

INTERNATIONAL CONFEDERATION OF FREE TRADE UNIONS

ICFTU OnLine...

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8th March – International Women's Day

Spotlight interview with Rosine Soubeiga (Burkina Faso – FNTCS)

"Planting trees to fight the desert ... and poverty among women"

Brussels, 2 March 2006 (ICFTU OnLine) On March 8, 2006, the ICFTU will launch the second phase of its global campaign to organise women workers. Women working in the informal economy are a primary target of this campaign (*).

The FNTCS (National Federation of Construction and Forestry Workers) is supporting a project to fight deforestation in the north of Burkina Faso, near Ouahigouya. At the centre of the project are over 80 women who work at the Somiaga tree nursery. For Rosine Soubeiga, the secretary for the promotion of women at the FNTCS, developing the growth of moringa trees in this Sahelian region is successfully contributing to reducing poverty.

What is the objective of this tree nursery project at the gateway to the desert?

The aim of the FNTCS is to protect the environment and fight against desertification. Its mission is to inspire the members to build nationwide solidarity to defend the interests of the workers and to defend their human rights through the respect of trade union rights. By developing reforestation activities in this desert region of Burkina Faso, we are firmly heading in this direction. To be more specific, planting trees amounts to halting the advance of the desert. We are also contributing to making the land more fertile. By providing fertile land for present and future generations, we are also equipping them with the means to secure good harvests. This provides the local population with food security, and, at the end of the day, better health.

Moreover, engaging in a reforestation project in a desert region is a means of improving the water supply, thanks to the rains.

In Somiaga, a small village 7 kilometres from Ouahigouya, we have a site covering 4 hectares where the tree nursery is located.

What are the qualities of the moringa, the tree you have decided to grow?

The moringa is a tropical tree from India, but one that is particularly well suited to the Sahelian climate and the dryness of the land here. Its full size varies between 4 and 7 metres and it grows very quickly. In Burkina Faso, we are growing 9 of the 13 different types of moringa. It is particularly appreciated for its many nutritional and medicinal properties. In traditional medicine, its bark and roots are used to treat the liver, diarrhoea and malaria. It is an inexpensive form of medication. In the kitchen, its leaves, which grow all year round, are a basic ingredient in the preparation of sauces for rice, couscous and tô. They can be eaten fresh or dried. When ground, they can be preserved for a long time. They contain many vitamins, which help to fight against malnutrition. The women also prepare moringa flour, which they use to make fritters or add to baby food. Finally, the seeds, rich in fat, are ground to produce the oil used for the moving parts of clocks and watches. It is also used in the production of perfume.

In what way is this tree nursery project contributing to the fight against poverty?

Thanks to many uses of the moringa, people are able to feed and treat themselves at a minimal cost throughout the year.

The moringa is also valuable to other sectors. Its wood is also used in the construction of houses, for the roofs and the frames. Not forgetting the charcoal needed for cooking, which is sold on the roadside. These various uses provide income that can be used to fund other activities and fuel the local economy. We are also assisting in the development of mutual healthcare, which has been made possible thanks to the profits made from moringa exploitation.

What role do women play in this project?

The Federation currently represents 5396 members, 1862 of whom are women.

There are over 80 women involved in the moringa project, working on a daily basis in the plantation and taking care of the trees. We have also held numerous training courses, mainly on tree nursery management. This promotes cooperation between men and women. Today, they are now able to sit down together, reflect and take decisions together. It's a great step forward. I find that the union really empowers women to fight for their interests.

The Federation is also supporting women's initiatives to raise awareness about HIV/AIDS and female circumcision. They go to every corner of every village and neighbourhood with the theatre group Yamwekre ("conscious awakening") to inform people and make them reflect on their conduct.

Is this pilot project going to be spread to other regions of Burkina Faso?

We are still at the experimental stage for the moment. We are benefiting from the scientific advice and guidance of the International Federation of Building and Wood Workers (IFBWW).

We will be able to envisage extending it once we have analysed the results.

We are short of resources and rely on the support of other partners for the follow-up stages. But given the initial results, we are convinced that we will be able to find the means to pursue this experiment.

Interview held in Ouagadougou by Pierre Martinot.

Also read:

- The Spotlight Interview with Hélène Sawadogo (Burkina Faso – SYNATRAFLA)
"From the garden to the market - Improving the fate of women workers"
at <http://www.icftu.org/displaydocument.asp?Index=991223474&Language=EN>

- The Spotlight Interview with Soumaila Lingani (Burkina Faso – PRASEI) "Informal economy: from information to mutual protection" at
<http://www.icftu.org/displaydocument.asp?Index=991223423&Language=EN>

(*) On 8 March 2006, the ICFTU will be launching the second stage of its global campaign on organising women workers. The campaign is called "Unions for Women, Women for Unions" and is principally targeting women working in export processing zones and the informal economy, and migrant women workers.

The first stage of the campaign, between 2002 and 2004, was led by 60 national centres from 49 different countries. It achieved remarkable results in some countries, including Mauritania, where the number of women trade unionists tripled.

The ICFTU represents 155 million workers in 236 affiliated organisations in 154 countries and territories (www.icftu.org). The ICFTU is also a partner in Global Unions: <http://www.global-unions.org>

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