



M BLUM - HONORARY PhD

Magdalena Blum works as an Extension Systems Officer in Rome. Her employer, the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), is a special agency of the United Nations. It serves as a holistic advisory system for both regional and international agricultural systems. Though she has filled this position for almost eight years, the path which led her to Rome is one which spans various continents and rich in a variety of experiences. Her work is characterised by a passion for development, humanitarian work, and female upliftment, but most of all, by helping people to help themselves.

Blum took part in her first outreach project to Africa while still a student. In 1979 she travelled to Senegal, and out of Germany, for the first time. She stayed in the village for three weeks, helping to build, maintain, and develop mud houses, a kraal, a hut for chickens, and planting trees. Using her training in physics and textile studies, she researched and carried out experiments on the climate of dressing. This was the first of many forays into international development and upliftment work. 1986 saw Blum's first long-term stay in Africa when she became involved in the "Women and Energy Project" in the Meru District in Kenya. This project set the tone for many of her later projects, in that it focused on certain main points, such as training courses, the development of women's groups, female empowerment, tree planting activities, establishing small scale enterprises, and rural and capacity development.

From 1990 to 1993 Blum was involved in the Gambian "Women's Rice Project", part of the National Freedom from Hunger Campaign/NFFHC. She was appointed as Extension Advisor. Gambia was identified as a country desperate for governance, and the project was launched in order to help the people of Gambia govern themselves. Again the project focused on capacity building

and development through the promotion of different organisations, such as women's groups. Her previous experience in Senegal was also of great use, as an exchange programme was set up between Senegal and Gambia. In Gambia she advised the project leader, steering committee and extension officers on policy issues, planned and organised participatory extension and M&E system in agricultural rice production, seed programme, appropriate technologies (rice production and processing technologies; animal traction) and income-generation for women's groups. She was also in charge of guiding the policy dialogue with the Minister of Agriculture to whom the project was directly attached. She was once more involved in training women's groups.

From 1993 to 1997 Blum worked in the Central African Republic on the Programme d'Appui aux Organisations rurales de Base en Ouham-Pendé (Support Programme for Rural Based Organisations in Ouham-Pende). On this project she served as the Project Advisor / Deputy to the Chief Technical Advisor.

Though the focus of the project was much the same as the ones she previously undertook, the focus here was more of a managerial nature, advising the Central African counterparts in management, steering of consultancies, the selection of project staff and team building for sub-regional teams considering gender. She also had to provide advisory services for self-help and organisational development for strengthening and empowering rural organisations and communities considering gender specific needs, self-help oriented poverty reduction, capacity and linkage building, networking, and resource mobilisation. Furthermore, she worked on the conceptualising and testing of the approach 'Planification du Développement Local' (Local Development Planning) with multi-disciplinary

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teams, namely participatory gender-differentiated research, restitution and planning, setting up of development plans with rural organisations and communities, monitoring and self-evaluation, and gender analysis and its consideration.

The years 1997 to 2001 saw Blum travelling to Togo. Here she worked on the Rural Development Fund for promoting financial and organisational capacity, as Project Leader and Chief Technical Advisor. Her main task was to develop an independent fund which would provide savings and credit facilities in the region. Blum was involved in designing, planning, monitoring, and steering the project, which meant transforming the 'Village Development Fund' into the 'Regional Development Fund (FDR)' to be an autonomous credit institution (incl. staff transfer, legal aspects, etc.). She was responsible for promoting organisational, institutional, and financial capacities of the 'FDR' as well as promoting village saving banks, and for leading policy dialogue with the Ministry of Finance/CASIMEC on the legal framework for the Regional Development Fund and on promotion of the Micro-Finance sector in Togo. Her passion for development and gender equality once more came to the fore through coordinating training to promote farmers' organisations, their roles and tasks as owner of the fund (gender balanced representation in the board/credit committee, in elections, etc.), staff training in micro-finance, gender aspects, etc. Moreover, she developed a Credit System for agriculture and income-generation considering gender differences and promoting credit to women's groups, increase of women's share of the credit portfolio from below 10% to 48%, women repayment rates of almost 100%. She also worked on promoting client-oriented and gender-specific financial and other services of the Fund and managing the process of financing the credit fund and graduated subsidies of operating costs.

Apart from these long-term projects, Blum also partook in various shorter projects in Palestine,

Niger, Vietnam, Lesotho, Germany, and Madagascar. These projects further aided in empowerment through education and training, financial and healthcare policy reform, poverty reduction, and female as well as male empowerment.

Apart from her formal education and her Master's Degree from the University of East Anglia 's School of Developmental Studies, Blum obtained further training and qualifications in the field of policy design/dialogue/advice and management, institutional and organisational development, partnerships, management and capacity development (policy, institutions, and human resources), innovation systems, extension and advisory systems, gender and development, rural development, poverty alleviation, and training, education, and communication.

Among her other work-related accomplishments are:

- Reviewing of major World Bank papers - 'Agricultural Innovation and Education' of the 'Gender in Agricultural Livelihoods Sourcebook' and an internal e-learning course on Agricultural Extension for WB staff;
- Advising in the identification (Niger, Morocco, West-Balkan regional project, Angola), formulation (Algeria, Tunisia, West-Balkan, Swaziland, Angola, West-African regional project) and in-house PPRC reviews of projects;
- Backstopping the implementation of technical assistance projects and participating in various task forces related to projects (Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia, Niger, South Africa, Sudan, Liberia, Bulgaria; detailed list see below), Lead Technical Officer for the EC funded Swaziland Agricultural Development Programme, and the EC funded project 'Intensification of Agriculture through the strengthening of Input Shops' in Niger;
- Assisting in organising stakeholder workshops, seminars, international meetings; providing conceptual inputs and presentations (regional

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workshop in West-Africa on market oriented extension; extension symposium, regional West-Balkan workshop, Neuchâtel Initiative/GFRAS meetings, FAO-AfDB meeting, etc.);

Showing, once again, her hands-on approach to her field of study, Blum forms part of the following organisations:

She is also a founding member and FAO representative in the Steering Committee the Forum of Rural Advisory Services (GFRAS), 2010 to date.

She often writes and presents reports and project concepts for global institutions, such as the German Red Cross, the United Nations, and the Association for Development Cooperation. What follows is but a selection from a long list of such reports:

Blum boasts a long list of accredited publications and research papers, such as:

Furthermore, the impact of her research can be seen in her continuing project work, such as her studies on financing mechanisms for demand led extension (2012 to date), which provides guidance and coordination of three case studies (Denmark, Senegal, Peru/Colombia) in collaboration with the Danish Agricultural Advisory Services (DAAS) and the Latin American Centre for Rural Development (RIMISP); national extension investment require-

ments (2010-2011, updated yearly), a survey on research and extension investment in 92 countries; worldwide extension studies (2008 to 2013) which was employed worldwide and focused on human and financial resources of agricultural extension and advisory systems worldwide, the clients they serve, the resources of each provider, the means for communication and transport, the role farmers and their organizations play in setting extension priorities and/or assessing performance; organizational development (2006/07) which studied capacity building for sustainable delivery to farmers in Bulgaria. She is also involved in the Centre for Sustainable Agriculture, Rural Development and Extension at the University of the Free State. She is involved in study material development for the Centre and also assists lecturers remotely by presenting lectures and aiding in classroom interaction.

Magdalena Blum is a prime example of someone who has followed her dream and believed that she could achieve what she wanted to, despite obstacles on the way. Setting out to bring about change, upliftment, and development, she has never let anything stop her, and has always achieved more than she set out to do.

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