

IDEASS

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The IDEASS objective is to reinforce local development processes through the increased use of innovations in the field of human development and decent work. The Initiative acts as a catalyst to disseminate social, economic and technological innovations, which contribute to economic and social development at the local level, through South-South cooperation projects. The promoted innovations can be products or technology as well as social, economic or cultural practices. For more information about the IDEASS Initiative, please consult the website at www.ideassonline.org



The ILO/Universitas programme (Decent Work through Training and Innovation) promotes the application of innovative solutions to problems of human development, especially in the world of work. To this effect, it carries out activities of field study, education and training for the benefit of decision-makers and personnel active in local development processes.



UNDP's APPI programme (Anti-Poverty Partnership Initiatives) is a tool whose purpose is to help both governments and social actors define and implement national poverty and social exclusion reduction policies, based on integrated and participative local development practices.



The UNDP/IFAD/UNOPS programmes on human development and the fight against poverty promote integrated and participative local development processes, in the framework of national policies, supported by public and private actors and civil society. These programmes offer a framework by which different donor's countries and communities of industrialized countries can collaborate through decentralized cooperation. It is in this framework that the South-South cooperation projects are carried out, through the Initiative.

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Pictures by ILO & La Concertation

Printed in Geneva, July 2003

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Innovations for Development and South-South Cooperation

The Coordination network between actors involved in the development of mutual health organizations in Western and Central Africa



Western and Central Africa

Presentation

In Western and Central Africa, mutual health organizations are still relatively new and scarce, although they have been growing rapidly for the last few years. There is a clear need for sharing knowledge, skills and experience among the group of actors supporting the emerging mutual benefit movement. On the basis of such evidence, a “Coordination network between actors involved in the development of mutual health organizations in Western and Central Africa” (called “La Concertation” in French) was set up by various international cooperation partners.

The “Coordination network” constitutes innovative, flexible and effective collaboration and partnership between the main actors involved in the development of African mutual organizations. A shared vision of that development brings together a group of national actors originating from eleven countries in French-speaking Africa and international organizations engaged in finding solutions to improve the quality and access to health care. The “Coordination network” encourages direct exchange of experiences, skills and knowledge and contributes to the creation of opportunities for South-South-North cooperation concerning mutual health organizations. Thus, the “Coordination network” is even more innovative because it permits a coalition among a plurality of actors. On the one hand, the coalition is expressed at the national level, through partnership between organizations of the informal economy, social partners and formal public agencies; on the other hand, it serves to unite actions undertaken by actors at the national and international levels.

Up to now the “Coordination network” has gathered more than 150 organizations supporting the African mutual benefit movement. It offers different types of services: an Internet website (www.concertation.org) which includes the identification of members and partners, reference documents, articles, and other practical documents; an information index of mutual organizations existing in the region; discussion groups

and the programme of activities planned by the various partners. The “Coordination network” periodically publishes a newsletter (the *Coordination Network Newsletter*, called *Courrier de la Concertation* in French), also available on the Internet website. Likewise, it set up a monitoring system of the development of mutual organizations. Finally, the “Coordination network” regularly organizes thematic workshops to support the mutual benefit movement.

Experience has shown that the “Coordination network” is viable and beneficial for its members and for the actors involved, needing only limited financial support. Thus, the instrument could be replicated in other parts of the world or in fields of activity other than mutual health organizations.



How does it solve the problem?

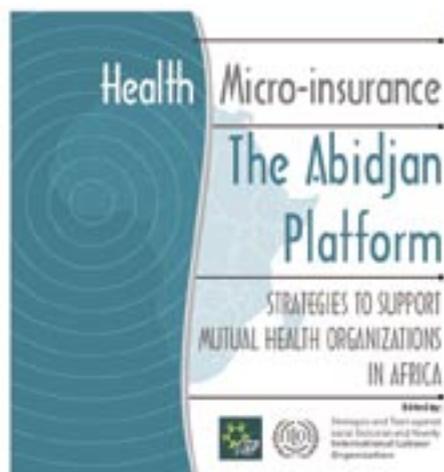
About half of the world’s population does not have access to basic health care. This exclusion mainly affects rural workers and urban workers in the informal economy. These groups are, however, the most severely affected by health problems. Poverty, reduction of social and health budgets, poor efficiency in the use of available resources and insufficient quantity and quality of health care supply are often the main causes of a lack of access to health care. Many efforts have been made to solve these problems. Although important results have sometimes been attained, there is still a lot to be done.

