South-South cooperation
More than just a Southern feeling

Many agricultural economies in the South share a lack of opportunity and a demeaning dependence on aid flows and far-from-fair trade. But can you count on your Southern partner more than your Northern?

The dugout pirogue boat swung gently around another bend of the creek in the mangrove, a few dozen kilometres south of the port of Ziguinchor in the steamy green province of Casamance in southern Senegal. Around, above, below it, as it stole its way under the branches of the dangling bushes, were swarms of insects, butterflies, colourful birds, darting fishes; in it, one tillerman, one lad quietly whistling, and three very excited people, their heads bobbing faster than the birds drilling at nuts on a nearby tree. They swapped knowing looks, whispered into a recording machine, jotted illegible scribbles into notebooks with squares. They had never seen paper with squares instead of lines.

They spoke to their guide, who had travelled far from home with them; she translated their wishes to the young French-speaking guide who translated to his brother at the tiller. The boy entertained them all with whistling birdsong, to entice more birds to fly near. After four hours, they moored at their host village and, once rested, began to record their findings, which would astonish their families and friends when they returned home to their village on the coastal plain of Guatemala, in central America. They were discovering the similarities in the ecosystems in which they lived: the similarities of flora and fauna, the different medicinal uses their different wise doctors had for the same plants. If only all rural communities could share their knowledge with such ease, they mused, how much progress could be achieved.
This exchange visit between farmers of two villages a hemisphere apart took place a generation ago, in 1982, when the dead leaves of jargon lay thinner on the ground than today. It was arranged through a network which brought together Southern NGOs and like-minded Northern support agencies and donors. It was seen as a wonderful illustration of South-South exchange of indigenous knowledge. But was it little more than the sharing by different peoples of what they have in common, for their separate gain?

**In the beginning, the exchange**

The ideal of South-South cooperation was born with the concept of ‘the South’. That cooperation has, of course, existed for thousands of years, usually driven by trade. Trade has always been the major vector for the transfer of ideas and technology around the globe on which agricultural development has always depended, as acknowledged in the South-South approach central to FAO’s Special Programme for Food Security (SPFS).

The South existed before ‘the South’. The concept was defined, perhaps paradoxically, by schools of thought in the temperate North, emerging in the 1960s through some slight anguish about a recent past as colonial rulers. The South, so it was said in the North, was an amalgam of cultures and economies; its prime commonalities were a colonial past under European tutelage, and a conviction that their share of the world’s resources and opportunities was meagre.

Gradually, the South has assumed its own identity, expressed more in cultural and social exchange than in shared economic power. By the 1980s, the South had institutionalised itself: the South Commission, led by President Julius Nyerere, ushered in the South Centre, based in Geneva, Switzerland. To this day it aggressively defends the South with the only tool at its disposal: rhetoric. An example, from 2002: “At a time when the developing countries are showered with ‘do-it-yourself’ prescriptions and sermons about good governance, they are being told to ‘swim’ in the turbulent waters of the international economic environment without a lifebelt or even a few drops of oil to calm the waters and make their task easier.”

**What works well**

Behind the waterfalls of words, what grounds are there for genuine South-South cooperation? The past two decades have seen many experiments and successes, ranging from village-to-village swaps of farmers to inter-regional networks of scientists and processors in, for example, herbal medicine. The recent review of FAO’s SPFS programme, through which several hundred agricultural technicians have left their home countries for 2 to 3 years to work elsewhere as ‘experts’ – from Vietnam to Madagascar, from India to Eritrea – finds that they have effectively brought “skills and practical experience relevant to the local scene, with a multiplier effect”. The major shortcoming of such exchanges is that, externally funded in part, they have not taken root easily in national agricultural programmes. Similar comments about high local impact and low national integration can be made about the Technical Cooperation among Developing Countries (TCDC) activities of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) which, over 20 years, has enabled thousands of skill swaps. Interestingly, the TCDC programme now appears to focus less on the exchange of actual people, and much more on the exchange of experiences through the Internet.

People-to-people exchanges do not necessarily have to carry the relatively high price tag of the international agencies. Various NGO networks such as IRED (the international network for development exchange), or Environment Development Action (ENDA), or Development Alternatives have enabled the exchange of village craftsmen, farmers and women entrepreneurs between continents. At a technically more sophisticated level, there are commercially successful exchanges of plant managers in agro-food industries, such as those facilitated by the African Management Services Company supported by the World Bank group.

**Go with the flow, people**

Trickle-up, top-down, side-to-side, hand-to-hand, Internet link up; no matter the form such exchanges have taken, there has always been an element of subsidisation or commercial self-interest. When external funding is not available, these exchanges have to follow some economic rules. When companies cooperate – for example, when a Brazilian agricultural machinery enterprise is helping to establish a similar company in West Africa – they have to be protected to some extent from the winds of competition, whether from the steamrolling North or low-cost Asian industrial states. The enabling environment for South-South cooperation is complex: export guarantees, insurance, favourable duties and tariffs, fiscal incentives, market protection, patents, co-ownership, no competition agreements... All such measures date from the 1960s and 1970s, just as the concept of ‘the South’ does. At the beginning of the 21st century, as the world stumbles towards various modes of globalisation with a decent, but not stunning, degree of regulation to pare down the sharp ends, such steps are simply not going to be allowed. The old school soldiers on: when the Group of 77 (the world’s 126 developing countries) in Dubai in October 2002 set up a South-South Science and Technology network, it inevitably called for other countries to fund it. Have they not seen the writing on the wall that says ‘where there is no donor’?

The climate in which old-style South-South cooperation could thrive has gone. To borrow a phrase from an explorer from another age who knew his time was up, it may be gone for quite some time. There is a new, harsher climate. A leading thinker on Southern science in practice, Calestous Juma, sums it up: “In such a climate, reliance on public institutions as the main vehicle for technical cooperation provides little prospect for success. Yet in many developing countries, government and industry maintain mutual antagonism and suspicion – despite the fact that a country’s comparative advantage today depends largely on the degree to which the two cooperate. A South-South cooperation model cannot be justified on the basis of proximity, or membership of the same economic bloc. Strategic alliances need to be forged, irrespective of their geographical location.”

Indeed so. Or, go with the flow. Twenty years after that exchange between Casamance and Guatemala, two of its ‘enablers’ met again, at the Caribbean Herbs Business Forum in December 2002 in Jamaica. Institutions made the exchange possible, but two South-South people made it happen, and made it last. See links, page 10.
Root crops

Tarry not, taro

Rooted in culture, taro is both eaten and exalted in the Pacific, and dished up in the Caribbean and Africa too. Is its future precarious or promising?

If you were a taro – an oval tuber of 1 to 3 kg – and under-flowing with confidence, you might well think that the world was trying to talk you into believing that you had a serious personality disorder.

On the one hand, at least in the Pacific, you are revered by all the people you grow amongst. When you are served up at meal-times, everyone present is bound to cease whatever hostilities they were pursuing. You feature in traditional medicine and on coins in Samoa and Tonga; you might end up on a national flag one day. You rank 14th worldwide among staple crops. In Hawai‘i, you are so important that only men may grow you. In Cameroon, where the women do the growing and the cooking, you are the centre of a complex serving ritual, and are used as a way to ‘catch your man’. Something for everyone.

But. You are on the list of the world’s most under-utilised crops – though you could regard that as more of a challenge than a put-me-down. Your starchy flesh is toxic to an irradiating level, unless well cooked. You are perishable and store for a week, no more. You are susceptible to leaf blight, and to removal from entire nations’ fields and plates if resistance is not improved. Some people regard you as poor people’s food. And after a brief flirtation in the 1990s with the yuppie markets in Europe, the tubers were mashed with cassava as ‘fufu’, it is a staple in Cameroon, Ghana, Guinea and Nigeria. It shares the same ‘cocoyam’ with its relation Xanthosoma spp – also known as ‘macabo’ or ‘tannia’.

