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THE WOMEN'S DAM
(The Mossi of the Upper Volta)

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

by

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UNICEF, New York

September, 1983

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"Develop without destroying; beginning with what the peasants are, what they live, what they know and what they want"

(Modern proverb of the Mossi Naam groups)

INTRODUCTION

Occasionally, one finds a case example which reminds us that all is not futile -- that women's participation in decision-making is not a slogan, but a genuine experience in the the struggle for development. Such is the "Women's Dam project" found in the Yatenga plateau in northern Upper Volta. It has been selected for the following reasons:

1. It is an exceptional experience in "bottom-up" planning which is based on women's initiative in solving the water problem and community-wide participation.
2. The Women's Dam is being replicated as part of a self-reliant regional development programme designed by the Naam groups, a non-governmental organisation, (The Naam organisation has a wide coverage of at least one group per Mossi village in Yatenga, Upper Volta).

3. It is an example of a rural revitalization movement which promotes women's participation as part of its modernization drive, but is rooted in its own cultural, social and spiritual traditions.

4. It has had a positive impact on enhancing women's participation in water and other development projects and in improving the welfare of women and children.

The purpose of the paper is to document the experiences of the women who participated in the Women's Dam, but many other lessons can also be drawn such as how women were mobilized. What is most encouraging is that we see that if women are given the chance, they can make a significant contribution to water and sanitation activities .

I. BACKGROUND

For over a decade, hundreds of aid agencies have talked of the great potential the Yatenga plateau has for irrigated agriculture, cotton growing and grain production. Fortunately, the Mossi who till these lands also harbour some hopes. They recall the pride of their warriors during the 500 years of Mossi kingdoms. They know that in those days, the young did not leave. The plateau was once one of the most densely populated regions in the country. The Mossi marketed their famous horses, donkeys and cattle along the north African and sub-saharan trade routes. But since the colonial days the region has had great difficulty recovering the wealth of the past.¹ Indeed, until recently, it appeared that the region was in a 'downward spiral' so that almost no improvements could be seen in the high infant mortality rates, low per capital incomes, or chronic malnutrition.²

Recovery depends upon a gradual transformation of the economy which is one of the most self-contained in the West African region; it is only marginally influenced by an international market or cash economy. Among the Mossi (the dominant ethnic group), there is no private ownership of land. All labourers, including women, have the right to cultivate land and some decision-making power over its produce. Most people live on what they grow or make at home. And everyone shares according to possibility and need, rice, millet and corn or their staples (usually served with a meatless sauce). There are few sources of cash income although the region used to export beef to Ghana.

Much of the subsistence production depends upon women and children as labourers.³ Even with their central role in the economy, Mossi women traditionally had little to say about community affairs. Some exceptions were found. For example, the king's first wife, or sister of a chief had adjudication powers in land disputes involving women and indirect political power. But as a rule, women were supposed to be silent partners of men. Much of that has changed, and, as we will see, the Women's Naam groups were instrumental in making those changes.

II. WATER PROBLEMS AND TECHNOLOGY

The problem was, and to a great extent still is, a severe water shortage. Rains are erratic, and when they do come, they disappear quickly deep into the earth. The groundwater table is so far into the earth that drills and pumps are the only practical means to get a permanent water source. There are three traditional methods of catching surface water: wells, drinking holes and small earthen dams. These are hand-dug and built mainly to meet the daily needs of animals and people; irrigated agriculture is not widespread. The French colonialists introduced improved methods when they built modern small-scale dams. The dam which looms larger than a soccer field in the provincial capital of Ouahigouya was built using trucks and sophisticated equipment, and engineers supervised. The local population was asked occasionally to contribute labour, but few were willing to work for a French project. After

