Africa’s farmers’ organisations are extremely busy and sometimes even overwhelmed by the many tasks that have fallen to them since governments have privatised or dismantled the development agencies which formerly provided services for farmers. Organisations comprising several different groups, or representing producers from a specific sector, now find themselves having to defend farmers’ interests with the government, and with the World Trade Organization (see Spore 114), as well as ensuring a supply of inputs to their members, becoming involved in marketing, setting up micro-credit systems, training farmers and working with researchers (see Spore 113).

Governments have withdrawn from many economic activities, including assisting with credit, arranging inputs, marketing, processing and exporting cash crops. Where these activities are profitable, private operators have been quite willing to step in. But in more isolated areas, it is left to the producer organisations, especially in West Africa, to try to fill the void left by the State.

Many of these producers’ federations are relatively inexperienced, and inadequately prepared to take on such tasks. For example, organising the supply of fertilizers and pesticides for farmers, often the first service that they set up, requires skills in negotiating with manufacturers or importers, as well as the ability to assess the quality of the products.
and their suitability for farmers. It also means organising distribution, ensuring payment or credit repayment — tasks that require a range of skills which need to be developed, particularly when several thousand farmers are involved.

**Selling and processing produce**

But little by little, these organisations are taking over the basic services essential to agricultural development. Some are going further and venturing into marketing. In Cameroon, the Fédération des unions de producteurs de cacao du Mbam (FUPROCAM) is a federation that brought together 92 cocoa producing groups, with a membership of more than 4,000 farmers. Faced with the fall in cocoa prices in the 1990s, and the State’s complete withdrawal from the sector, the federation gradually started to sell fertilizer and pesticides to its planters, offer them credit and, most recently, help them to market the cocoa. The system they have opted for is to put the entire production of a village up for auction, with potential buyers summoned to attend the sale on a given day. In this way, planters manage to sell their cocoa for more than the usual rate.

Since 2004, URECOS-CI has also held a 35% stake in a second ginner, the Société de développement du coton (SODECOTON).

Producers have so far failed to gain entry to companies in other export sectors, which are often run by multinationals, with whom they cannot hope to compete. In English-speaking countries such as Ghana, producer organisations are still rare, according to a report by the Sahel and West Africa Club. The ones that work are those launched by private companies, which play a prominent role in the country. One of these is the Ghana Cotton Company, which encourages cotton producers to group together to sell their produce and make their needs heard.

**A long apprenticeship**

These organisations are ill-equipped to fulfill the expectations of governments and donors. A World Bank document observed that “often, external partners expect an unrealistic level of perfection from producer organisations”. These organisations often do lack human resources, skills and means. Those in charge must learn to negotiate contracts, manage budgets, represent the interests of all members of their organisations and, gradually, to become autonomous. To be effective, such apprenticeships need to extend over a period of 8 to 10 years, according to estimates by the World Bank, in its Agricultural Services and Producer Organizations Project. Areas covered should range from setting up information services for farmers to training in accounts and managing internal conflicts.

Training the leaders of these organisations is especially important. It should involve exchanging experiences with other leaders and taking part in meetings to compare their ideas and common problems. The Kenya National Federation of Agricultural Producers, an organisation created in 1947 and restructured several times, refers, in its programme of activities for 2003-2007, to the strong need to train its leaders and associate members. When such capacity building involves organisations working in profitable sectors, the results can be quickly seen. In Zambia, the Cooperative League of the United States of America has taught producer associations to organise an entire agricultural campaign, from the purchasing of inputs right down to the sale of products to South Africa.

**Having the means to act**

But while strengthening the institutional capacities of organisations is fundamental, it is also important to give them more resources, so that they can put their plans into action. The absence of working funds and a minimum of infrastructure often hampers their initiatives. And whilst aid from donors and other bodies is essential, it can sometimes have an adverse effect. It introduces disparities, often significant, between organisations which are helped and sometimes even courted, and those which are not. If badly planned, assistance can end up dividing the leadership from its membership, so that the organisations no longer fulfill the key role of representing communities.

Producer organisations also have to contend with considerable difficulties in the local context: the unreliability of private or public sector partners, the virtual impossibility of obtaining legal recourse in cases of litigation, and the lack of economic clout which would enable them to negotiate favourable terms with traders. As for the governments, they do not always fulfill their role as they should — fixing the rules and making sure that these are followed.