Grown in 30 countries, either in flooded wetlands or in uplands, the bulk of taro production is in Africa. Nigeria accounts for almost half of the world’s production of 8.5 million t. Other major producers in sub-Saharan Africa are Ghana, Côte d’Ivoire, Madagascar and the Central African Republic. After Africa comes Asia, where China is the main producer, followed by Japan, the Philippines and Thailand.

The heart of the diet

With production at 300,000 t, Oceania is outshone by all other regions except the Caribbean - but only in volume. For the general shine of taro is brightest right here among the nations and territories of the Pacific. Says FAO, “no other part of the world can match Oceania in terms of the intensity of production, utilisation and dependence on taro for food”. In Tonga, where tubers represent almost half the nation’s intake of dietary calories, about 40% of them come from taro. In Solomon Islands, about 10% of people’s dietary calories come from taro, 30% from other tubers.

It is in Samoa that the central role of taro is best expressed. Prior to a devastating spread of taro leaf blight in 1993, virtually all the population’s dietary intake from tubers (one-fifth of the overall diet) came from taro. The overnight removal of taro from household menus, and the prohibition of even modest exports to Samoans in Australia, New Zealand and California, was a great shock to the nation’s psyche, diet and economy - in short, to its identity.

That shock made many Pacific nations realise their vulnerability to leaf blight, and to re-focus on a crop that they had perhaps taken for granted. Given its sometimes spiritual attributes, one observer mused, maybe taro was a Pacific person’s tenth chakra - a person’s hub of energy.

In healthy moderation

After the blight, the new impulse. Through the TaroGen programme, set up in 1998 at the Fiji office of the Secretariat of the Pacific Community, advances have been made in the management, deployment and use of genetic diversity. The crop has bounced back in Samoa after farmers planted specially-bred disease-resistant varieties. Although more research is needed to maintain diversity and resistance, it must be accompanied by improved availability of resistant planting materials and seeds - as much a question of organisation as research breakthroughs.

Researchers are now focusing on DNA fingerprinting of taro varieties for the accurate comparison of accessions between countries. Another focus is on virus indexing procedures, to overcome quarantine concerns in international exchanges of taro germplasm. The establishment and maintenance of genebanks for in vitro storage remains a priority, but more attention is now going to seed storage systems and on-farm conservation.

The staples we eat

Chips, powders, flours, cakes, biscuits, ice-creams - banal enough, but power food in a way. Power for a people. Power for a plant.

For further reading:

The leaves we eat
CTA number 821. 10 credit points.

The staples we eat
CTA number 959. 10 credit points.
Libraries and information services

Knowledge banks?

Libraries have long been a society's store of knowledge. No longer staffed just by bookworms and book lovers, and often demand-led, they are stepping firmly into the future.

Ancient and modern

and, early one morning, at the side of a major road out of a regional town in almost any country and you will still probably see a library service van chugging out for its rounds to nearby villages for the day, set to return at sundown. Be it in Marondera in Zimbabwe, despite the woe of fuel shortages, or Tamale in Ghana (woe: a ticky motor), or Ljouwert in The Netherlands' Friesland (woe: ice on the roads), the sight of the local 'bibliobus' or 'mobile media centre' has for decades been as familiar as the delivery lorries of soft drinks companies.

In most villages today, you find one or more libraries, their modesty outshone by their ambition, their few dozen or so titles much coveted by their users. Such local initiatives occupy a special place in the constellation of world libraries, alongside some legendary libraries of much greater size.

Yesterday goes fast forward

In Alexandria, Egypt, the new Bibliotheca Alexandrina was opened in October 2002 on – or near – the site of the ancient one which aimed to serve humanity from 295 BC to the early 5th century AD. It shares some goals with the ancient library: a focal point for research, the advancement of knowledge and the open exchange of ideas, but not for storing every book in the world – that will happen one day in a place called the Internet.

In Timbuctou, Mali, work is progressing on preserving the 20,000 books, many scientific and agricultural and dating from the 13th century, that are stored in the Ahmed Baba Centre for Advanced Islamic Studies. Electronic copies will be available on the Internet. Just as these books recall the depth of Islamic scientific enlightenment, so the 8th century Stift in St Gallen, Switzerland, with its illuminated scientific books, is a reminder of how libraries run by monks served as a refuge for knowledge in Europe's Dark Ages.

What's in a word?

The English word 'library' probably comes from the Latin term 'libraria' for shop, from the time when books were sold, not lent, in bookstores. The French and Portuguese words for bookstore are, to this day, librairie and livraria. The Latin word for book is liber, or the bark of a tree, from when bark was used as paper.

The French word for library – bibliothèque – and the Portuguese biblioteca come from the time when a collection of books was regarded as a 'centre of knowledge'. Compare that with the super new turbo-language of 2003: 'knowledge centre'! The 'biblio' part is Greek for the papyrus reed which was flattened to form paper; the name was given to Byblos, the world's first paper-making town 3,000 years ago, in what is now Lebanon. The 'thèque' part comes from the Greek brain cells.

The hard part is choosing

While most people in society value libraries, few value librarians. This centuries-old paradox is changing, though, as these information professionals throw off their meek image and start to assert themselves. From the International Federation of Library Associations to the International Association of Agricultural Information Specialists, they are catching up with the task of becoming service-oriented, raising standards and seeking financial sustainability. And there is the second paradox: it is the current social process of democratisation, drawing inspiration from the library stored records of the struggles of our predecessors, which threatens the very necessary science of the librarian.

The spread of information and communication technologies has led many untrained people to believe that they can organise their information and find out about anything, anywhere, on the Internet. In theory, yes, but only if the information searcher knows how to search, if the information storers know how to make that information accessible, and if the information user knows how to sort the relevant wheat from the irrelevant chaff.

All this calls for more, and not less, use of the librarian's toolbox of classification systems, thesaurus and abstracting skills, and programming intelligent searches. With the growth of informal, community-based libraries, the challenge for information professionals is to share skills with the uninitiated, and for community and farmers' organisations to develop them. After the initial excitement of plugging into world-wide networks comes the realisation that it is not just a question of access but, increasingly, of being able to select information.

What global library?

There are, then, many bridges to cross along the library's path into the future. But while we must worry about selection skills, let us cross the first bridge first. In a seductive presentation to the International Telecommunications Union in 1994, the then Vice-President of the United States of America, Al Gore, called for the creation of a world network, based on the Internet, of libraries and knowledge. Every child, every school, in every city, town or village on the planet was to have access to this network by the year 2000. In a world apparently fonder of proposals than practice, however, it was not to be. Such has been the information explosion on the congested Internet since Gore's speech that the text of his address that April morning has been submerged and is no longer easily accessible. And that global library still has to chug its way over the horizon.