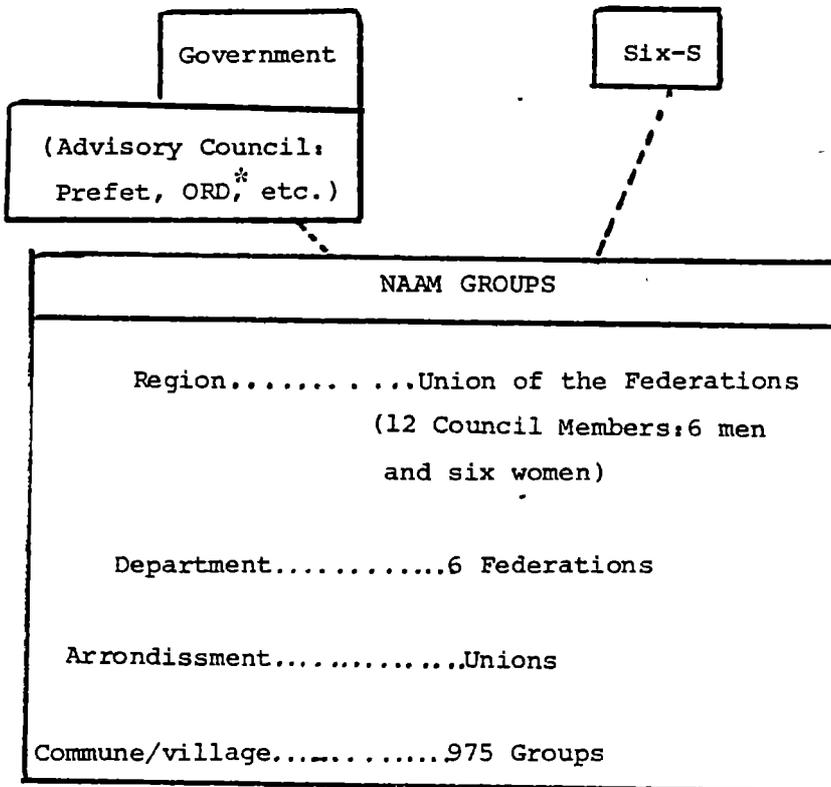
Independence in 1960, this dam was improved, and the government built two others. Again, these were costly, high-technology projects. It was unlikely that the government could build enough dams to develop the entire region, and yet it seemed to villagers that such small-scale earthen (and cement) dams would solve the water problem.

III. PLANNING: ADMINISTRATIVE AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

The moving force behind the planning and implementation of the Women's Dam were the women in the village of Saye. For years, the villagers talked of building small earthen dams to catch the rainy season's waters and hold them longer into the next dry season. Finally, the women's Naam group (a local non-governmental organisation) in Saye village told the men that if they did not build the dam, the women would do it themselves. And, if this didn't work, the women were going to return to their natal villages. It was a persuasive argument. In 1981, the men and women's Naam groups in Saye built the first "Women's Dam", as it was called. Around its waters, they planned to rebuild their community. They planted 625 trees whose leaves provided both food and medicine. The cattle had water to drink. And if villagers dug 20 meters near the dam they could get water for gardens nearby. Water was the beginning; this was the lesson the women in Saye had taught.

Although the initiative for the water project came from a local group, the administrative and technical assistance provided to build more dams for the rest of the region comes from other sources. In chart I we see the linkages between the organisations involved in dam projects. The most important one is a regional non-governmental structure which unites all local Naam groups at various administrative levels. The second group, responsible mainly for technical and material assistance is an international NGO known as the Six-S which channels international funds and hires administrators and technicians to assist Naam groups. Not all Naam groups are involved with Six-S projects, but even those outside the latter's influence are financially stable. A third

Chart I
 ADMINISTRATIVE LINKAGES



* Office of Rural Development

partner is the government administration. At first, it had cast a suspicious eye on the Naam movement. However, members from the administration and important technical agencies such as the Office of Rural Development have representatives on an Advisory Council to the regional Naam organisation. As is evident, the degree of administrative autonomy and highly developed organisational network of the Naam groups is exceptional. Its coverage is also impressive. As one administrator said, "In this region, every village has a Naam group".

UNICEF in the Upper Volta recognized the Naam movement as one of the country's best organised, spontaneous rural development organisations. UNICEF first made its contributions to the Naam groups in 1978 when it provided twenty women's groups with credit funds for wells, pumps, carts, motor grinding mills, pharmacies and operating funds. Male village mechanics were trained to maintain pumps and grinding mills, and female nurse extension workers were educated in primary health care. When the Naam groups requested a ten-ton truck to help them carry rocks and gravel for the Women's Dam, UNICEF offered to help. UNICEF has cooperated with many other international agencies such as SOS, World Council of Churches and OXFAM to sponsor other dams now in construction in the region.