Farmers’ organisations have no choice, they must succeed if agriculture is to make headway in their countries. The task is huge and the first steps are the most difficult. Some organisations have already overcome these first hurdles and are conducting themselves successfully in a difficult environment.
Commodity Risk Management

Weathering times of boom and bust

Farming is fraught with uncertainty. The risk starts from the moment a producer plants a crop, and ends only when the sale of harvest is completed. The challenge is to establish predictability in agricultural incomes, without distorting markets.

As any farmer knows, making a living from the land is a risky business. First, there is the weather. At any point, the harvest can be compromised or damaged. Then there are pests and diseases. A plague of locusts can strip a field in minutes. Last, but not least, is the uncertainty of the marketplace. Will the farmer find a buyer? How much will the fruits of all his or her labours fetch? It is hardly a recipe for a good night’s sleep.

Today, one of the biggest threats facing farmers is the risk of falling crop prices. Since the beginning of the 1990s, the liberalisation of commodity trading and pricing in developing countries has shifted the burden of risk from governments to farmers. In many ACP countries, producers previously insulated from the day-to-day vagaries of the world market now bear the full brunt. Will the producer find a market for his produce? will the buyer have to negotiate a price or will the price be fixed by the marketplace. Will they find a buyer? How much will the fruits of all his or her labours fetch? It is hardly a recipe for a good night’s sleep.

Experts at the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) suggest several ways a farmers association can provide risk management, including arranging fixed-price or minimum-price forward contracts and organising price insurance by buying options for the price and volume indicated by farmers. Associations can operate a stabilisation fund, putting aside reserves in times of high prices, and can play a key role in ensuring quality and timely delivery, which in turn leads to more reliable prices. But governments and donors need to help farmers’ associations to use modern financial instruments, including training and technical assistance.

Hedging your bets

The Commodity Risk Management group (CRM) at the World Bank has been investigating institutional channels and models that would combine price risks from many small farmers and hedge them in international markets. Feasibility work is taking place in Cameroon, Costa Rica, Cote d’Ivoire, Dominican Republic, Ghana and Kenya, in the coffee, cocoa and cotton sectors. The CRM is also trying to promote weather insurance for producers in vulnerable countries and in Mauritius, sugarcane producers now have insurance against cyclone damage. The International Task Force on Commodity Risk Management in Developing Countries (ITF) has put together a set of price insurance instruments to cushion sugar farmers in Fiji against price fluctuations, and has launched a pilot programme to introduce price risk mitigation for cocoa in Ghana.

Peace of mind aside, failure to plan against plummeting prices and other disasters can carry a heavy cost. “In 2 years, between 1999 and Sept 2001, Tanzania lost over US$800 million in export revenues for coffee, and of that, farmers lost some US$750 million in earnings,” said Lamon Rutten, chief of commodities risk management at UNCTAD. “If farmers — or some central entity — had hedged against the risk of price falls, even with a very conservative strategy they would have avoided more than half of this loss.”

See Links, page 10
Rice

A success story for some

In ACP countries, urban consumers have benefited most from the boom in rice production in Asia and America over the past 40 years. Small producers have generally been unable to withstand the competition. And yet, the potential for local rice production does exist, especially in Africa.

Rice production needs to virtually double over the next 25 years if it is to help feed the world’s growing population, and especially the countries of the South, says the Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations (FAO). By 2020, Asia will have 750 million extra rice consumers, Africa will have 90 million and the Caribbean will have 50 million.

The challenge is huge, similar in scale to the one already taken on in the past few decades by rice growers, who have made a significant contribution to feeding the planet. In 40 years, global rice production has seen impressive growth. Annual harvests, which in 1960 barely topped 200 million tonnes of paddy rice (unmilled grain) have tripled. Today, total global production stands at around 600 million tonnes of paddy rice, the equivalent of some 400 million tonnes of milled or white rice.

Rice is the staple food of 2.6 billion people. It remains a predominantly Asian cereal, since this continent accounts for 92% of global output, compared with barely 5% in America and the Caribbean and 3% in Africa. Europe’s rice production is negligible in global terms. Almost all varieties grown in the world belong to the species *Oryza sativa*, which originated in Asia. *Oryza glaberrima*, which originated in Africa, is not grown outside the continent. In Asia, the tremendous rise in output was mainly fuelled by the introduction of new varieties and the use of inputs, as part of the famous Green Revolution, which, between 1966 and 1996 enabled the rate of rice production to outstrip population growth. But this model has now reached its limits, especially in the ecological sense: yields have ceased to rise in Asia, where due to a lack of soil and water, any further expansion of irrigated land is not possible.

