

'You have found the ideal formula'



Photo: Neill McKee

A little over a year ago a new periodical appeared on the newsstands of the French-speaking countries of West Africa. Entitled *Famille et Développement*, the publication represents a unique venture into the field of development education in the region.

Pierre Pradervand, of the IDRC's West African Regional Office in Dakar, Senegal, a Swiss sociologist with eight years' African experience in the field of research and information, is managing editor of this Centre-supported project. In the following article he describes the reactions to the new publication, and how it came into being.

A recent letter received by the editors of *Famille et Développement* started thus: "... You cannot imagine all the good this publication does for our youth. You have found the ideal formula. I will take 10 subscriptions for my students."

A young chemist from Chad recently wrote: "Your periodical... offers an abundant source of information which is simple, clear and precise, at a price anyone can afford."

A school director from the Republic of Benin (formerly Dahomey) expressed similar enthusiasm: "This publication arrives at just the right moment for our continent in its quest for information of an educational nature. *Famille et Développement* will be one of the most interesting tools in our educational institutions and a most efficient means for the development of the African countries, due to its content and presentation."

How is it that just a year after the first issue readers' mail is 100 percent favourable (a factor that even the editors would be skeptical about if numerous other factors did not point in the same direction) and *Famille et Développement* is already widely known in the region? There are a number of reasons.

Famille et Développement is a quarterly, illustrated periodical on development problems, with special emphasis on family health, started and financed by the IDRC in response to the huge need for information on these issues at the grass-roots level in this region of Africa.

Information of an educational nature has been possibly the most neglected area of development in the Third World, and Africa is no exception. Yet it should be evident that people cannot adapt adequately to new situations and institutions without a minimum of information as to the "whys" and "hows" of such changes. This is the need *Famille et Développement* attempts to fill.

The project was started only after a very careful evaluation of the real needs. This evaluation included a mailed questionnaire; a meeting in Dakar with 24 participants from 11 countries to determine content, format and title of the

periodical; contacts with high-level officials from 10 countries; and, last but not least, a trial issue published in October 1974.

The editor-in-chief of the publication is Marie-Angélique Savané, (above) a Senegalese journalist, while another Senegalese, Charles Diagne, is responsible for design and production. They are assisted by an eight-member editorial committee composed of representatives of Mali, Upper Volta, Ivory Coast, Togo, Benin, Cameroon, Congo and Zaire. The committee meets yearly in Dakar and is the publication's policy-formulating body.

Articles are mostly written by Africans from the region and cover a wide variety of topics: preventive health and health education, clitorrectomy (issue No. 2 contained one of the few articles on this topic ever published in an African periodical), traditional contraception, unemployment, teenage abortion in schools (a serious public health concern), drought in the Sahel, Chinese barefoot doctors, the dangers of skin bleaching products, drug abuse, etc.

Great care is taken with the layout and photography to make the magazine attractive and to enable it to compete with others on the newsstands.

Success is always hard to define objectively, especially in the area of educational inputs. However, in this case there are some objective indicators of the magazine's appeal. Sales are steadily increasing, and in some areas even used copies have been selling for twice the usual price. Radio stations and newspapers throughout the region are picking up whole articles and using them. In Mali it is reported that even illiterate drivers of the ministry of agriculture were buying it to be read to them by members of the family. Ministries of education — specifically in Togo and Ivory Coast — consider it a valuable educational tool, and training institutions are taking out multiple subscriptions. Distribution has been extended well beyond the usual level of the capital city and a few major towns or villages. Even though there has been little or no publicity, newsstand sales are increasing regularly, and paid subscriptions are coming in at the rate of 500 to 600 a month, certainly a healthy sign.

But maybe the most significant sign of all is the high degree of identification with the periodical shown by the considerable number of readers who wrote in after the trial issue referring to "our journal".

The IDRC's present financial support ends in December 1977. It is hoped that in the long run *Famille et Développement* will be taken over by an African organization and become a truly African journal. □