



**RELUFA**

# Food Sovereignty Newsletter June 2010

## Editorial

Second lap. Not a car or bicycle race, but another level that is being engaged in the race of the food sovereignty program of RELUFA. In recent years we have spent much time with the villages building a system that could allow them to preserve their stock of grain, and set up business rules to enable them to successfully manage and increase their stocks, and especially reduce hunger during difficult times. We did it in forty villages of the Far North region of Cameroon, and estimate at more than 20,000 the number of people benefiting from this operation. Now that the operation has been launched, our main challenge is how to move to the second step, how to strengthen the beneficiaries so that they are at the fore front of the program more as lasting beneficiaries but as promoters?

In general, the vision of RELUFA is to build well informed community movements, committed, and responsible for their destiny. RELUFA launches initiatives together with them, but once they take off, the batten is passed on to them so that they take the lead in programs that make changes in their lives. In the coming years, RELUFA will reduce its direct involvement in the food sovereignty program, and allow the villages to build a system that meets their aspirations, and engage the State of Cameroon and other partners so that their needs are taken into account. Faced with the advancing desert and all the changes it brings to people's lives, it is important that concrete actions are undertaken, and communities must be able to make proposals to the discussion on the table.

Two years ago, RELUFA facilitated meetings between different groups benefiting from the village storage operation, and it provoked a momentum! Villagers have realized that they were not alone in the difficult food situation they lived in their village, but that others in other regions had the same problems. Through exchanges, a bond of solidarity was created, the understanding of a broader phenomenon has been gradually established, and since then, meetings between villages are continuing, trade is increasing, and common strategies are gradually introduced. The individual storage groups of four sub divisions in which RELUFA is committed in the diamaré and Mayo Tsanaga divisions in the sub divisions of Meri, Mokolo Ndoukoula, Gazawa have decided to come together in to a union of various groups who have responsibility for managing the storage operation in the villages, but also look at the issue of general development of their communities, and seek recognition of real right to food in Cameroon. We applaud this initiative and wish them Good luck!

Valery Nodem,  
Coordinator RELUFA

## SECOND GEAR: LAUNCHING OF UNIONS OF GROUPS

*By Sandrine Kouba*

To address the recurring problem of hunger faced by people in the Far North region of Cameroon, RELUFA established since 2006 a system of community grain bank in forty villages, allowing people to access the food in difficult times under humane conditions. RELUFA decided not to make food distribution but to build a sustainable system of storage which is experiencing a major beneficiary participation, and leaves them the management and inventory control.

The program began with an approach focused on individual villages, but it soon became necessary to build strong alliances between the villages involved in the operation, since this is a global problem and its solution must be global. All the villages, gathered together in small units in June 2009, expressed the desire to be together more often to discuss the challenges of their region. The 40 groups participating in the RELUFA food Sovereignty program were divided into four different groups according to their geographical location. New villages wishing to join the program (and they are many) can be integrated into different groups and new groups can be created based on the evolution of the program.



**Photo prise lors de la réunion des villages de l'arrondissement de Mokolo sud**

On May 10, 2010, for the first time since the program began, RELUFA organized a meeting of all the 41 villages of the program in Maroua. The purpose of this meeting was to share views on how the program is evolving in the different villages, as well as the challenges and prospects for the future. It was also about the question of moving in to the second stage of this program, consisting of groups evolving into unions. After this meeting all the 41 villages were divided into four unions according to their geographic location:

- Group 1: Mambaria, Djamdoudi, Tchoumpel, Zlakam, Mazlaguidey, mbig, Djeling, Herzlelek, Gombor, Gouzlom, Mélendou, Boudouma, Djalingo, Saber Jean, Sabongari, Betcha-Hossere, Wampa, 18 groups ( Mokolo sub division)
- Group 2: Moudoumboui, Keping, Zongoya, and Wawala Miziling or 05 groups ( Ndoukoula and Gazawa sub divisions)
- Group 3: Goulwa Kondje, Tchambi, Charleroi, Belgium, Ribidis, Dimsack, Gueling, Diwayam-Mosso, Bilavaï, Mandaya, and Metchezleo Gagala, 12 groups (Mokolo sub division);
- Group 4: Godola, Macxal, Ftang, Kelmey, and Gozemey Médjéréo or 06 groups (Meri sub division)

"Unity is strength". For them, it is an opportunity to share their experiences: they have the opportunity to discuss methods for more effective recovery of grain stocks. In addition, the union is the best place to discuss common problems so as to find lasting solutions to their problems. These associations should also enable them to have a stronger voice to meet authorities to defend their interests and request their rights.