Output reaches a peak

During the same period, ACP countries have also seen a growth in the size of their paddy fields, their yields and their harvests. With a total output of 19 million tonnes in 2003, Africa produced four times as much rice as it did in 1961. A similar pattern was seen in the Caribbean. The Dominican Republic and Guyana produced respectively five times and twice as much rice in 2003 as they did in 1961, while Suriname tripled its output. The Pacific countries, however, with the exception of the Solomon Islands, now grow less rice than they did in the 1960s.

In spite of such expansion, rice production appears to be running out of steam and can no longer keep pace with population trends. In ACP countries, food security of the most vulnerable communities is at risk, especially in the towns.

On a global scale, rice is the cereal which travels the least. In 50% of cases, it is consumed by the family which produces it, or sold at the nearest village within a 12-kilometre radius of the place where it was grown. Only 5 to 6% of global rice production is sold on the international market, compared with 18% for wheat. But these exports have gradually become crucial for many countries of the South. During the 1990s, they rose by an average of 7% per year. By 2002, they were almost two and a half times greater than they had been in 1990.

Leaving aside the United States of America — the world’s third biggest exporter, but only the tenth biggest producer and trailing way behind the global giants of China and India — the world rice market has the distinction of being a mainly South-South trade: more than 80% of trading is between developing countries in the South. The Asian countries (India, Thailand and Vietnam) are of course in the lead when it comes to exporting rice, with
clients scattered throughout the world. However, from the 1990s onwards, there has been a steady rise in African rice imports. In 2002, four of the six largest rice importers were African: Côte d’Ivoire, Nigeria, Senegal and South Africa. Today, Africa imports ten times more rice than it did during independence and accounts for a total of one-quarter of global imports.

A similar surge has been seen in the Caribbean, which buys rice from the United States. In 2002, Haiti imported more than 464,000 tonnes of paddy rice, whereas Cuba bought 813,000 tonnes. While not on the same level, the Pacific Islands followed a similar trend. Fiji and Vanuatu both imported five times more rice in 2002 than they did in 1961. In the Solomon Islands, the increase was tenfold.

On a global level, successes have largely been due to the expansion of rice production and high yields in Asia and the United States, regions which have produced growing quantities of rice at increasingly lower prices. Between 1997 and 2002, export prices almost halved, though since 2003 price levels have been edging back up again. This performance has been coupled with a strong growth in population and urbanisation rates in ACP countries. In order to feed the towns and ensure their countries’ food security, the governments have opted to import more and more rice. Indeed, this cereal now plays a pivotal role in the shaping of food policies in ACP countries.

Africans have developed a taste for the Asian rice introduced in colonial times. Well suited to the needs of urban dwellers as it is quick and easy to cook, it has taken its place, suited to the needs of urban dwellers as it is quick and easy to cook, it has taken its place, quickly taking the place of many traditional rice varieties. Consumers complain that this latter contains too much waste and too many stones, that it has to be sorted before cooking. Badly stored or dried, or poorly milled, it often swells less during cooking than its imported rivals and therefore has the flaw of “failing to fill stomachs”.

The import boom

Even countries like Côte d’Ivoire, Guinea and Nigeria, which have made considerable efforts to intensify rice production, have seen their import levels soar. Côte d’Ivoire produced around 545,000 tonnes of white rice in 2002, but it imported 796,000 tonnes. In Senegal, in spite of years of campaigning with the slogan “Eat local produce”, aimed at changing eating habits, national rice production still covers barely 20% of the country’s needs. The same is true of Haiti, which bought nearly five times as much rice in 2002 as it actually produced. For these countries, that means a heavy bill to pay.

The process of trade liberalisation which started in the 1980s has exacerbated the problem in ACP regions. Some countries such as Nigeria have on several occasions tried to buck the trend by taxing or banning rice imports. But this strategy has only served to encourage re-exporting and smuggling of rice from neighbouring countries conducted in 2003, a 50 kg sack of locally grown rice on sale in Benin costs about 20% more than the same quantity of imported rice.

The boom in demand, which has been satisfied by massive imports of cheap rice, has stifled the development of local rice production which might be able to withstand the competition from imports. In Africa, irrigated rice cultivation is often still costly. What is more, 40% of output comes from small producers practising rainfed rice production, which often generates low yields. The cost of rice production in Africa is one-third higher than it is in Asia.

