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CRAZY ABOUT THE NEW CHEESE

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Women in the village of Badékparou in Tchaourou municipality in Benin were starting to make money by turning soy beans into cheese (actually tofu). But the cheese was not yet reaching a high quality standard because of the processing techniques used by the women.

To improve the quality, a video on processing soya cheese was presented in collaboration with DEDRAS NGO through video projections in Badékparou.

The women organised themselves into three small groups of about 10 people each to watch the 9-minute video. Three months after the women watched the video, we talked to them again.

The women loved the video. First, they emphasised that most of the conventional training they received before the video training excluded some of the group's members.

Sometimes trainers only teach group leaders. These leaders were in charge of passing on the ideas from the training modules to the other members. But repeating someone else's lesson can be frustrating, and the second-hand information was not always passed on completely.

Gounou Baké, a member of the group, said that such a training approach does not personally motivate her to learn more. She always had doubts about whether the training information passed on to them was accurate.

In contrast, she was satisfied with the video-based training by DEDRAS because it allowed for all the members to watch and to learn together about the various stages of making cheese from soya.

Thanks to the video, the group not only heard, but could also see the techniques for soya cheese-making. Inspired by the images, the women adapted some of the equipment shown, such as strainers, to give their soya cheeses a shape similar to cow's milk cheese.

One woman said that the customers not only appreciated the new shape of their cheese, but also liked it because it was no longer repulsive.

By applying the processing techniques seen in the video, they could now produce soya cheeses without the bad odour that their cheeses had before. Better tofu attracts more customers.

These women explained that they are now using improved techniques which they learned from the video, and that their neighbours who did not watch the video were curious and wanted to understand how they managed to improve the quality of their cheese so much that their consumers were crazy about it.

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