IV. THE STORY OF THE DAM

The Meeting and Saye

The Naam groups had decided that they must take rural development into their own hands. In December, 1979, the representatives of the Naam group Federations (there are seven in all) met for the first time in the provincial capital of Ouahigouya. The men and women crowded into the meeting room and courtyard. Everyone voiced their opinions on what the problems were and how to solve them. Discussions were animated. One man said, "There is nothing to eat. Its simple!" Others talked of the dying livestock and scarcity of wood

to make roofs. There were so many problems, the discussion shifted to priorities. Which ones were the most important? In the midst of heated debates, Minata from Somiaga rose from her chair. She said, "What you say is fine, but it is useless to talk about livestock and food when there is no water. The first problem is that we have no water! If you have water you can have everything else. We, women, are going to find out how to get it, and we will solve all the other problems." She sat down. Everyone looked at each other, and there was a long silence. They were stunned by the simplicity of the truth.

Those at the meeting agreed that they should return home to discuss the water problems with their Naam groups. In Saye, the women met as soon as they could because they had one of the most severe water shortages - their wells had almost all dried up. During their meeting, the members elected three delegates to take the matter to the village elders and the men's Naam group.

Determined to succeed in their mission the three women went to the men and pleaded their case. They said that they were exhausted from carrying water long distances, pounding grains and gathering fuel. They were determined to build a dam. If it couldn't be built, they would return to their parents' villages where there was more water. The men thought that the situation must be very serious if the women were thinking of leaving. The elders had placed their faith in the Muslim god and Mossi ancestors to bring back the rains, but none had come. Maybe the women were right; it was time to try something new.

The date was set for work to begin. Minata, leader of the women's group in Somiaga came with her two co-wives to help Kadisso, traditional healer and leader in Saye. Youth Naam groups arrived with their long drums strapped on the back of bicycles. The older griots (traditional court singers) carried their drums in their arms as they walked. Villagers came in donkey carts with loads of women and children. Eventually, hundreds of people from over three villages had gathered. It was the dry season, and there was little other work to be done. One man said that one day he counted over 800 people at work.

Each had his or her task. The old men who couldn't work sat under the trees and encouraged the others. They watched the toddlers and stopped fights among them. Some grandmothers sat in the gravel pits loading the baskets and pails for the younger women. Children who could carry only one small rock at a time worked beside their mothers. Sometimes they grew quite tired as the distance from the gravel site to the dam was four kilometers. The girls' Naam groups sang songs promising great things to the boys if they worked hard.

After a long morning's work, the groups stopped to rest. They gathered by age and sex in squatted circles under the trees. The women's Naam group from Saye had organized the most important event of the day - the food and water. Contributions came from their own granaries as well as those of their husbands. They had prepared food at home and carried it on their heads to the dam site. Under one tree, they unloaded their food which was dished out into large bowls to feed a group at a time. Then, as is the Naam custom, the Tasting Chief or Limbe-Naaba of the different Naam groups (each has one) washed his or her right hand with water, poured the sauce over the rice and reached in for the first bite. It was a welcomed moment.

By February of 1980, they had been working almost every day for two months on the dam. The outline of its mounded edges stretched beyond a clump of trees which would be allowed to remain in the center of the dam. The villagers imagined a small lake with fish just like the dam in Ouahigouya. Anxious to share their good news they informed the Naam headquarters. The reaction of their technical advisor, Bernard Ouedraogo, was not what they expected. He warned that a technician should be brought in to give them advice on building a large dam. He was afraid that the traditional methods were not good enough. But the men and women of Saye said that they could not wait. Engineers always seemed to take their time.

Before long, the villagers finished, and they hired someone to guard their dam by day and by night. An accident happened after the rains in August,

1980. In the middle of the night, the guard saw that the water was rapidly flowing out of a part of the dam's wall. He pounded his drum to warn the villagers who came running out. The next day, they began repairs by putting sand in empty grain sacks and placing them on the damaged wall. They had learned a lesson about technology. As soon as they could, they sent a delegation to the Naam office to ask for help.