Yet, unlike Asia, Africa is still far from developing its full rice producing potential. The launch of NERICA (NEw RIce for AFRICA), the result of a cross between African and Asian rice varieties (see Spore 105 and 112) holds out hope for the continent. A number of different varieties of rainfed rice which are suited to the climate, resistant to disease and specifically developed with Africa’s small producers in mind are now being grown in 10 West African countries, and tested in several parts of central and southern Africa.

Africa’s potential

Launched in 2002, the African rice initiative has the goal of reaching a total of 210,000 hectares of NERICA rice by 2006, with an annual production of around 750,000 tonnes. That is less than Senegal imports on its own each year, but it is a start. The Green Revolution didn’t happen in one day. But growing more rice is not enough. Away from the paddy fields, an even greater challenge for Africa’s rice sector lies in cutting post-harvest losses (which range between 15 and 50% in countries of the South) and improving drying and storing techniques. The rise in rice prices seen on world markets since 2003, which is linked to the oil crisis, could well prove to be a golden opportunity.

Rice production and imports for some ACP countries in 2002

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Rice (milled equivalent) in tonnes</th>
<th>Production</th>
<th>Imports</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Africa</td>
<td>383 359 357</td>
<td>26 277 517</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nigeria</td>
<td>2 129 064</td>
<td>1 251 718</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Madagascar</td>
<td>1 736 845</td>
<td>61 203</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guinea</td>
<td>561 962</td>
<td>356 862</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Côte d’Ivoire</td>
<td>545 606</td>
<td>796 727</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ghana</td>
<td>186 760</td>
<td>332 431</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senegal</td>
<td>118 563</td>
<td>788 645</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caribbean</td>
<td>487 380</td>
<td>1 030</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dominican Republic</td>
<td>295 948</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suriname</td>
<td>130 065</td>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haiti</td>
<td>69 368</td>
<td>309 956</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: FAO
In brief

Mass exit from Malawi’s rural areas

- Villagers in rural Malawi, severely affected by drought and resulting food shortages, are leaving the rural exodus which now affects a growing number of ACP countries. Malawi’s rate of urbanisation is currently the fastest in the world, and the southern African country will need heavy investment in its rural areas to stop the rapid migration to towns, according to the United Nations Settlements Agency. Although the country is agriculture-dependent, it is estimated that 44% of the projected 11 million population will live in towns by 2105.

EU helps Pacific Islands win voice at WTO

- The Pacific Islands Forum countries have opened permanent representation to the World Trade Organization (WTO) in Geneva. The Pacific Office has been supported by a €280,000 grant from the European Development Fund and will be the regional representation of 14 Pacific ACP countries in Geneva. It should also strengthen the capacity of the three Pacific WTO members (Fiji, Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands) and three observers (Samoa, Tonga and Vanuatu) to participate in the WTO.

A portal for fisheries

- France’s development research institute, the Institut de recherche pour le développement (IRD), has just launched a new internet gateway on fisheries and marine ecosystems in developing countries. It offers details of all the programmes, research units, observations and databases linked to IRD that deal with seas and oceans. A major sorting exercise has been carried out in the “Thematic Documents” section, which lists seven major fisheries problems: fish and biodiversity, fish farming, fishing methods, general studies, fishing and the environment, ethnology-biology, and the economics and management of fisheries. IRD has listed the types of documents that relate to each one of these — press releases, scientific information, exhibitions and Web pages that the institute has published in the past — to provide a highly detailed study of fisheries.

www.peche.ird.fr

Top security as Kenya prepares for GM maize

- The building of a top security, US$ 11.5 million, biosafety greenhouse funded by the Kenyan government and Switzerland-based Syngenta Foundation has pushed Kenya to the forefront of biotechnology in Africa. The greenhouse was built as part of the Insect Resistant Maize for Africa project (IRMA), which is using biotechnology to develop varieties of the crop that are resistant to the stem borer. Each year, Kenya loses $90 million to the insect, which devours 400,000 tonnes of maize — about 15% of farmers’ annual harvests. The Biosafety level II greenhouse, designed to ensure the containment of genetically modified (GM) crops at the experimental stage, has been built at the Kenya Agricultural Research Institute (KARI) Biotechnology Research Centre complex. It is the first in East Africa, making Kenya the only country on the continent other than South Africa to have a greenhouse for GM maize.