For many years, the populations excluded from social protection systems and the international

community have joined forces to find solutions to the double challenge of improving health and sustainable financing of care, especially in Africa. Since the early 1990s, we have witnessed the expansion of numerous social protection systems created by various non-state actors: communities, non-governmental organizations, employers’ and workers’ organizations, micro-finance institutions, etc. Mutual health organizations are one of the protection mechanisms against the risks related to sickness. These mutual health organizations link traditional mutual help practices and solidarity to the mechanisms of insurance. They present real potential for improving access to treatment and for decreasing the financial risks associated with sickness. Even though these mutual organizations are often recent creations and have developed quickly, they are generally fragile, small in size, and often do not have necessary competence and knowledge for their development. Their actions are generally isolated and actors do not make use of the experience accumulated by others in the field. Furthermore, the international community itself has made only scattered efforts and has not designed a concerted strategy for supporting the African mutual benefit movement.



As a result, a variety of international partners decided to meet in June 1998 to define support strategies for the emerging African mutual benefit movement. A workshop, which was held in Abidjan (Côte d'Ivoire), was attended by different organizations: mutual federations from Africa and other regions in the world, international organizations, governments, cooperation agencies, health care providers, local and international non-governmental organizations, universities, research centres and trade union confederations, etc. Representatives of nine states and of some 50 organizations participated. During the workshop a reference document was created: *The Abidjan Platform*. This is the product of the experiences of the main actors involved in the development of mutual health organizations in Western and Central Africa.



The participants at the workshop expressed the need to create a more structured mechanism for collaboration among the mutualist development actors. This idea was carried out through the establishment of the “Coordination network between actors involved in the development of mutual health

organizations in Western and Central Africa”, called the “Coordination network” and based in Dakar in Senegal. The “Coordination network”, officially created in April 1999, is an innovative and strategic mechanism. It allows for the creation of strategic and technical links, collaboration and the establishment of dialogue among African mutual health organizations, social partners, actors involved in the



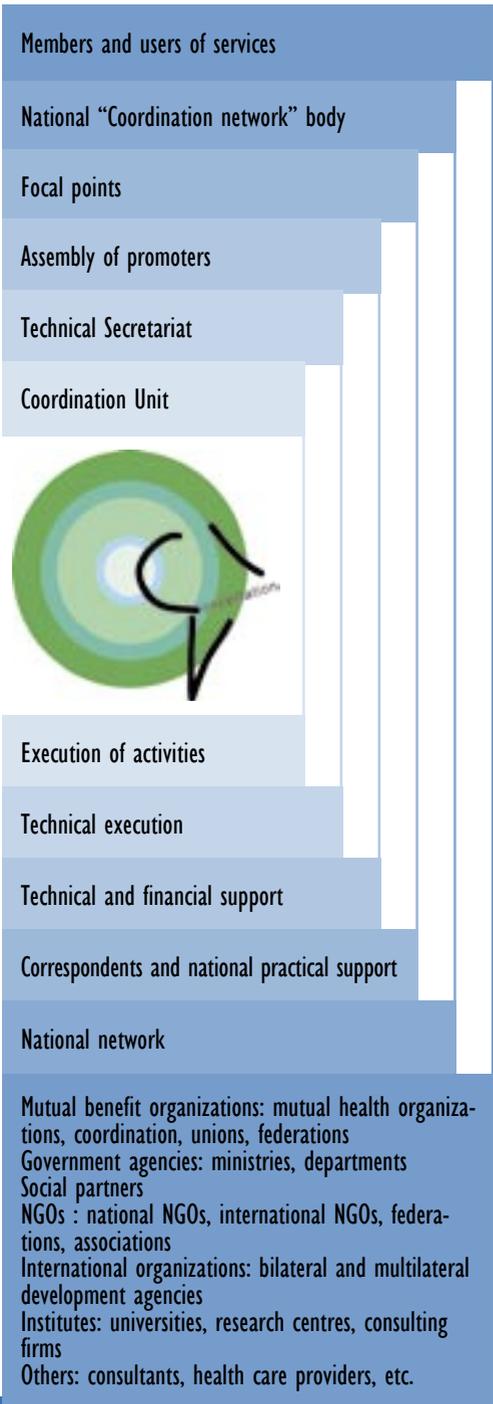
development and the communities, through concrete activities such as training, workshops for exchange of ideas and thematic discussions. Since its creation, many actors have been able to share their points of view, their knowledge and experiences via dozens of newsletters, the “Coordination network” website and periodic meetings. Every month, newcomers join the “Coordination network”, which counted more than 500 users in 2002. The “Coordination network” is active in eleven French-speaking African countries: Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Senegal and Togo.

