only be achieved by having a common vision.

## **5 THE IMPACTS AND POSITIVE CHANGES OBSERVED FOR THE COMMUNITIES**

The populations have acquired new knowledge, particularly in terms of context analysis (welding, climate change, etc.) and innovation (organic farming, fertilisation with chicken droppings) thanks to the training organised by the CDS.

The setting up of the CDS is indeed accompanied by a series of measures implemented by the UGPM through the initial programme, including the organisation of training and capacity building in general.

With community animation as the guiding principle, different themes such as health and natural resources were addressed. This has had the impact of facilitating the use of health personnel by the populations.

The CDS has also enabled the emergence of new leaders within the group.

The poor are valued because they participate in the management at all levels. Indeed, all members are involved without distinction due to social status as may exist in other spaces.

In addition, new services are being set up with the calabash. Thus, beyond solidarity, CDS supports individual and collective activities. For example, the system of selling basic foodstuffs organised thanks to certain calabashes reinforces visibility in the village.

## ILLUSTRATION OF THE DIFFERENT ECONOMIC OR SOCIAL IMPACTS THROUGH TESTIMONIES

### **Bathie GNING**

#### **CDS de Kër Médoune testifies:**

*"I have a very positive assessment of the support given by CDS. It was an emergency credit at the right time. We were in the middle of the lean season. I had fallen ill. CDS enabled me to go to Thiès for treatment and also to buy a good part of my prescriptions.*

### **Mbène NDIAYE**

#### **Member of the CDS of Couré Mbatar**

*"The CDS plays an important role in the social cohesion of the village but also in learning about local governance and good administrative and financial management.*

### **Daba DIAGNE**

#### **Founding member of the CDS of Ndiandiar**

*"My last emergency credit allowed me to enrol my child in the French school in Merina. So I can add that apart from the emergency credits of CDS, these funds have helped to initiate other. These activities allow CDS to diversify its resources and address the problem of low TAAs. These activities allow CDS to diversify its resources and address the problem of low TAAs.*

## 6 THE IMPACT OF THE CDS ON THE LIFE OF THE GROUPINGS AND ON THE UGPM

The impact of CDS on the life of groups :

- ▶ Thanks to CDS, the group is proving useful to the village community because the group's services go beyond the members. The perception of the village population has changed positively. They understand that the group is a lever for economic and social strengthening of the village. In this way, the village population perceives the group as a unifying element of village synergies.
- ▶ The CDS has greatly contributed to the visibility and credibility of the group in the village. For example, the group is called upon by non-members to resolve a number of concerns.
- ▶ The group is seen as a necessary tool for the economic and social development of the village. The group's leaders have become an essential part of the village's thinking and actions. The group's opinion is taken into account in all decisions and it is considered an economic arm of the village.
- ▶ New memberships have been registered by the group.
- ▶ The group has complied with one of the religious prescriptions of Islam which bans interest on loans. This has earned the group the support of clerics who were against the practice of usury and the trust of non-residents of the village who put their means to the development of the village. Non-members, often non-residents, sometimes participate in TAAs when they visit the village.
- ▶ With the CDS, the group regains its leadership in the village.

The impact of CDS on the UGPM :

- ▶ The link between the UGPM and the groupings has been strengthened.
- ▶ UGPM's support is more visible at the level of the groups.

- ▶ The groups' confidence in UGPM is growing.
- ▶ The presence of the facilitators is appreciated by the members.
- ▶ UGPM's advisory support strategies are made visible through the intervention of the facilitators.
- ▶ The birth of the calabash networks has brought the various members of UGPM closer together by region; there are currently 12 local networks that are tending to evolve into a consumer cooperative to facilitate grouped purchases of basic necessities.

## 7 THE DIFFICULTIES

Difficulties tending to weaken the approach have nevertheless been highlighted in the implementation of solidarity gourds in some groups:

- ▶ Weakness of anonymous voluntary contributions;
- ▶ Irregularity of anonymous voluntary contributions due to the lack of respect for the meeting schedule and the unfavourable economic context;
- ▶ Non-repayment of loans; Delays in loan repayments; Non-transparent management ;
- ▶ Non-compliance with the internal regulations linked to the level of illiteracy in the community, which can create difficulties in its appropriation by the members;
- ▶ Blurred vision often linked to lack of ownership or the emergence of new needs that were not taken into account at the outset;
- ▶ Lack of democracy ;
- ▶ Non-compliance with commitments.



## 8 LESSONS TO BE LEARNED

In conclusion, the solidarity calabash is a **tool for learning about local governance** that produces an **opening of minds and hearts for** its members, provided certain principles such as **equity** are respected. **The rigorous updating of management tools** and the **monitoring/accompaniment of** the CDS by the

The success of the project is based on the fact that it has been run by a team of facilitators.

It has enabled the release of initiatives in the groups that have adopted it (production of bleach, local soap, natural broth, etc.), thus enabling them to mobilise their own resources through community activities.

The CDS creates a **space for dialogue**, exchange and sharing. Thanks to the meetings and reflections, new courses of action are set up within the village. The village's development concerns are discussed in public and solutions are proposed.

The meetings are moments of **mutual knowledge where everyone can express their problems**. It is a tool for liberation and psycho-social development. It therefore develops **self-confidence** which favours self-promotion because each member has confidence in himself and works to develop his initiatives.

Finally, it is a tool to **fight against social inequalities**; relationships of equality are developed because within the CDS all are equal and thus relationships of domination are well managed. **Solidarity and social cohesion are strengthened** because several types of social and financial problems are solved by the solidarity calabash.

The calabash is a flagship strategy that needs to be reinforced by others in order to propel its autonomy; grouped purchases, consuming locally, training etc.

**Ownership by the members** is the best strategy for **sustaining** the solidarity gourds.