The Naam office was able to organize resources to help the villagers. It relied on external aid and technical advice, but used local resources whenever possible. Administrative and technical support came through the Six-S, an international NGO co-founded by Bernard Ouedraogo in the aftermath of the Sahel drought. UNICEF joined four other international donors to provide needed materials. The Federation of the Naam groups contributed three million West African francs (about 380 francs to one US dollar) from their own reserves to help pay for sand, a driver and gas for the truck. A dam like the one at Saye cost an estimated 20 million francs, half of which were contributions by villagers in food, materials and labour. It was a financial discovery when the villagers realized that this amount was a fraction of the estimated 500 million francs spent by the government on similar projects.

The last day was celebrated by feasting and dancing in the highest of Mossi fashion. Everyone was invited, and it seemed like everyone came: the officials from the Office of Rural Development, the Prefect, the local Naam officers and representatives from villages. Among these honored guests, Minata from Somiaga was the star. The crowds recognized the familiar tribal scars on her face as she stepped up to the microphone to sing with the women of Saye. They sang of the beautiful trees and plants which would grow around the dam. Minata composed a song alone. The words were:

We worked together to gather stones

We made a dam

All the men who travelled to Mecca say they gathered stones to throw
at the evil tombs of the disbelievers

Like them, we gathered stones

But we are going to build a dam, a future for

our children, our village, for the Upper Volta and all of Africa.

When she stopped, she found the women had encircled her and wouldn't let her leave. The festivities continued long into the afternoon until clouds gathered overhead. The villagers dispersed and a few hours later, the first rains of 1981 fell in Saye.

V. SOMIAGA AND OTHERS

In the nearby village of Somiaga, Minata was even more impatient to begin organizing her village to build a dam. She had come back to the village after the Federations' meeting in 1979, called the women together and told them of the groups' decision. The women eagerly spread the news. One day, while working in the fields, a friend from Saye told Minata that her village had already begun a dam. Minata was happy to think that her own village would be next. With its 1,600 inhabitants, Somiaga had almost four times the workers as Saye so it could finish in less than three months. Others would come to help.

For Minata, the first day of work on the Somiaga dam was particularly memorable. She described that day, saying, "It was 4 o'clock in the morning when I got up. There was a full moon in the sky that lit my path as I went to the well to pump water and came back to prepare breakfast. Afterwards, I went to see how the village women were doing in organising the food. Each family contributed vegetables and expensive rice. As soon as I could, I went to the dam site where I found that I was the first to arrive, so I was the one who greeted the technician.

The villagers of Somiaga consider Saye the training grounds for their own dam. Said one man, " We learned from the women in Saye that dams should be built; we also learned from their mistakes". Fortunately, making mistakes did not discourage them from trying new things. In Somiaga, the women were looking for a way to demonstrate the advantages of a new fuel-saving stove to other villages. The dam gave them their chance to do so, and they built four stoves near the construction site for the women to use.

Thus far, there are five other dams in the region under construction. These dam-building projects benefit from three major resources. Around half of the funds come from donor agencies such as UNICEF. This provides extra support for food, transportation of people and materials, cement, picks, pails, and technical expertise. For the Saye repairs, there were almost four different agencies involved. As already mentioned, additional funds are provided by the regional Naam "daughter projects" funds. But villagers contribute almost half the costs. This reduces the construction bills to a fraction of their original amounts. A dam like the one at Saye cost an estimated 25 million francs compared to an estimated 500 million spent by the government on similar projects. (see Chart II)

VI. RESULTS

It is premature to expect an impact evaluation of the Women's Dam. Villagers say that it takes at least three years of good rains before the dams will really hold water. But if the benefits of the existing dams are the same for the new ones, one can expect them to have an important impact on improving the welfare of women and children. Already, some villagers say that the water level of the household wells is rising. Rains in 1983 filled the dams with water which are used to water the cattle, for bathing, and gardening. Without the dams, in many villages, reforestation would be impossible because young saplings must be watered every week. The leaves of these trees provide both medicine and food for families as well as fuel.