Even virtual libraries need gateways of bricks and mortar, tables and chairs, as in Nzérékoré, Guinea. When will UNESCO give special status to rural libraries, whether run by Spore readers or not, as it has to the knowledge centre of Chinguetti in Mauritania (top left) and the new Biblioteca Alexandrina (top right)?
Unlocking the public memory

“Unfortunately indigenous information, and therefore the accrued memory, tends not to be valued by its holders. They may either believe the experience is common knowledge or, at the other extreme, insist that culture dictates that it be retained as a sacred trust or, at the other extreme, insist that culture be retained as a sacred trust or, at the other extreme, insist that culture dictates that it be retained as a sacred trust or, at the other extreme, insist that culture dictates that it be retained as a sacred trust or, at the other extreme, insist that culture dictates that it be retained as a sacred trust or, at the other extreme, insist that culture dictates that it be retained as a sacred trust or, at the other extreme, insist that culture dictates that it be retained as a sacred trust or, at the other extreme, insist that culture dictates that it be retained as a sacred trust or, at the other extreme, insist that culture dictates that it be retained as a sacred trust or, at the other extreme, insist that culture dictates that it be retained as a sacred trust or, at the other extreme, insist that culture dictates that it be retained as a sacred trust.

Kay Raseroka, Botswana. President-elect (October 2003) of the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions, in her paper to the IFLA Conference where she was elected.

When virtual is more than real

Like many other institutions, CTA is creating a virtual library, for agriculture and rural development. It will make available – in electronic ‘virtual’ form – the best of the technical and project information which the Centre has accumulated during its first 20 years, and will link up with complementary collections.

This is not, though, CTA’s first virtual library. Way back in the 1980s, the Centre pioneered the use of CD-ROMS with bibliographic references for partner libraries in ACP States. This created an intricate web for document exchange and became the basis for decentralising some of CTA’s services.

In the mid-1990s, a second virtual library made public the course material of agricultural training centres. No documents were collected; instead, a central list was compiled of what was available on which Website, and hey presto! – a library was born.

Where libraries go now

e are standing, early one afternoon, on a major route out of Yaoundé, capital of Cameroon. Behind the lines of street food vendors, along the usual strip of telecentres, tailors and hairdressers (we just love the shack called www.josephine.coiffure.com!), a new kind of shop struts its stuff. The info-shop of the Centre de Documentation pour le Développement Rural (part of the Agricod network, see Spore 101) is receiving a steady stream of visitors, young and old, women and men, stopping by on their way home, to market, from school, to work. They come to buy manuals and newspapers, or take a look at the exhibition on drying cacao beans, or browse in the library. “It gets busiest here on the days they pay out pensions at the post office,” observes Pierre-Marc Ebede, one of the front managers. “Then the old men come to town with two things in mind: collect their money, and get some information for the village.”

At the back of the clean, light shop is the library. About 3,000 books, practical how-to manuals, reference books, magazines, policy tracts – the sort of mixture you find in Agricod and Spore – stand neatly, well thumbed, organised by the subject classification system known as Satis. Two students are absorbed in making notes from a pile of reference books. Ebede interjects: “Actually, about one-fifth of the library’s visitors are farmers with very specific questions.”

The hard copy

Move to a similar scene 3,000 kilometres away, in Kumasi, the Ashanti capital, in central Ghana. There, the library of the British Council, nowadays more of a locally focused development centre than its name implies, is undergoing its daily occupation by information-hungry extension workers, farmers, entrepreneurs and students. In her office, manager Nina Chachu is channeling the endless floods of enquiries and incoming publications. “I use Spore as a way to select my stock, and to get interesting Websites. Whilst I appreciate access to your Website and other electronic resources, I still think that in many developing countries ‘hard copies’ are still essential, especially given the state of the telecommunications and power infrastructures.”

Cross to one of the hills of Madagascar’s capital Antananarivo, to the teeming building of the Centre d’Information Technique et Economique de Madagascar (CITE), and climb up several stairways to their besieged library. It has become the information centre of preference for many Malagasy agri-entrepreneurs. For those who do not come to the city, CITE has 10 info-shops across the nation. In a busy street in the bustling neighbourhood of Ambohimandringa in Antsirabé, the shop nestles near a butcher’s shopfront displaying raw and processed meats, including the city’s renowned sausages. Inside the info-shop, farmers and food processors from the nearby market can find tips on how to better produce and preserve such sausages, and other food products.

In a world where information has become a commodity, it should not be surprising that many libraries have metamorphosed into such info-shops, led by the development agencies taking information to the people.

We ❤ libraries

Dozens of respondents to the recent ‘Uses of Spore’ survey talked proudly of their ‘home library’, usually a modest collection of books and magazines, much used, highly coveted and obtained with great effort, and of their village information centres, with reading evenings and study days.

More formal libraries also use Spore as a direct source of information and a gateway to more. At the Uyo Agro-studies and Practical Centre in Nigeria’s Akwa Ibom State, librarian Lucy Rogers Eduok uses Spore as “a veritable source of information bordering on new technology adoption, announcement of new publications and provision of research inputs.”

Librarian Ferdinand Khama Chadokweenda in Gokwe, Zimbabwe, reports that “the major use of Spore at this centre is as a periodical, circulating from person to person. It provides subject material for local extension officers and agriculture teachers in local secondary schools.”
Trickle across

- After trickle-down and trickle-up strategies, how about a horizontal approach, from rural community to rural community, but on a large scale? That was the underlying issue at a workshop on the role of farmers’ organisations and associations in the design, production and follow-up of technical information materials, organised by CTA in December 2002 in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso.

Given their special position in the rural media landscape, local radio stations were well represented among the 22 participants from West, Central and Eastern Africa and networks, as were farmers’ federations. Their conclusions – sound audience research, and training for farmers’ groups to satisfy the needs of the media. Will these be followed up? If the participants’ energy is an indicator, then yes! They produced a daily seminar paper in French and English, got coverage in national and internet press services, and left with a lot of homework. The star of the show? Jeanette Nelken, from a rural radio station in Chad. She missed her plane, and travelled by road for 4 days to make it to the workshop. Cool, Jeanette.

More work for Decent Work

- The ‘Decent Work in Agriculture’ symposium will take place in Geneva from 15 to 18 September 2003. Themes include safe work, women in agriculture, ILO standards and workers’ education.

Elizabeth Goodson
ILO Bureau for Workers’ Activities
4, route des Morillons
CH-1211 Geneva 22, Switzerland
Fax: +41 22 799 6570
Email: actra@ilo.org

Ah! Management

- On 11 February 2003, the Management for Development Foundation of The Netherlands opened a new management training office in Arusha, Tanzania. Its courses, scheduled to start towards the end of 2003, will include: ‘Integral project cycle management’ (6–17 October); ‘Institutional development and organisation strengthening’ (10–21 November); and ‘Project management tools and skills’ and ‘Managing sector-wide approach programmes’ (both 1–12 December). Each course costs US$ 1,300 plus accommodation and travel.

MDF-ESA
PO Box 2894, Arusha, Tanzania
Fax: +31 318 614 503
Email: mdf@mdf.nl

Women in charge

- For women to gain access to resources and have a say in their own destinies continues to be a major challenge. In the Mozambican districts of Tete and Changara, female-headed households have taken things into their own hands, forming groups to provide clean water and to construct toilets to improve family health. These groups are also playing a dominant role in the area by producing seeds. The group in the village of Salinhanga runs a productive goat-keeping enterprise which earns revenue through the sale of goat kids to other group members.

All these initiatives are part of the Projecto Cobarema (community-based resource management), an initiative supported by the German NGO Welt friedendienst. Since 1999, Projecto Cobarema has been working to increase communities’ self-reliance and to conserve the hilly areas flanking the Zambezi River valley.

Other activities include farmer-to-farmer extension, farmer exchange visits, seed fairs and training programmes organised in conjunction with Mozambique’s Department of Agriculture.

The essence gets to you

- Downtown in Kingston, Jamaica, in a bustling little area of new small businesses, stand two symbols of enterprises blowing new life into agricultural production. One is the LH Publishing company whose recent books on herbs, reviewed in this issue, have revived local farmers’ interest. A few doors away, unbeknownst to the other, is Starfish Oils, a rising producer of essential oils and soaps made from herbs. For these entrepreneurs, herbs can do no wrong.