A bio security greenhouse should block any genetic pollution

Security is tight at the state-of-the-art greenhouse. There is a double door system and entry is regulated by secret codes and electronic cards. Emergency precautions include reinforced glass windows in case of a breakage. The doors have been sealed with rubber and every opening fitted with a fine wire mesh to avoid pollen leaving the premises. In the event of a serious earthquake, staff have instructions to destroy all materials in the greenhouse to avoid contamination. The IRMA project is being jointly implemented by KARI and the International Maize and Wheat Improvement Centre (CIMMYT). Plants from genetically engineered maize seed that are infested with insect pests will be grown and evaluated for resistance. Kenyan scientists will not be looking for new genes, but investigating the effectiveness of Bt genes (cry1Ab and cry1Ba) against Kenya stem or stalk borers, which damage maize plants in most parts of Kenya.

After the storm

- As Caribbean islanders counted the cost of the damage wrought by Hurricanes Ivan, Frances and Jeanne, efforts were under way to pick up the pieces and start rebuilding the ravaged agriculture sector. The tropical storms which battered the region in the latter half of 2004 devastated farmland and forests, leaving death and destruction in their wake. In Grenada, one of the worst-hit islands, 90% of buildings and infrastructures were destroyed or damaged, and tourism and agriculture, the twin pillars of the island’s economy, were shattered. Particularly hard hit was the nutmeg industry, which accounts for 10% of Grenada’s economic output and employs 8,000 families. Now, the industry is in ruins. It takes more than 7 years for nutmeg trees to grow and bear fruit. Officials said that it might be so difficult to rebuild its nutmeg sector that Grenada should consider trying to grow other products, such as flowers. “When you look around and you see the tall coconut trees which took years to reach such a height are down, then you have to think, in terms of nutmeg years and coconut years what rehabilitation means for us here,” said Terry Charles, Director General of the Grenada Red Cross. The island’s banana and cocoa industries were also totally devastated. To help fill the void in the short-term, the Caribbean Agricultural Research and Development Institute (CARDI) is helping farmers plant food crops such as corn, sweet potato and vegetables, which have a 3-month cycle. In Jamaica, where damage to agriculture was estimated to be at least $7 billion, farmers have been given government vouchers to help them buy seeds, fertilizer and other inputs. The government is also helping fishermen with funds to remake fish posts destroyed by Ivan, while other grants will help restore and restock fish ponds.

In Haiti meanwhile, where 68% of households rely on agriculture, aid agencies worked to distribute seeds and tools in time for the October/November 2004 planting season, and to begin poultry restocking. Officials put the total damage to Haiti’s agriculture sector at US$ 17 million, with at least 1,200 hectares of rice lost and almost 2,000 head of cattle drowned or swept away. The Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO) is providing a US$ 400,000 emergency assistance fund to help farmers in the Caribbean resume agricultural production and buy inputs, such as seeds, fertilizer and tools.
Shea shade benefits crops

The shea tree (*Butyrospermum parkii*), of the Sapotaceae family, grows freely in the Sahel from Senegal to northern Cameroon. When it flowers, this 10 metre-high tree loses its leaves. Five months later, it produces about 15 kilos of fruit that provide 3-4 kilos of dried shea nuts for marketing. The fallen leaves help make the soil suitable for market gardening.

In western Cameroon, people who plant crops under the trees obtain excellent harvests of tubers (coco yams, taro, etc.). To capitalise on such good results, the farmers have organised a cooperative with the objective of “killing two birds with one stone” — produce vegetables for the local market and shea butter for export.

The Association pour la promotion des actions de développement endogène et rural (APADER), which promotes indigenous and rural development activities, has previously held several discussions and meetings to make people aware of this cultivation technique. First of all, it encouraged the growing of vegetables under the trees, which is easily achieved because the shea tree has a tap-root that plunges straight down into the soil, rather than spreading. This means it does not compete with plants growing at its base. Secondly, APADER also wants the leaves of the trees made into compost to fertilise neighbouring plots of land in the hope of achieving the same kind of results as those obtained in the shea tree shade.

Uproot those bananas!

In Africa, banana is a basic food crop that is consumed in different ways. It is not only eaten but also drunk, for it is used to make a popular wine. However, major producing countries such as Uganda, with 10 million tonnes annually, Rwanda, with 1.5 million and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), with 1 million, are experiencing sharp falls in production due to attacks by the *bacterium Xanthomonas campestris pv. musacearum* which causes banana bacterial wilt (see Spore 106).

At Goma, in the DRC’s eastern province of Nord-Kivu, the price of wine bananas and cooking bananas has doubled. Aside from its economic impact, this disease could result in shortages of bananas in the region.