Chart II

ESTIMATES OF DAM COSTS

External Agencies	Naam "daughter" fund	Village groups
10 million Truck and bin, cement, food etc.	3 million cement, drivers gas, sand etc.	12 million ,equiva- lent to 200 persons x 90 days x 600 francs per day.

Total External input,10 million francs

Total Naam input,15 million francs

TOTAL COST,25 million francs

VII. LESSONS LEARNED

1. Women's Participation

The Naam experience is very encouraging because it shows that it is possible for a community-based movement to promote women's equal participation in water and sanitation activities within a comprehensive programme for rural development. (For more information on the Naam movement, see Appendix I.) This vision can be attributed partly to the foresight of the movement's founder, but also to the struggle of the younger women within the Naam groups to mobilize other women.

Among the actions which promote women's participation, we see that the projects:

1. Select traditional women or girls' cooperative organisations, build on them. Make them more development-oriented and introduce new activities.
2. Train women extension workers who were from the villages, live in the region, and are able to conduct consciousness-raising activities.
3. Give women equal representation in key economic positions such as in planning and supervising committees and in the overall administration of the cooperative groups. These are guaranteed in the organisations' charters.
4. Provide needed administrative and technical assistance to grass-roots movements which have already demonstrated their ability to promote equal participation of women.

2. Use of Local Resources and Self-Reliance

The dams were built using local resources such as rock and gravel. Building skills of the local masons etc. were put to full use. Labour and food were supplied by the community. The choice of technology opened the door for women to participate as they traditionally worked on more traditional earthen dams. Also, because costs can be kept low, projects may begin in numerous other villages using limited external assistance. Self-reliance is, undoubtedly, one of the most outstanding lessons of the Naam dam-building projects.

These experiences were successful in part because all organisations concerned:

1. Identify and support existing projects which show a high level of awareness concerning the use of local resources and which demonstrate a judicious use of external funds towards self-reliance.
2. Choose a level of technology which is appropriate to women's as well as men's skills and resources, and provide assistance to upgrade them with modern methods.
3. Promote project replication as a "built-in" objective of projects so that choice of technology, costs and level of women's participation are considered at the initial planning stage.

3. Regional Development

Dam-building is but one project in a number of social, economic and political activities of the Naam groups. Furthermore, the groups are well organized at a regional level so that the administrative committee can review the progress of a whole regional plan. The integration of the water and sanitation activities with other dimensions of development is leading to an

"integrated rural development" plan. In this case, they are an entry point to a much broader aim of reviving the spiritual, social and cultural vigor of traditional Mossi society. From the women's point of view, then, economic gain is mainly a means to these ends, and a regional effort is natural because all of the Mossi should be united.

At the ground level, we note that the Naam groups:

1. Replicate projects on a regional level through use of a strong regional cooperative organisations, collective funds, and study tours.
2. Avoid potential competition between villages within the region for external funds by organising them on the basis of common tradition, values, and ethnic identity.
3. Promote a regional cooperation between NGOs, government, and international agencies which is based on the autonomy and initiative of women's groups at the local level.

VIII. CONCLUSION

The Women's Dam in Saye will not be forgotten. Villagers are proud to show it to visitors as their prize achievement in recent years. The women have proven that they could move the earth and "throw the stones" at the drought. Minata expressed the sentiments of many Mossi people when she explained the reason why the rains have fallen in recent years. As she put it, "We have created harmony and cooperation on earth by building the dams. The rains came because the watchful ancestors could not help but be pleased at what they saw".

APPENDIX I

FOOTNOTES

1 For other documents on Mossi society, see 'The Rains', a thirty-minute documentary by BBC television made in 1983 (available through UNICEF, New York). Other references are Brenda Gael McSweeney, "An approach to collecting and examining data on rural women's time use and some tentative findings: the case of Upper Volta", Working Paper, The Population Council, March, 1979 and Elliott P. Skinner, The Mossi of the Upper Volta, Stanford U. Press, Stanford, California, 1964.

2. National data shows that the Upper Volta is one of the least developed countries. With a total population of 6.9 million people, its infant mortality rate is 219 per 1000 live births and life expectancy is only 42 years. The per capital income is 237 US dollars. Only 25 percent of the population, mainly in cities, has access to clean water (figures are 1980 or latest year).