The “Coordination network” in practice

The “Coordination network” is based on a partnership between actors involved in the development of the mutual health organizations in Africa. Four structures concretely exist to make it viable.

- ◆ **The members** numbered 150 in 2002, and consisting of mutual organizations, trade union federations, public organizations, research centres and mutual organization support structures in both Africa and at the international level. Furthermore, more than 500 users of the “Coordination network” services are registered on-line in various databases. In each country, a national “Coordination network” body brings together different actors within the country around specific issues.
- ◆ **The focal points** play a key role in the operation of the “Coordination network”. They facilitate communication with the coordination unit while enabling interaction among national members, local actors and their regional and international partners (see the list of focal points in the section “Contacts”). The national “Coordination network” body consists of light structures, that are animated by the national focal point or by one of the national actors, and which provide local actors with opportunities for knowledge-sharing. These national structures permit the elaboration of joint plans of action between the various local actors in order to encourage the harmonious development of mutual organizations in their country.
- ◆ **The coordination unit**, under the supervision of a Technical Secretariat, ensures daily management of activities. The Technical Secretariat also has the responsibility of establishing ties between the different partners.





This structure has set up an operational information system based on four main activities.

- ◆ **An Internet website.** It provides information on mutual organizations, institutions and other support structures for the mutual benefit movement, an information index of existing systems, as well as a calendar of activities planned in the region and at the international level, particularly thematic workshops and training intended for actors involved in the development of mutual health organizations. The site provides information, and systematic overview of events taking place in the sector to hundreds of users, through its "news-flash" system.



The site is also a place for exchanging information (forum for discussions) and knowledge, through proposed topics and relevant documentation on mutual health organizations. More than 150 documents are available: articles, brochures, studies, research papers, monographs, case studies, legal texts, etc. Discussion forums on topics related to the African mutual benefit movement are organized on-line. This allows interaction, direct exchange and collaboration between actors involved in the development of mutual health organizations in Africa.

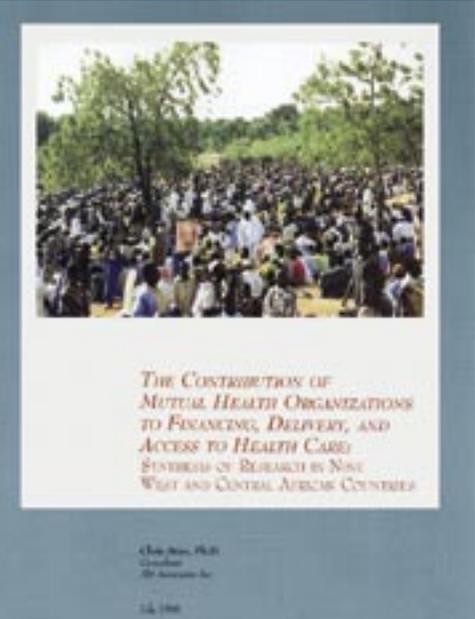
- ◆ **A newsletter,** called the *Coordination Network Newsletter* (or *Courrier de la Concertation* in French), complements the Internet website and allows contact with a target group who are kept informed when they would otherwise face only limited access to modern technology. The *Coordination Network Newsletter*, distributed free of charge in the eleven countries covered, contains articles about specific topics, interviews with people in charge or with actors who work on the development of mutual organizations, as well as exchanges of experiences and of information on up-coming events. This newsletter is published mainly in French, although a summarized version in English is also distributed to partners. The *Coordination Network Newsletter* is likewise available on-line on the "Coordination network" website.



- ◆ **A monitoring system of the development of mutual organizations.** Different tasks are implemented to follow the evolution of mutual health organizations in Africa: case studies, syntheses and lessons-learned analyses. Thus, in 1998, a study was carried out in nine Western and Central African countries concerning the mutual organi-

zation's contribution to financing and access to health care. Numerous conclusions and recommendations were made, dealing notably with the fragility of the mutual organizations studied, their dependence on the institutional context, their impact, their contribution in terms of equity and efficiency in improving the quality and access to health care. These conclusions permitted the actors involved in the development of mutual organizations to consolidate or reorient their strategies. The study was updated in September 2000, while taking an inventory of mutual organizations in the countries covered by the "Coordination network". A systematic and regular monitoring process (every three years) is set up to help actors identify steps and actions for the consolidation of the mutual benefit movement.

- ◆ **The forums.** In addition to the other information tools, forums are organized every two years to bring together all the actors, in order to share their experiences, compare their analyses, define their joint or coordinated actions and to initiate or reinforce partnerships. The first workshop (on two themes and ten experiences) took place in September 2000 in Dakar where 80 participants of 18 different nationalities



came together. The second workshop (on three themes and 29 presentations) was also organized in Dakar in September 2002 with 190 participants of 24 different nationalities.