“Production in Kichanga and Rutshuru has fallen by around 60% and we have been forced to turn to producers in the area of Bweremana, 50 km from Goma. Even with that, we are not managing to satisfy the increasingly important Rwandan and Ugandan demands,” said Masumbuko Butaka, president of the Association des producteurs et vendeurs de bananes de Bweremana (APROVEB), which represents Bweremana banana producers and vendors.

Kahindo Ndasimwa, a banana grower at Kichanga, is desolate. “Now, all my plantation is infected and I must burn everything,” he laments. For him and his neighbours, it is a matter of preventing the disease spreading from one plant to the next. Nevertheless, according to Augustin Milambo, an agronomist with the Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations (FAO) in Goma, farmers are not always prepared to make such a sacrifice. “We are doing all we can to make the farmers aware of the need to temporarily replace their plantations in order to halt the spread of the virus to other regions,” he explains. “But their reluctance to uproot their banana plants makes the battle against this scourge difficult.”

According to initial estimates, of the 2,500 hectares of the region’s plantations already affected only 8 have had their plants uprooted.

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Developing the Volta

The catchment basin of the River Volta will soon have a coordinating authority responsible for equitable sharing of its water resources among the six countries that occupy this area. An agreement to this effect was signed on 30 September in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, on the initiative of the World Conservation Union (IUCN). Ghana and Burkina Faso — who between them represent more than 80% of the basin’s 413 000 km² — are the principal countries concerned. Thanks to this agreement, financed by Sweden, which took over funding from Norway, technical teams are beginning to study the area. Later, a water management body, made up of all the countries involved, will be established. Thus the Volta, like the Niger, Senegal and Gambia rivers, will not only have an organisation for development, but also for peace.

Samoa’s future farmers

A programme called Future Farmers of Samoa has been launched to promote agriculture as a viable option for young people who are leaving school or are unemployed. The initiative will help youngsters to set up their own farms and learn about agro-business, marketing and farm management. The programme covers crops, fisheries and livestock, offering as wide a range of choices as possible. Funding is from FAO, which is also offering help with training and tools. Already, young people in three villages on the island of Savaii have begun discovering some of the attractions of a future in farming.

Going organic in the Caribbean

The Caribbean has launched a Regional Organic Association (ROA) to help develop organic agriculture in the region. A priority for the new association will be the creation of a Caribbean certification body. Recent studies carried out by CARDI, the Agricultural Society of Trinidad and Tobago (ASTT) and CTA have revealed rapidly expanding market opportunities for organic products in both the regional and extra-regional markets. A significant number of farmers from the CARICOM region have expressed interest in entering into this system of production, say CARDI officials.

Bananas are very popular in East Africa

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In brief

- A programme called Future Farmers of Samoa has been launched to promote agriculture as a viable option for young people who are leaving school or are unemployed.
- The Caribbean has launched a Regional Organic Association (ROA) to help develop organic agriculture in the region.
The giant mole-rat, Cryptomys mechowii, prized by the Congolese for its meat, has been bred in captivity in the laboratory of the Biology Department of the University of Kinshasa, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). This small, wild, underground mammal is, like the cane rat, a victim of over-exploitation. Breeding them in captivity will help protect the species and provide an increased supply of protein for people living on the Bateké plateau. Research has shown that the mole-rat can be fed on wild, water-rich tubers, cassava and sweet potatoes.

Clean up for Indian ocean

A US$11 million project has been launched to cut pollution in the Western Indian Ocean. The 3-year programme, funded by the Global Environment Facility (GEF) and the Government of Norway, will help eight East African countries devise plans to curb sewage, chemicals and other pollutants. The Western Indian Ocean — one of the most wildlife-rich in the world with important mangrove forests, seagrass beds, lagoons and coral reefs — is thought to hold more than 11,000 species of plants and animals and more than a fifth of the world’s tropical inshore fish species.

More accessible legal rights

Two important international legal databases are now accessible online. The Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nation’s FAOLEX has the most important electronic collection of national laws and regulations, and international treaties, pertaining to food, agriculture and renewable natural resources. The ECOLEX database, managed jointly by FAO, the World Conservation Union (IUCN) and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), deals more specifically with the environment. It contains treaties, legislation, jurisprudence, and legal literature on resources, with some of the available documents dating as far back as 1812.

Sugar warning by ACP countries

European Commission (EC) proposals to reform the EU’s sugar regime, if adopted in their present form, would devastate the sugar industries of ACP countries “with severe socio-economic consequences”, say the ACP states covered by the EU-ACP Sugar Protocol. The EC proposes to slash the price that it pays to European sugar farmers by about one-third. The cut would apply to the 1.295 million tonnes of sugar a year that the EU imports from ACP countries and would be made over a 3-year period.