After the general meeting, each union later met to prepare its statutes, decide what actions to take, and establish an executive bureau that will be responsible for controlling the operation of the union. The various offices are made up of young, older, men and women. One of the four unions will be chaired by a woman. It remains only to wish them good luck!

## INSTILLING THE RIGHT TO FOOD

*By Nakaashi Vaswani, Stagiaire de RELUFA*

Hundreds of children die every month due to lack of food around the world. With progress and development in many countries in the world, today we see this problem only worsen, particularly in Africa. The right to food has risen to notice, especially in the last decade, by governments around the world. Yet the issue remains of delivering and enforcing this right in every possible way to the citizens of the world.



Inclusive of the right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness come by nature the right to food for every individual. As stated first in the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, "Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services..." This entails every man the access to food with three obligations to

a country: to respect, protect, and fulfill this right for every human being. To respect this right, a government must not permit any such policy or action that may deprive or prevent people from their access to food. If they are able enough to provide for themselves, this privilege must be protected. And for all those people in the world (264 million in Sub-Saharan Africa alone) who are undernourished and are unable to exercise this right, the governments of every country must fulfill this right for them.

According to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), 2009 broke all records with one billion people undernourished and without access to proper food. For our focus, we take the particular case of Cameroon. Located on the mid-west coast of Africa, this country finds itself abundantly rich in natural resources: minerals, rain forest, fertile land, and a rich diversity in species. Despite the existence of multiple extractive programs and an economy concentrated mainly on agriculture, we see that money earned and hence taxes paid do not result in the proactive cooperation of the government towards the undernourished. Not only do these people lack food, but access to water, health, education, housing, transportation etc. are also deprived from them.

We can direct these problems to a dire deficient of a transparent government system and the mal-management of money to the places where it could be put in use. Many villages around the country lack access to safe drinking water and to availability of food, provoking them to borrow from others, migrate to other villages, or simply die of hunger. In a country where the potential of production is massive, a government must fulfill its duty of aiding in every which way, whether by money or by technology, to allow these citizens access to food.

In this country where poverty is displayed on every street and on the face of very many individuals, others take up the initiative while those who have the authority do not do so. RELUFA (Network Fighting Hunger in Cameroon), in an effort to actualize this right for some of the poorest citizens of Cameroon, brought up its own program called Food Sovereignty. With a purpose to teach the locals a simple technique of managing their own farm products, they have created a cereal banking system whereby which a farmer can learn to control his crop expenditure so that he may be able to prevent his family from starving when growing crops isn't possible. In this program, RELUFA provides the villages with a working capital to allow granaries to build up their cereal banks. With the availability of such banks, when farmers run out of food as it happens every year, they can reach out to the granaries. With the establishment of this system, RELUFA has founded a path for the accessibility to food for these citizens, moving one step away from starvation, and provided them with training and a management of cereal prices to ensure the continual growth of this system. Another program is that of Fair Trade; whereby awareness of struggles of Cameroonian fruit farmers is spread through the sale of various products such as dry bananas, papayas, and mangoes in Cameroon and the United States through an organization called Partners for Just Trade.

While commending the efforts of RELUFA and other such organizations, we see that the government must increase their efforts as well. As of 2010, Cameroon had yet not mentioned the right to food in their constitution. Yet, now that it is indeed recognized, the government must fulfill its duty not only to the international scripts it has signed, but to every citizen of the country as well. Whether that may be through the pathways created by RELUFA and other such initiatives, or through direct interaction with these peoples in need, we see a mighty potential of growth and prosperity for our beloved Cameroon.