The attractions of the herbal market were confirmed in early December 2002, over on the other side of the island, at the Caribbean Herbs Business Forum in Montego Bay. About 150 delegates converged for a packed programme of exchanges, presentations and field trips.

As with earlier moots in South Africa in 2000 and in Vanuatu in February 2002, the pace was brisk and business-like. No wonder. The need for crop and product diversification is critical for the region, for years dependent on commodity crops such as sugar cane and banana. The potential of its biodiversity is clear not only to producers, but also to the ‘aromatics’ trade – richly represented from North America and Europe.

The market is literally within a hand’s reach for the grabbing, but it has to be a well-organised hand. Some exceptionally clear recommendations emerged on training, branding and positioning, and the certification of producers and products, respectful of traditional knowledge and keenly aware of the needs of processors and importers. The new Caribbean Herbs Business Association (CH BA), proposed at the forum, will surely help them in their conquests, complementing the Caribbean Association of Researchers and Herbal Practitioners (CARAPA) launched in 1998. Among the follow-up actions is the ‘Out of the Caribbean’ herb exhibit, to be launched in the UK in April 2003, and based on 2002’s ‘Out of Africa’ exhibit (see Spore 99).

The forum was organised by the Centre for the Development of Enterprise (CDE), the Commonwealth Secretariat, CTA and the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA), together with the Jamaican Promotions Corporation (JAM PRO).

Interim Executive Secretariat
Caribbean Herbs Business Association
c/o Aaron Parker, Judith Ann Francis
NCLA, T&T Office
PO Box 1318, Port of Spain
Trinidad and Tobago
Fax: +1 868 628 4562
Email: icatt@iicacar.org
See also: www.caribbeanherbs.net
The insect – our main rival?

Though tiny creatures, insects are human beings’ chief rival for the available food supply of the world. They come in infinite varieties and have always adapted to consume any kind of organic material in the world – plant or animal, living or dead, raw or manufactured.

In Kenya, as in many other ACP countries, a wide range of methods has been tried out to control the devastating effects of stemborers, such as the spotted stemborer (Chilo partellus), the maize stalkborer (Busseola fusca) and the pink stemborer (Sesamia calamistis). The methods, including good habitat management, cultural practices such as burning affected areas, biological control and the use of conventional insecticides, have proved inadequate.

The development of resistant plant varieties has long been researched.

Now a solution to the stemborer problem seems to be in the offing. Since 2000, scientists of the Insect Resistant Maize for Africa (IRM A) project in Kenya have been working to develop genetically modified varieties of maize – Bt maize – for use as an alternative or addition to other stemborer control systems.

The name Bt is taken from Bacillus thuringiensis, a naturally occurring soil bacterium found worldwide. It produces crystal-like proteins which become toxic when they get inside the stomachs of specific insects.

Bt maize produces its own Bt protein which kills any insect feeding on the maize plant. The technology is not new. Nearly 40% of maize grown in the US and Canada carries the Bt gene. What is new is finding Bt maize varieties that are effective against each of the stemborer species and thrive in Kenyan conditions. Despite the controversies surrounding genetic modification, the varieties are being developed in Kenya and then distributed to other countries.

The Kenyan Agricultural Research Institute (KARI) is familiarising the country’s extension workers with Bt maize.

A testing time for tsetse eradication?

Even with 100 years of experience and more than enough tools in the toolbox, the way forward for tsetse control continues to be a hotly debated subject. “Tsetse eradication is a vision, control is a strategy” said one participant at a discussion workshop held recently by the Animal Health Programme of the British Department for International Development (DFID) on ‘Tsetse control – the next hundred years’.

Achieving control is an ongoing process. Measures such as the use of drugs, insecticide-treated cattle, traps and spraying, which are relatively cost-effective, need to be implemented year after year.

Through such measures many farmers have already achieved effective control, although there are worrying signs of drug resistance. Sterile Insect Technique (SIT) is a dedicated eradication strategy but it has to be preceded by standard control techniques that have reduced fly numbers. Even if eradication is achieved, the threat of reinvansion remains.

Moreover, controlling trypanosomiasis is not the only task in hand for resource-poor farmers and eliminating this disease will not guarantee improved animal health. Other diseases, as well as poor nutrition and animal husbandry techniques, impact on productivity.

And the fear of tsetse-infested areas puts added pressure on the decreasing amount of productive land available for growing populations.

So what is the way forward? The scientific community

Is microfinance a poverty breaker?

Financial services in Djibouti are getting much-needed working capital from a loan of US$ 3.6 million from the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), agreed with the government in February 2003. The project will mainly target 150,000 people in rural areas, active in animal husbandry, gardening and agriculture, fishing, handicrafts and other small-scale income-generating activities. Special attention goes to unemployed youth and households headed by widows or divorced women. With such levels of loan capital, microfinance might yet prove to be a route out of poverty.

Hey, honey – an award

Dreams don’t come much sweeter than this. Honey Care Africa, a small business in Kenya supported by the International Finance Corporation, has won the first Equator Prize.

Launched in 2002 by a cluster of international agencies such as IUCN (the World Conservation Union) and the World Bank, the prize honours community-based poverty reduction initiatives in countries on or near the Equator.

Honey Care introduced Kenyan small-scale farmers to commercial beekeeping and successfully built a market for their honey, together with Africa Now, a British NGO. The key to success? Apparently, their micro-leasing approach whereby more farmers can access processing and packaging technology. Didn’t Spare talk of micro-leasing years ago?

Niger notes better food security

The January 2003 Niger report of the Famine Early Warning Systems Network (FEWS) says there is good access to cereal products on a household level. Harvests have been mostly plentiful and such items as groundnuts, sesame and ducks have been widely sold on the markets. Food staples, on the other hand – mostly millet and sorghum – have been stockpiled for family food security.

In December 2002, cereal prices in major urban markets – Niamey, Zinder, Maradi and Tillabery – were dropping. The major food staples, millet and sorghum, however, were marketed at higher prices than in 2001. Livestock too is precarious: prices have increased, due to bad pastures and unsustainable exports to Nigeria.

- Afril News
Jamaican first with ISO 14001

The Jamaica Producers farms group – comprising the island’s Eastern and St Mary Banana Estates – has been given ISO 14001 certification, the first agricultural entity in the Caribbean to do so. The ISO 14000 series of the International Standards Organisation covers the environmental responsibilities of an enterprise; ISO 14001 covers the management aspects. The group’s ‘Simply Green, Keep It Clean’ system covers the meticulous and environmentally correct disposal of waste and chemicals, the recycling of plastic bottles and the polyethylene sleeves which protect the growing banana fruit, and training of all staff handling pesticides. With this certification, the group has increased its sales to Britain’s TESCO supermarket chain, which takes 60% of its output.

Drawing a road map for African science

Barely installed in its new Pretoria offices, the African Union’s New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD) has started work on a new ‘road map’ for the future of science on the continent. Designed by a February 2003 meeting of science policy advisers, it was described by one participant as a way “to craft a wider African process on science and technology”.

The online Sci.Dev magazine (see Spore 98) has taken up the challenge. With a long, lucid editorial on 24 February headed ‘Gleam of hope for African science?’, it spoke of the need for NEPAD to follow participatory science policy development and invited readers to join the process. A discussion forum was due to follow.