The economies of many of the countries are already weak and vulnerable, and thousands of ACP farmers depend on sugar-cane.

Meeting in Brussels in October 2004 to develop a response to the proposals, the 19 ACP sugar-supplying states pointed out that the Sugar Protocol is a long-standing preferential trading arrangement between the ACP and the EU, an agreement “with obligations to be met by all contracting parties. On the EU side, the obligation is to respect the commitments enshrined in the Protocol in terms of...guarantees of price, access and indefinite duration,” said the sugar-producing states. They describe the severity of the price cuts and the timeframe for their implementation, as “totally unacceptable....tantamount to a breach of the obligations enshrined in the Sugar Protocol, and an impairment of benefit derived ...with dire consequences on employment, investment, rural development, food security, protection and preservation of the environment”. Guyana, Mauritius, Swaziland, Fiji and Belize are identified as the most vulnerable countries in terms of potential production and job losses, according to the Commonwealth Secretariat.

The Caribbean Community (CARICOM) estimates a loss of $90 million a year for the region, and warns of “serious negative effects on employment and living standards”. Discussion and dialogue in the EU continues, with a decision expected in 2005.

Cassava comeback

A partnership between scientists and smallholder farmers in East Africa is helping to re-establish disease-resistant cassava following years of devastation by the mosaic virus. Scientists at Uganda’s Agricultural and Animal Production Institute at Namulonge and local farmers are working together to introduce resistant varieties free from the disease. Together with improved production practices, the project, funded by the Maendeleo Agricultural Technology Fund and managed by the UK NGO FARM-Africa, is set to make a significant contribution to the rural economy of central Uganda — and could become a blueprint for improving food production in eastern and southern Africa. Dissemination of resistant plants and of agronomic advice is carried out through groups such as the Nakasongola District Farmers Association, and is backed up by demonstration sites.

The next step will be to help farmers develop strategies for marketing and processing the extra production from the improved varieties. Since the start of the spread of the mosaic virus in 1988, yields of cassava in Nakasongola District have fallen to less than 1 tonne per hectare, and in some parts of Uganda this once-major crop can no longer be grown. With resistant varieties, the small farmers who are the backbone of the country’s economy can look forward to yields of up to 9 t/ha. Along with bananas, Ugandan farmers regard cassava as one of their most important crops. Cassava also has the potential to become a major cash earner to supplement declining incomes from cotton, coffee and tea. Said FARM-Africa’s Dr Christie Peacock: “Cassava was a dying crop until the improved material came along. Now the visible contrast between resistant plants and the susceptible local ones is persuading farmers to plant the new varieties. For many it could make the difference between poverty and self-sufficiency.”
African pasture grass comes home

African savannah grasses supported African herbivores for thousands of years, before becoming a pasture grass for South America’s teeming cattle herds. Now, scientists want to reintroduce the grasses to African farmers. Hauled into service as bedding for slaves, many African grasses (scientific name *Brachiaria*) were introduced into South America in the 1500s. There, they proved themselves as quality forages. Commercial *Brachiaria* species have many desirable agronomic traits. They are persistent and can grow in a variety of habitats and, having evolved in the African savannahs, they are highly tolerant to grazing by large herbivores. They are also apomictic — they can reproduce asexually, but through seed. Improved *Brachiaria* grasses have deep and abundant root systems that allow them to tolerate drought and adapt to poor soils.

Over the past two decades, scientists from the International Center for Tropical Agriculture (CIAT) have established the world’s largest *Brachiaria* collection in Cali, Colombia. The scientists have identified several superior *Brachiaria* types and developed the first commercial hybrid, cultivar Muilato, which is currently marketed by a Mexican company, Grupo Papalotla. Now there are plans to enable African farmers to benefit from the improved, high-quality *Brachiaria* cultivars. CIAT is working with African National Agricultural Research Systems (NARS) and the Ethiopian Agricultural Research Organization (EARO). Thanks to cooperation from the National Agricultural Research Organization (NARO), the new hybrid has already been planted in Uganda, and there are plans to try small plot plantings in Ethiopia in the next few months. Papalotla has agreed to provide the hybrid seeds and training to farmers on how to produce high quality seeds for export — to generate income. It will also buy all the seeds that the farmers produce — a scheme that has already worked well in Thailand. Priority will be given to women smallholder farmers.