3. Brenda McSweeney's study shows that out of 14 hours of work, gathering water and fuel took a total of 44 minutes while food-processing took 132 minutes. During the droughts, time for getting water and fuel increased dramatically so that field observers reported it women walked up to 24 hours to come back with nothing at all.

THE WOMEN'S NAAM GROUPS

1. History

How was it possible for women to overcome traditional prejudices? How does one explain the courage of Minata and the village women of Saye? One of the instruments for raising consciousness and mobilizing women was the Naam movement which built its structure on traditional cooperative groups. This proved much more successful than previous attempts of government women extension workers. At the same time, the activities of the groups were expanded from collective work and social functions to non-traditional roles for women in economic planning and community participation.

The women's groups were an outgrowth of a wider grass-roots movement and adopted many of its objectives and strategies. Originally, this movement was inspired by Bernard Ouedraogo, a French educated Mossi who had returned to his country as a government official in charge of rural education in the Office of Rural Development. His socio-anthropological study of Mossi society identified women's oppression as one of many traditional norms which needed reform. Others were kin, class and generational privileges, typical of the former kingdoms. Interestingly enough, within Mossi society the traditional Naam groups were distinguished by an organisation quite contrary in principle and practice from any of above. They were youth groups (mainly unmarried boys and girls) in which equality between the sexes, cooperation and egalitarianism were highly valued. During the rainy season their main activities were to provide group labour for villagers, and in the dry season they sponsored dances and festivals for youth.

Bernard advocated the revival of the Naam groups as transitional structures into modern cooperatives because they were rooted in Mossi culture. He observed that other attempts at establishing cooperatives had failed to gain the support of the people. Prior to the beginnings of the Naam movement in the 1970's, there had been at least three major cooperative

attempts, organized by the colonial or government administration. According to Bernard, their weakness was that they were foreign models which could not be grafted onto the traditional structures which made up village social and economic life. They were governed by a council of elites living in cities and implemented by extension workers who were not from the region. The Office of Rural Development education programmes reflected the problems of the cooperatives--they, too, were ill adapted to local needs and failed to halt the rural exodus.

2. Membership and Organisation

There are currently around 975 Naam groups with over 50,000 members. Half of these are estimated to be women members. (The exact figure is not known because groups sometimes "mix" membership with both men and women if the village size is small). Since 1979 the Naam groups have been organised into Unions and Federations, corresponding roughly to the government's administrative levels. To register, a new group must have at least 50 members and agree to abide by the statutes of the organisation.

The modern Naam groups differ from the traditional ones because they do not limit membership to young men or girls (before, only males aged 20 to 25 years and girls from 15 to 20 years were members). They also conduct meetings jointly between men and women's groups. Both of these differences created problems. According to one Federation official, the elders of the villages had numerous conflicts with younger men and women at the first meetings. In such instances, the community organisers from Naam headquarters and the leaders in more progressive groups were brought in to encourage members to assert themselves and support the principles of the modern Naam groups.

3. Consciousness-raising

Women had a particularly difficult time. Ramata, one of the most active and articulate of the Naam extension workers (animatrice), talked about the early days saying, "When I was younger, I saw women who didn't want to attend meetings. They had good ideas, but they kept quiet and talked about them at

home. When women came to meetings, they wouldn't look men in the face, and, in public, they hid their faces behind veils. The Naam groups have helped to change that. Our job was to encourage the women behind the scenes. Now I see the same women leading meetings and even correcting their husbands in front of everyone else. We cannot say that women are equal to men in every way, but I have seen some real changes. Some day you will come here, and we will show you a project planned and designed by women without men's help. Someday it will be possible".

4. Activities

Dam-building and other economic activities is just one of the Naam groups concerns. Unlike many modern women's groups, the women's Naam organisation is a multipurpose one, and they fulfill a number of cultural, social and political needs. We have already mentioned the importance of their role in promoting women's active participation in decision-making, a step which was decisive in order that women's priorities such as improved water supplies be taken seriously by the other Naam groups. Other activities may be divided into four parts: 1. economic - grinding mills, gardening, water transport with carts, animal husbandry, dam-building, 2. educational - study tours, research and evaluation of projects, 3. social services - health, maternal and child health care, nutrition, mutual aid to the poor, and 4. recreational - dances, theater and folklore. In brief, the women's Naam groups serve as the basic unit of Mossi community life, and because many activities are coordinated within them, almost every Mossi has an incentive to join.