Safe pea to harvest

Grasspea (Lathyrus sativus L.; guaya in Ethiopia and gilb in Sudan) has long been known as a source of forage for animals. It grows mainly in north and north-east Africa, southern Europe, the Middle East and South Asia. It is rich in protein (30%), improves the quality of sheep’s wool, fixes nitrogen in the soil and is very drought resistant. Both foliage and seeds are used for forage and the latter also for human consumption. But the plant contains a neurotoxin which paralyses leg muscles in humans if eaten as a main source of food for more than 3 months. It is harmless for animals and less harmful for humans when eaten in small quantities and accompanied by vitamin A-rich green vegetables. Especially in times of drought, when the beans are the only source of food for many people in Ethiopia, India and Sudan, the irreversible disease (neurolathyrism, named after the plant) takes its toll.

Researchers working at the International Center for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas (ICARDA) harvested the first grasspea lines with low neurotoxin levels during trials in 2002. Four new lines resulted from a breeding programme, crossing low toxin Lathyrus varieties from the Middle East with varieties from Asia and Africa that contain higher levels of neurotoxin. Ethiopian researchers have now started developing locally adapted lines and seed production programmes.
The smart set

Progress is being made in the development of the Toolkit for managers of information projects, following a meeting of some 30 experts in evaluation and information management in Amsterdam, The Netherlands in late November 2002. Organised by its host the Royal Tropical Institute (KIT), the International Institute for Communication and Development (IICD) and CTA, the ‘Smart Tools’ workshop discussed and assigned tasks to bring the toolkit towards completion.

Much of the debate focused on how practitioners in information projects should evaluate the performance of their projects for self-assessment, motivated by self-learning, with a view to developing good project management practice. Central to this is the development of a multi-layered road map that presents methodological approaches for performance evaluation to produce a user-friendly toolkit. The workshop drew up guidelines and assigned tasks for writing the tools – preparatory tools, process tools and activity tools. All that someone evaluating an information project might need, and all with an eye on improved customer service.

The customer is king, and no information project is worth its salt until it recognises that.

Coming to terms

With the clock already ticking uncomfortably fast on world trade talks, the CTA seminar on ‘Meeting the challenge of effective ACP participation in international trade negotiations’ came not a moment too soon, in late November 2002 in Brussels, Belgium. For ACP countries, the challenge is to focus on two separate and moving targets: the European Union and its deals with the ACP group and regions, and the World Trade Organisation (see Spore 100).

Almost within shouting distance of EU headquarters, this was one seminar in CTA’s busy schedule which had no field visits to local projects. In Brussels, it is not the smell of the soil, field and farm which prevails but – there is a difference – that of power, with all its facets of negotiation, lobbying and trade interests.

So it was the powerful, and the empowered and to-be-empowered, who came together and open-heartedly shared their positions, explaining differences and clarifying tactics. Among the 140-plus participants were negotiators at WTO and EU fora, policy-makers and representatives of regional organisations, support organisations for producers, processors and traders, resource centres on trade and information specialists.

The meeting had been preceded by a lively electronic forum (with about 200 exchanges, a good level for this new mechanism), and provided with extensive documentation. It was no doubt the high quality of these preparations, plus the desire of all present for a productive meeting, which led to its open exchanges. The lawyers who defended both sides of the recent banana trade dispute biffed their tactics in public, like a Punch-and-Judy show; the NGOs who campaign to defend such ACP sectors as sugar got mightily mashed up by representatives of those very same sectors; and the fairly basic differences between, say, a pineapple grower and ‘the people who are trying to decide our destiny’ got a good airing too. Then they moved on to the real business, laying the ground for building skills and networks.

The event was covered by an on-site newspaper The Negotiator, also widely distributed by email, allowing followers from as far apart as Burkina Faso and Indonesia to hear in Brussels. Its last issue sums up the results and sets the mood for the next steps (at the Ministerial session in Cancun, Mexico, in September 2003):

“It was a bit bristly at times, but it no doubt helped the participants to face the friendly argy-bargy and consensus (ABC) of the work to come.”

The printed report is due to be published in August 2003. Full documentation, including The Negotiator, online at: www.cta.int/ctaseminar2002

Prepare to repair

There is room for importing appropriate tractors and farm equipment to meet the cultivation needs of Pacific island countries, concluded participants at a regional workshop on “Tractor operations, safety and maintenance”. The event was organised in Tonga in 2002 by the Institute for Research, Training and Extension in Agriculture (IRETA) at the University of the South Pacific, with CTA support. The participants recommended sub-regional workshops on maintenance and safety, pointing out that farm equipment in the Pacific is generally in a poor state of repair.

Greener Limonade

The environment is greener now in the Limonade area of northern Haiti, thanks to a reforestation programme by the World Food Programme (WFP) and the Ministry of Agriculture. WFP donated seeds and 30,000 plastic gro-bags, and the Ministry provided technical assistance and a plant nursery. Trees include breadfruit, oranges and lemons. More than 5,000 people-days have been spent in replanting since work started in May 2002.

Water power

Rural electrification, integrated water management and small-scale hydropower are the main subjects for discussion at the Hydro Africa 2003 conference, to be held in Arusha, Tanzania, 17–19 November 2003, by the International Centre for Hydropower and the Tanzania Electricity Supply Company Ltd.

The International Centre for Hydropower
Klebuveien 153
NO-7465 Trondheim, Norway
Fax: +47 73 59 07 81
Email: lfi@ich.no
Website: www.ich.no/hydroafrica.htm

Long live the screw pines

The multipurpose screw pine tree (Pandanus tectorius) is an important source of food, medicine and building material in the Pacific nation of Kiribati, but it is an endangered species. A joint programme by the FAO, the South Pacific Community and the South Pacific Regional Initiative on Forest Genetic Resources is establishing a genebank collection at the Central Nursery and promoting propagation and conservation. For starters, 550 trees have been planted in the Kiritimati area.
Southern partners

With a great deal of political support behind the notion of South-South cooperation and the exchange of agricultural and related skills and knowledge between regions and countries, it is no wonder that there are many programmes to make this happen.

There are good opportunities to obtain funds for short-term exchange visits between people linked with farmers’ organisations and research programmes. Such visits often arise through networking between NGOs and publications such as Spore. The exchange can focus on technical knowledge, such as institutional guarantees. Locally based NGO donors or an official aid agency, usually located in or traceable through embassies, often welcome the opportunity to support South-South cooperation as opposed to the more usual investment in purely local initiatives.

Longer-lasting exchanges, which involve the presence of a professional on an agricultural programme for 2 to 3 years, require more financial backing and logistical support. Here, the international agencies have a range of programmes through which more than 1,000 South-South technical exchanges take place each year. Officially, these are government-to-government programmes with external support. However, the international agencies are, as public bodies, always open to proposals from the private and civil society sector and to facilitating the involvement of government in arranging the exchange. The attitude of the FAO SPFS programme (see main article) is typical: “The programme follows a bottom-up approach in which farmers are the most important decision-makers.” The door is open!

People-to-people programmes

As always, we encourage readers in both governmental and non-governmental bodies, at local or national level, to approach such programmes. The good ones are always looking for something “different” to support, and you could surprise yourselves with what can be done. The three principal agencies with active programmes affecting agriculture (including aspects of science and technology, and working conditions) are in the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the International Labour Office (ILO). Try to seek out the country offices of these agencies or contact these specific programmes at their headquarters.

Index cards

Interested in developing your own (organisation’s) library and looking for more contacts? Here are three excellent ports of call to drop in on.

The International Association of Agricultural Information Specialists (IAALD) is a loose and open membership organisation. Relatively low on resources, but peopled by some of the best networkers around, it is always a good source of shared experience. Ask for special rates for developing country members.