Many activities are held during the forums.

- ◆ Presentation of the most recent studies carried out in the eleven countries on the development of mutual health organizations.
- ◆ Workshops on specific topics identified by actors in the field, about mutual health organizations.
- ◆ Display and distribution of various products about the mutual organizations (studies, documents, articles, pedagogic and didactical tools, etc.).
- ◆ Distribution of documentaries, films and photos.
- ◆ Meetings between the different actors and partners.
- ◆ The “Forum Proceedings” were edited and published (also available on the “Coordination network” website).

Some figures

- ◆ 2000 copies per issue of the *Coordination Network Newsletter* in French and 500 copies of the English version were distributed.
- ◆ The Internet website of the “Coordination network” was consulted by more than 696 685 visitors of which 369 593 solely in 2002.
- ◆ More than 150 documents are available on line.
- ◆ About 80% of training workshop participants were informed by the “Coordination network”.
- ◆ 149 messages were disseminated by “news-flash”, consisting of almost 200 articles.
- ◆ 2 international workshops and 6 national workshops were organized in three years.
- ◆ The “Coordination network” Forum, organized in September 2002, brought together 190 people from 24 countries.
- ◆ About 35 field experiences were presented during the Forum in 2002.

What are the results?

The “Coordination network” has created a real dynamic of exchange, collaboration and partnership between the actors involved in the development of mutual health organizations. To a great extent, it managed to combine the efforts of the main actors at national and international levels.



Moreover, with the aim of promoting mutual health organizations, the “Coordination network” enabled a large variety of actors to rally around a common objective: improving the quality and access to health care for the population of Africa. The actors involved are essentially community organizations within the informal economy, social partners (or federations), public institutions, international NGOs, international cooperation agencies and United Nations organizations. One of the advantages is having a flexible and efficient system, at a low operating cost made possible by means such as the Internet, publications and meetings, as well as a relay organization mode through focal points and national “Coordination network” bodies. Each country is responsible for the life of its network and the use of proposed products. The system distributes products, experiences and requests to all users of the services.

The international interest

The “Coordination network” is supported by:

- ◆ The International Labour Office (ILO) and its STEP programme;
- ◆ The United States Agency for International Development (USAID), through its PHR^{plus} programme;
- ◆ The German cooperation agency (GTZ) and its Health Insurance project;
- ◆ The International Mutuality Association (AIM);
- ◆ The National Alliance of Christian Mutual Organizations of Belgium (ANMC);
- ◆ The Belgian NGO World Solidarity (WSM);
- ◆ The Support Network for Mutual Health Organizations (RAMUS) supported by the French cooperation agency;
- ◆ The National Union of Socialist Mutual Organizations of Belgium (UNMS).

Other institutions have shown their interest, notably the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), the World Health Organization (WHO) and the World Bank. Several other multilateral and bilateral institutions have also been contacted.

The activities of the “Coordination network” concern, primarily, French-speaking Africa, but other African countries also wish to be integrated in the network and have asked for the extension of activities also to their benefit; this is notably the case for countries in English-speaking Central and Western Africa.

Likewise, other regions and countries have shown a strong interest in setting up a “Coordination network”. Take for instance the case of Nepal, which has recently decided to incorporate the potential and dynamics of Nepalese mutual health organizations in its national strategy to extend social protection in health. In this context, the innovative experience of the “Coordination network” when extended to the Asian sub-region could serve as a prime forum for discussion and exchange of ideas contributing to the

reinforcement of the movement. The main actors of micro-insurance systems in Asia (India, Bangladesh, Nepal, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, etc.) have expressed their wish to benefit from this type of mechanism in their region. At the global level, large organizations of social and mutual protection (ISSA, AIM, ICMI, Belgian and French mutual benefit organizations, etc.) have also expressed their wish to participate in a “Global Coordination network”.

The “Coordination network”: a mechanism applicable to other countries

The “Coordination network”, as a mechanism of partnership and exchange of knowledge between development actors in a specific area, may be replicated effectively at the sub-regional, regional or global level.

The “Coordination network” has to rely on the support of the principal national and local structures, on development actors, as well as non-governmental organizations active in the area concerned. To come into being, the “Coordination network” only needs the participation of a few partners. Its development will encourage the networking between actors and the participation of a larger number of new partners. A sub-regional, regional or global “Coordination network” needs only limited financial and logistic resources.



Additional Information

Documents and practical information related to the “Coordination network” are available on the website: www.concertation.org

All information can also be obtained from:

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