5. Leadership

The planning and maintenance of dams follow the pattern of most other Naam projects. At the regional level, six women should be elected along with six men to form a project committee. Thus far there are seven such committees. Each project may have different members on a committee so that the dam-building committee may not be the same as that concerned with grinding mills or maintenance of wells. This group is responsible for project

planning, implementation and evaluation. Many villagers accept the idea of equal representation for women partly because it is traditionally found in the youth naam groups. Women have equal representation in many (though not all) upper level committees of the Naam organisation. This is important because regional committees make many critical policy and financial decisions. At the same time, the Naam groups resist overcentralization and actually live up to the philosophy that the leaders should "follow the people". One relevant example may be the Saye dam where, as we noted, the women initiated and started to build the dam.

How are women leaders chosen? One woman member explained, "We know each other's reputations very well. We leave our villages after we marry, but in our new homes we find new friends who are like sisters. We will say, 'that woman is honest. We can trust her with our money'. We see that she wants to help everyone and gets along with everyone. She dances and speaks well. Even if she cannot read, we want her to lead us. She can rely on her good memory. When we see all of these things, we ask her to be our president. The president appoints her 11 administrators, referred to in both traditional and modern terms (for example, the vice-president is also called a "chief"). One of the most interesting responsibilities is that of the "chief of discipline". If a woman is lazy, the chief lies on the ground in front of her to show everyone who is causing the problem. Women say that after this happens once, a person is seldom lazy again.

6. Role of Extension Workers

As already mentioned the Naam groups have their own trained extension workers who are Mossi villagers. The women extension workers facilitate communication between women's Naam groups involved in dam-building, and in encourage them to build income-generating projects around the water sources. They also have other important functions which will ensure that the water and sanitation activities will be supported by educational programmes so as to

have an impact on health and nutrition. One method used by both female and male extension workers is to organise study tours for Naam groups. The philosophy of Naam education is that groups can teach each other and that observation is the best teacher because "what one sees with the eyes will go into the mind and be remembered". One animatrice acts as a primary health care worker (combined midwife and aide sanitaire). She conducts nutrition, sanitation and health education classes for women, but she relies most on the study tours. She explains, "If you act like some government extension workers and tell village women that they are dirty, they will think you are crazy. But if you take one group of women to a village which is nice and clean, they will ask how can they be the same way. I know women who visited model nutrition villages, and now these women are teaching others".

7. Finances

The dam projects will follow the pattern of a Naam innovation: the "father-daughter-son" projects which originally applied to the grinding mills projects. One of the essential values of the Mossi customs is solidarity. Solidarity demands that the one who receives some external grants such as a mill should repay its purchase price to another group who can in turn also benefit from a mill. They invented the term "father mill", "daughter mill", and "son mill" to describe the economic system by which this mill is going to have daughters and sons to multiply. The "Father mill" is the ancestor, the founder, the progenitor who is respected and whose advice is followed. The first "child" of the "Father mill" (and mother) will be a "daughter". It will be called the "Daughter mill" because daughters leave their villages to go to another family and have children.

The "Daughter mill" will be the outcome of the solidarity and the good management of the group responsible for the "Father mill". Two years later, this mill will have enough benefit to give birth to another "daughter". The "Father mill" will get old and if he does not have a son his family ties would die out. Thus, the "Father mill" (and mother) should give birth to a "son" who could replace the old, tired, worn out father. This "son mill" will ensure the lineage and the continuation of this solidarity.

This concept has now become applied to numerous other projects such as the dam-building. It is an important part of a mutual aid system which also permits women to receive credit, thus further encouraging self-reliant finances on the part of members.

Grants received from external agencies are pooled together into a kind of revolving fund called the Caisse from which other projects can be funded. Some are even entirely repaid by the Naam groups. External funds are combined with profits from previous projects. Sometimes this Caisse is referred to as the "daughter projects fund".