The IAALD World Directory of Agricultural Information Resource Centers (see Spore 95) is now available online through the National Information Services Corporation. www.nisc.com

Is your priority to get some order into those rows of books and magazines in your library? A classic work happens to come from the world of health information workers in Africa and Asia who have been through the same problems, and have pooled their experiences through the Healthlink network. Their Resource centre manual is highly relevant for small rural libraries, but paradoxically is no longer in print and is available only on the World Wide Web - and downloadable in small format. Worth getting. www.healthlink.org.uk/roman/rchome.html

Wider in scope, but also full of helpful networking colleagues is the International Foundation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA). Options for membership range from full institutional status to ‘one-person’ library managers and individuals.

In a recent case involving Indian and Malian NGOs through the Delhi-based D development Alternatives – the artisanal production of paper from agricultural ‘wastes’. Or it can be about the methodologies and management of extension communication, rural finance or the use of information and communication technologies.

Show your innovation

As in all good funding strategies, it is important to persuade a potential financial partner of the innovative nature of the exchange, as well as providing
Publications

Come in, number 9

■ CTA’s Web magazine ICT Update, an awareness service on information and communication technologies for ACP agriculture, has recently undergone some substantial re-thinking about its content and design. Issue 9, published on 31 December 2002, featured Agricultural Market Information Services, including items on MIS in Kenya and Mali, and on MIS management, all echoing Spore 96, but with an ICT-tint and many more sources. Future topics include rural connectivity; issue 8, published in October 2002 highlighted Gender and ICTs.

It’s available in print, on a bi-monthly basis. The electronic version is livelier and more topical, with a promised 10 extra news items each week.

ICT Update
Print version, 8 pages, bi-monthly. Free. Subscribe at ICT Update office, at CTA address (see page 15)
Electronic edition. Subscribe at ICTupdate.cta.int

Everyday politics

■ A strongly developed civil society is nowadays regarded as essential in the democratisation process. The breadth and diversity of ‘civil society’ allow only broad definitions, such as ‘it represents the people and functions as the conscience of the government’, holding it responsible for what it was elected to do. And where there is no choice to be made in government, social movements are vital in bringing about changes.

Farmers’ organisations, which can represent the rural population, have a vital role to play here. That role, and how civil society has developed and how it functions vis-à-vis the State and democratisation, have not been extensively researched until now.

This compilation of 13 papers from the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA) presents research findings on rural peasant organisations in Cameroon, Cape Verde, Kenya, Nigeria, Senegal, Sudan, Tunisia and Zimbabwe.

An interesting collection, it pulls together very diverse experiences of different kinds of organisations, including ones organised on the basis of age, or activists interests, or a common objective such as community development, welfare or mutual support. You realise that the question ‘just how representative are they?’ has many answers.

Peasant organisations and the democratisation process in Africa
CODESRIA
PO Box 3304
Dakar, Senegal
Fax: +221 8241289
Email: codesria@telecomplus.sn

Orders from outside Senegal:
African Books Collective Ltd
The Jam Factory
27 Park End Street
Oxford, OX1 1HU, UK
Fax: +44 1865 792928
Email: abc@africanbookscollective.com

Seeing with slogans

A summary of fierce debates between WTO national delegations, governments, the European Commission, NGOs, researchers and farmers’ organisations about how non-trade concerns (such as jobs, culture and environment) in agriculture need to influence current international trade negotiations (see Spore 98). By squeezing the arguments into little more than slogans, it gives a thankfully clear, albeit simple, picture of these complex issues.

Agriulture beyond trade

10 credit points

Let’s negotiate

Want to dig a few layers deeper in the agricultural trade negotiations?

Prepared for the CTA seminar in November 2002 (see News in Brief), these pamphlets explain the WTO and Cotonou agreements and the place of agriculture and ACP countries in current negotiations on trade, agriculture and intellectual property rights.

Cotonou, WTO: The challenge for ACP agriculture. 6 pages to understand, anticipate and debate
By B Hermelin, J-P Rolland and K Tavernier, Solagral & CTA, 2002. 6 pages. ISBN 2 84034 040 2 or 92 9081 1672

CTA number 1104.
10 credit points

Organic prospects

A wealth of wisdom, and a fair portion of hope, came from this 2001 conference (see Spore 97). Issues include regular production, national standards and certification, and developing markets.

Supporting the diversification of exports in the Caribbean/Latin American region through the development of organic horticulture

CTA number 1106.
10 credit points

Updates for publishers

■ As from January 2003, the email address for Hans Zell Publishing, the source of the African Publishing Companion, is hanszell@hanszell.co.uk. The Website is unchanged at www.hanszell.co.uk.

The Bellagio Publishing Network has launched an open discussion list to “share knowledge about the challenges and joys of publishing” in developing countries. Subscribe at: bellagiopublishingnetwork.org

Their new postal address is:
BPN, PO Box 1369, Oxford OX4 4ZR, UK
Fax: +44 1865 250024

Published by Solagral & CTA, 2002.
54 pp. ISBN 2 84034 039 9
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Off the silk route

The mulberry (Morus spp.) is well known as a major food source for the silkworm (Bombyx mori) and so many people associate the tree with silk production. It has been used for that for ages and, as such, is one of the oldest domesticated trees in the world. Its foliage is usually fed to animals as a by-product, and it is only in the past two decades that research has started to focus on cultivation specifically for animal feed.

Some small farmers in eastern Africa, mainly in Tanzania and Kenya, harvest the foliage from mulberry trees as part of the diet offered to ruminants. Its nutritive value is well recognised, but this has not led to much planting of mulberry trees.

The articles in Mulberry for animal production were first used in an electronic conference – the first on the topic – held in mid-2000. The topics covered include germplasm resources in various countries, agronomic issues, chemical composition, nutritive value and animal performance. This is not a ‘How to cultivate mulberry’ book, but it recounts various experiences around the world. A good introduction if you are considering embracing the mulberry.

Draining effects

Irrigation is often afflicted by two major physical problems: waterlogging and salinisation. Waterlogging occurs when irrigation water cannot penetrate the sub soil quickly enough due to, for instance, an impermeable clay layer. The air spaces in the soil get filled with water and the plant’s roots suffocate.

Salinisation occurs when salts accumulate in the top layers of the soil. They dissolve in water and when it evaporates the salts are left behind in the topsoil. This kills crops if the concentrations become too high. A common practice is to flush extra irrigation water to wash away the salts.

A proper drainage system is essential to prevent these problems occurring. Instead of draining excess water mechanically with pumps, it can be ‘removed’ by growing vegetation to absorb the water. This method, known as biodrainage, is economically attractive, requires only an initial investment in planting and, once established, can produce economic returns in the form of fodder, wood or fibre harvested.

This compilation of principle and practice, Biodrainage, is a specialist work on a promising topic for water professionals and drainage experts.

Thrown out with the bargain

The practice of deficit irrigation – whereby water supply is reduced below maximum levels and mild stress is allowed with minimal effects on yield – is described in these technical and specialist papers. Deficit irrigation practices

Report of baseline study on land and property grabbing

Or outside Botswana:

African Books Collective Ltd
The Jam Factory
27 Park End Street
Oxford, OX1 1HU
UK
Fax: +44 1865 793298
Email: abc@africanbookscollective.com
Pep up your health

Perhaps you never knew that rosemary and cayenne pepper both raise your blood pressure, but that tea made with watermelon seeds can reduce it again? We cannot all be herbalists, can we? Maybe we could, if every country followed this feasty little example, from Jamaica, of producing a pocket dictionary of its herbs and medicinal plants. A guide to healthy living, it lists herbs from A to Z, with their nutritional use and the ailments they can treat. The companion volume on Caribbean herbs, wider in scope, is a worthy complement.