## ECHOES ON THE IMPACT OF THE RELUFA FOOD SOVEREIGNTY PROGRAM IN THEIR LOCALITIES ACCORDING TO THE VILLAGERS

*By Kouba Sandrine, RELUFA Food Sovereignty Program Assistant*

With the chronic hunger prevalent in the far north region, RELUFA has created a system of community cereal banks. Through this project, RELUFA has already provided a stock of 6 tons in the villages involved in this operation. And during the periods of scarcity, each villager can now borrow a bag in the group and repay it in kind with interest during the harvest period. The goal here is to sustainably reduce hunger. To assess the impact of this program in the regions concerned, some evidence has been collected from the beneficiaries.

Testimony of Ezekiel Bodjel

Ezekiel Bodjel is a young farmer of Miziling village. According to him, during periods of scarcity which is the most difficult food period (July, August and September of every year), families were forced to sell livestock to purchase food. Since the start of the RELUFA food storage project, Ezekiel found that sales of livestock have decreased considerably, and the granary of the village is always full. During the period of food scarcity when hunger becomes rampant in the village, he now has the

opportunity to borrow a bag of millet - which can feed a family of six people for two months – and which is repaid with interest of 10 cups. In addition, he feels strongly that the price of a sack of millet has become less expensive in the market.

However, there is always a problem. Although the sale of livestock can now send their children to school and to solve problems other than food, they still lack adequate financial means to send their children to school. He proposes that funds be allocated to enhance the education of their children, and repayments can be done through the sale of cotton. There is lack of classrooms in his village, and children are forced to attend lectures under shades. To help solve this problem, in 2009 RELUFA granted academic credit for 279 beneficiaries from 143 families in the region. For Ezekiel, the union of groups is an opportunity for all villages affiliated in its union to discuss common problems to find common solutions.

Testimony from a representative of the "Kaoutal" union in the Meri sub division

In villages of Ftang, Gozemey, Godola, Kelmey, Médjéréo, Macsal before the RELUFA village grain storage program, during seasons of scarcity, the men traveled to work in other fields, in order to have a little food for their families. The fact of working in other villages gave them the feeling of being slaves, forced to work for others to get paid in-kind. The RELUFA community granaries program allows them to restore their dignity, and feel more independent.



**Representatives of the "Kaoutal" union**

Before the commencement of village storage, the villagers depended on moneylenders, whose loan system was very difficult. When the peasants borrowed a bag, they had to pay for two. And sometimes, the whole crop harvest of a farmer can be comprised only of two bags. He could not give his entire crop harvest and starve but would go to work for the moneylender to repay the debt. .

Moreover, the mobilization of villagers during the scarce period has reduced, they have more time to work on their own fields, which means increased production and crop diversification. The education of children and access to health care has also improved. The fathers also spend more time with their families, which is very important psychologically.

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Testimony Aissatou Alimatou

Aïssatou is a young woman from the Wawala village, assistant secretary general of the newly created "Woudokoumvou 'union of villages in Gazawa and Ndoukoula sub division.

My name is Aissatou Alimatou. I was born in Bertoua on the 28 of April 1977. I live in the Wawala village. At first in my village, there was always famine that disturbed villagers. Women took wood and vegetables to the market to have millet. Men abandoned their own farms to go and work for other more capable people to have some cups of millet. This year, I have realized that

things have changed with regards to famine. Poor people no longer go to beg for millet. Our problems now are: Lack of means for the education of our children, how to clothe them and solve other problems. That is why we are asking for more granaries for us women so that we can have the means to sell to solve some problems. We also want loans. With that we can do cattle rearing and trade.

#### NEXT ISSUE ...

In the next edition, we will document destocking phase of the granaries, and give you news on the newly established unions. If you want to send us information or if you have any comments or suggestions about the newsletter kindly send them to [skouba@relufa.org](mailto:skouba@relufa.org)