Both books are aimed at consumers, but they will also give the farmer and the backyard producer a good idea of what the market wants.

How to obtain these publications

The green leaf symbol indicates publications that are on CTAs list. Subscribers to the Publications Distribution Service (PDS) can obtain them from CTA. All other publications, indicated by an orange square, are available from the publishers listed, or through commercial outlets.

Publications on CTAs list are available free-of-charge to PDS subscribers. Subscribers can order publications on CTAs list up to the value of the credit points available to them. Subscribers can only request publications on the order forms provided.

Non-subscribers who wish to join the scheme should write to CTA for an application form. Applications will be considered from agricultural and rural development organisations in the ACP (Africa, Caribbean and Pacific) Group of States; individuals resident in ACP countries may also apply. If you are not eligible for a free subscription to the PDS, or if you need publications beyond your free credit allocation, you may buy publications on CTAs list from our commercial distributor: CTA Publications ITDG Publishing, 103-105 Southampton Row, London WC1B 4HL, UK. Fax: +44 20 7436 2013 Email: ctat@pubs.org — Website: www.itdgpublishing.org.uk

A continent’s outlook

People and the environment have always been tightly interwoven, although it is only in the past four or five decades that the struggle for natural resources has visibly etched its mark on nature and on policy agendas. Just how interwoven they are is made fascinatingly clear in Africa environment outlook. Its chapters are grouped around different natural resources – land, fresh water, forests and marine environments – described according to principal political regions. Whether you want scenarios for the future, or a sounder assessment of the continent’s present through the unfolding of its past, you will rarely find a better environmental reader.

Cultivation of soya and other legumes

LMH official dictionary of Jamaican herbs & medicinal plants and their uses

JMD 395 • £ 7.75

LMH official dictionary of Caribbean herbs & medicinal plants and their uses

JMD 395 • £ 7.75

LMH Publishing, PO Box 8296
Kingston, Jamaica
Fax: +1 876 928 80 36
Email: lhm@jmamaica.com

Africa environment outlook: past, present and future perspectives

Published by UNEP, 2002. 400 pp.
ISBN 9280721011
US$ 37.50 • £ 34.75
Stock number: 2987
Earthprint Ltd.
PO Box 119
Steenosage
Herts SG1 4TP
UK
Fax: +44 1438 749844
Email: customerservices@earthprint.com
Available online at: www.unep.org/aeo/

LMH compiled

Glossary of biotechnology for food and agriculture

US$ 16 • £ 15.55
For FAO address see elsewhere

What are the limits?

An accessible list of terms and acronyms that are used regularly in biotechnology and its application in food and agriculture. A convenient reference work for researchers, students and technicians, especially when English is not their native language.

Glossary of biotechnology for food and agriculture

US$ 16 • £ 15.55
For FAO address see elsewhere

In so many words

The wide variety of 24 papers from a 2000 workshop held in Kenya makes it a good reader for policy-makers and students in higher education.

Nature calls

Natural resources management in African agriculture: Understanding and improving current practices

ISBN 0851995845, GBP 60 • £ 92
CABI Publishing
Wallington, Oxfordshire
OX10 8DE, UK
Fax: +44 1491 833508
Email: cab@cabi.org

Available online at: www.unep.org/aeo/
Don't worry, the headline is not another exhortation from on high to produce more. It is your own wish. Production of livestock, crops and vegetables are the subjects which our subscribers most want to read about, according to an analysis of the distribution of 66,000 books ordered from CTA’s Publications Distribution Service under the credit point scheme in 2002. Other top topics are information, training, marketing and organisation and management.

These preferences confirm the responses to the Uses of Spore survey in 2002 which showed that more than one in four respondents wanted more coverage of livestock issues, and one in five more coverage of information and communication. The list (see table) of the Top 20 most ordered publications – of which five from ACP publishers – includes eight titles related to livestock, from beekeeping to animal breeding manuals. Top of the list is the manual Poultry, of which 960 copies were ordered, followed by Where there is no vet.

Another six titles relate to information skills, ranging from the specifics of Strengthening biometry (statistical analysis) to the broad overview of the Information revolutions taking place at community and national level throughout ACP countries; this group includes The ABC of book publishing and the Development of training materials.

Of special note as the third most ordered book is the new guide to Setting up and running a small food business; its popularity has given new energy to the compilers of the series on food processing, of which this was the first to appear, in late 2001. Strong interest in sound agriculture practice is also clear; just creeping into the Top 20 is Producing food without pesticides, and the new survey of World markets for organic fruit and vegetables, published in mid-2002, soon caught the interest of many subscribers.

A similar picture exists in the parallel Top 20 French-language books, which is headed by L'élevage de la volaille, the French edition of Poultry. There is a similar pattern of interests, but with some differences in titles: the popularity of a beekeeping book in English, for example, is matched by a book on duck rearing in French. Another common feature is the interest shown in series of publications.

So many interests
The Top 20 is, however, just the tip of a mass of titles for which there is a broad demand. If you ever wondered why the CTA Publications Catalogue is so thick, now you know. In all, orders were received for 650 of the approximately 680 titles on the CTA list, the difference due to some titles joining the list near the year’s end, with the first orders coming in 2003. And, as in any ‘shop’, one or two items just did not get asked for. That idea of the shop holds true when it comes to special marketing efforts. When we draw attention in Spore to a new title, or to an old one whose ‘sales’ are sagging, or do a special mailing to special interest groups – you soon see the orders surge. But, once in the shop, people do like to have a good look around.

Orders for the 20 favourite titles account for a quarter of the 36,500 orders placed for English books, and a third of the 28,500 orders for French titles. Most other orders were for the range of Portuguese-language titles in stock.

Who wants to know?
Two-thirds of all the publications ordered are intended for people who manage services or an enterprise (such as suppliers, traders and processors) and for communicators (such as extension and field workers). About a fifth are the hands-on, how-to manuals used by producer groups and their individual members. The remainder are publications for researchers and policy-makers on technical, political and socio-economic issues. This picture is the same for both French- and English-language titles, and reflects the composition of our subscribers’ list. Incidentally, this aspect of meeting needs is reflected by the fact that of the Top 20 titles, 18 English and 19 French are CTA’s own publications or, predominantly, co-publications with another publisher. These are titles for which CTA identified a clear need from its constituency, and the demand has proved the Centre right.

We shall not go into the detail of who is ordering which publications, because we all know that policy-makers keep chickens and farmers’ associations have an interest in following policy issues. If you’re in Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Ethiopia or Nigeria, you’ll be proud to see that your five countries often account for at least half of the orders for a title. There are, though, more than enough titles for every subscriber to get their fair share in 2002, all subscribers together spent more than 1,090,000 credits, but your kitty is not empty yet. Try to take a look at the latest Publications Catalogue, on the CTA Website www.cta.int.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Top 20 books in English of 2002</th>
<th>CTA number</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Poultry. Tropical Agriculturalist series</td>
<td>244</td>
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<td>2. Where there is no vet</td>
<td>917</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Setting up and running a small food business. Opportunities in Food Processing series</td>
<td>1041</td>
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<td>4. Information revolutions</td>
<td>1037</td>
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<td>5. Learn how to grow onions, garlic and leek</td>
<td>1006</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. People’s farming workbook</td>
<td>939</td>
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<tr>
<td>7. Animal breeding. Tropical Agriculturalist series</td>
<td>603</td>
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<tr>
<td>8. Simple construction surveying for rural applications. Agrodok series</td>
<td>261</td>
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<tr>
<td>9. World markets for organic fruit and vegetables</td>
<td>1055</td>
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<td>10. Animal production in the tropics and subtropics</td>
<td>392</td>
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<tr>
<td>11. Animal health – vol 1 – general principles</td>
<td>711</td>
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<tr>
<td>12. Information support for agricultural policy formulation. Working Document series</td>
<td>8004</td>
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<tr>
<td>13. Beekeeping in the tropics. Agrodok series</td>
<td>745</td>
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<td>15. Learning together</td>
<td>1045</td>
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<td>17. The ABC of book publishing</td>
<td>961</td>
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<tr>
<td>18. Livestock production systems. Tropical Agriculturalist series</td>
<td>714</td>
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<tr>
<td>19. Citrus nurseries and planting techniques</td>
<td>928</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. Producing food without pesticides local solutions to crop pest control in West Africa</td>
<td>927</td>
</tr>
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Mailbox

Go with your flow

A farmer’s work is never done, we know, but you as farmers must know how to make farming easier, more sustainable, profitable and rewarding. Let it simply flow from your pens, mail it to Spore’s Mailbox and share it with everyone else!

Drive on, thrive on

Lennox Wilson A. Chitonga of Kaphiri Kamodzi Farm near Mwanza in Malawi is a smart farmer. He tells of the transformation of one hectare of dry, useless land into thriving farmland. The farm is situated west of Middle Shire river. The area used to be uninhabited because it lies in the rain shadow of a mountain range and thus has limited rainfall. The farm was established on land abandoned by two previous occupants because of water stress. In the late 1990s Mr Chitonga carried out conservation work on the farm, including building 200 m of contours and an extension agent in Ghana. He is very worried, like others, about the effects of climate change on agriculture in his country. “At the moment, cultivation methods based on former notions cause large-scale damage. In all cases, the result leads to vulnerable food security and a bitter end. I firmly believe that the altitude range of agroecological zones for field crops should be changed with regard to the dramatic climate change. It implies that there is a need to vaccinate people with new ideas against ignorance. To tackle the disaster we have to create an environmental awareness among farmers so that crop husbandry will be performed in the right time and at the right place.”

Lonely out front?

After ten years of reading, for me Spore still commands the lead among agricultural magazines,” writes Martin Francis Arko, an extension agent in Ghana. He is very happy, too, with CTA’s book distribution system: “It gives us access to good study books, ideal for use in the field. My extension support services have made quite an impact in the farming community.”

As fickle as the weather...

In the course of the cropping season, there is often not enough rain or a sudden halt to the rainy season, and meteorologists often get it wrong, according to Coffi Sedji-vo Elvis Padonou of Promotion Jeunesse Unie in Abomey, Benin. He feels that the damage to the ozone layer, caused by pollution or natural phenomena, could be blamed. In any case, for farmers it is difficult to obtain good harvests in this situation, since not everybody has the means to irrigate their fields. “But to save your harvest, you can also harrow your field every 2 weeks or, if possible, every week. By harrowing, you can easily make good use of the water-holding capacity of the soil and can bridge these difficult periods, even if it means extra expenses. We experienced this result several times in our own agricultural practice.”

Quite right, Coffi, even if your advice raised a few eyebrows here in the office. Farmers know best after all! Harrowing after tillage seals the open soil and breaks the evaporation of moisture in the freshly broken soil. Harrowing – especially in the case of a crust – breaks the capillary action that releases the moisture from the soil. So harrowing can indeed improve the water-retention capacity of the soil and limit evaporation.

…or has it really turned?

A keen reader of Spore, Assaye Terefe, from East Gojjam, Ethiopia, is very worried, like others, about the effects of climate change on agriculture in his country. “At the moment, cultivation methods based on former notions cause large-scale damage. In all cases, the result leads to vulnerable food security and a bitter end. I firmly believe that the altitude range of agroecological zones for field crops should be changed with regard to the dramatic climate change. It implies that there is a need to vaccinate people with new ideas against ignorance. To tackle the disaster we have to create an environmental awareness among farmers so that crop husbandry will be performed in the right time and at the right place.”

Together we’re strong

Writing from Sibiti in southern Congo, Jonas Mahoundou, reports that “thanks to the kindly collected supply of information in Spore, I established a farmers’ group – a cooperative in the making – in January 2002. Main activities of the group, called ‘La Gerbe’ (the sheaf), are vegetable growing, livestock raising (sheep and fowl) and soap making. For the moment, the vegetable growing business is fully operational, as you can see in the picture.”
Farmers and globalisation

Farmers of the world, unite!

Farmers have improved agriculture by breeding plants and animals and building sustainable systems of production. They have borne the brunt of agricultural and industrial revolutions too. Yet forces outside agriculture dictate its production and distribution of its wealth. For how much longer?

In their magnificent history of world agriculture from Neolithic times to its current crisis, Marcel Mazoyer and Laurence Roudart analyse the long saga of the farmer and agriculture, a saga well worth reflecting upon. It all started about 10,000 years ago when crop production and livestock rearing became the stage upon which humanity took some historically decisive steps. It was then that the many cultivation and technical systems which still coexist today were born.

A blind, mad evolution

Agriculture in developed countries is blessed with advisory services, credit, grants, price guarantees, customs barriers and accessible markets. This is in stark contrast to the poorest nations where farmers lack almost everything: advice, inputs, credit, communications, transport, trading organisations, sometimes even land and, often, governments genuinely interested in supporting them. This blind, mad evolution of the world’s agricultural and food supply system is a tragedy. In just a few regions of the world, a few large farms acquire more and more resources to produce highly competitive crops and livestock and put them at low prices on world markets. In vast regions of the world, most farmers cannot produce competitively, do not have enough land and end up as simple bit players in a crisis which often leaves them destitute.

This dreadful distortion is the root cause of inequalities between nations. The critical position of an under-resourced and non-productive farming class is the basis of the rural and urban poverty which holds back the development of agricultural countries. It suppresses demand, it dampens economic growth, increases unemployment, creates poverty and leads down the path to exclusion. The consequences ultimately come knocking on the door of developed countries, compromising their prospects on developing country markets. And the developed countries are affected, directly or indirectly, by other aspects of this complex Third World crisis where misery, stagnation and despair foster massive migrations, terrorism and armed conflict.

Legless and deaf

Today’s fashionable solution is economic liberalisation and the globalisation of trade, widely promoted in developing countries by international institutions. It brings to mind the story of the scholar who puts a flea on the table and shouts “Jump!” The flea jumps. The scholar rips off its legs and again shouts “Jump!”! But the flea does not jump. The scholar concludes that, without its legs, the flea cannot hear.

We can do the same and shout to the farmers of poor countries that they should jump aboard the train of globalisation. But they will not be able to do so, unless enormous differences in productivity which are rooted in history and in the unequal availability of resources.

Let us return to the legless flea. What is the point of aid flows, of debt cancellation or of development projects if the people in poor countries are not equipped to withstand the shocks of liberalisation and globalisation imposed upon them by the rich countries who have protected their interests through customs duties and farmers’ subsidies?

Education, key to development

The foundation of development is knowledge – isn’t it? – or, better still, the capacity to acquire, use and increase knowledge. Education and professional training should logically be the top priority of globalisation – if there is committed and genuine interest in helping the poor.

The foundation of development is knowledge, the capacity to acquire, use and increase knowledge

To move beyond the current world crisis, the rich countries have to renounce profit in the short-term, opt out of their unsustainable, unequal growth and choose a model of harmonious, participatory and sustainable development. Was this not the model sought by the founders of the European Union, or to some extent by the Marshall Plan after the Second World War?


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