A code for sustainable coffee production

The Common Code for the Coffee Community (CCCC), which was introduced on 9 September 2004 in Hamburg, Germany, is currently being tested on the ground in Vietnam and Uganda. This code of conduct is an initiative of the German Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) and the German Coffee Association (DKV), together with associations, producers, major coffee processors such as Nestlé, Tchibo, Kraft and Sara Lee, and international organisations such as Consumers International (CI).

The code aims to increase incomes of coffee producers, improve working conditions for plantation workers and strengthen environmental protection. At this stage, the text of the code is simply a declaration of intent. It provides for the tracking of coffee, ease of access to markets by smallholders, and a connection between product quality and price. It hopes to change world coffee practices — from growing, harvesting and roasting to marketing — a costly process that will take years to achieve. The code will be applied throughout the world, but on a voluntary basis, with those who adopt it committing themselves to its principles.

International trade and development

The International Centre for Trade and Sustainable Development (ICSTD) has opened an Internet portal which deals with major themes of international trade in the context of sustainable development. It offers access to websites involved in discussions and decisions regarding intellectual property rights, services, Africa, agriculture and the environment.

www.icstd.org

My enemy’s enemy

Black pod disease, caused by a fungus, *Phytophthora*, destroys up to 80% of Africa’s cocoa plantations. At Yaoundé, the Institut de recherche agricole pour le développement (IRAD), the Cameroonian institute of agricultural research for development, is trying to identify a natural enemy of this fungus. Since 1999, IRAD has isolated and multiplied certain microorganisms before replanting them on infected trees and measuring their impact on black pod disease development. Some field trials have already been carried out and trials are planned for three different locations. The aim is to give small-scale farmers a means of combating the disease that is neither too costly nor damages the environment. In the future, these enemies of the cocoa tree’s enemy could be multiplied on site in Cameroon by farmers’ associations or other approved organisations.

Institut de recherche agricole pour le développement (IRAD)
BP 2067
Yaoundé
Cameroun
Fax: +237 223 35.38

Global warming threatens rice yields

Global temperature increases could cause significant reductions in yields of rice, according to new research. Scientists have published evidence showing that increased night-time temperatures associated with global warming can cause rice yields to fall. The study, conducted at the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) in the Philippines, found that rice yields fell by more than 10% while night-time temperatures in the dry season rose by 1.1°C. This trend in nocturnal temperatures is linked to increasing concentrations of ‘greenhouse gases’.
Coping with uncertainty

To the uninitiated, commodity risk management can be a complex subject to grapple with.

A good place to start is the World Bank-led International Task Force on Commodity Risk Management in Developing Countries (ITF) which carries out research and education on innovative tools for risk management. One of its goals is to provide producers and organisations with the information and training to use these instruments and, in keeping with its mission, the task force has developed a good website, with clear information on price and weather risks and innovative approaches for small-scale producers to manage them. The site has a particularly good FAQ section, which covers just about every aspect of the issue in language that the lay reader can understand.

Farmers’ associations are increasingly being looked to as possible suppliers of risk management and the International Federation of Agricultural Producers (IFAP), an international umbrella group for farmers’ associations, is an active member of the ITF. For a good analysis of how farmers’ associations can help provide risk management solutions for their members, read Farmers and Farmers’ Associations in developing Countries and their Use of Modern Financial Instruments, a paper published by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD). The commodities section of UNCTAD’s website is also worth a look, for reports on other aspects of risk management. Commodity risk management is part of the road map of the EU-Africa partnership on cotton.

To develop this partnership, an EU-Africa forum on cotton was held in Paris in July 2004 (see Spore 113), with CTA support and its website is a good source of information.

For further information:

EU-Africa Cotton Forum
www.cotton-forum.org/indexflash.html

IFAP
www.ifap.org
60 rue Saint-Lazare
75009 Paris
France
Fax: +33 1 48 74 72 12
Email: ifap@ifap.org

ITF
www.itf-commrisk.org

UNCTAD
www.unctad.org
Palais des Nations
8-14, Av. de la Paix
1211 Geneva 10
Switzerland
Fax: +41 22 917 005
• Paper on farmers’ associations, downloadable from: http://j0.unctad.org/infocomm/comm_doc/docs/official/pollitdoc035.pdf

Unearthing farmers’ organisations

You would think that finding information on the economic activities of farmers’ organisations would be an easy task.

However, the studies and analyses which take a critical look at developments are few and far between.

For West Africa, where the farmers’ movement is well underway, such sources are in good supply, but they are much harder to find in other ACP countries, where farmers’ organisations are not as established. Naturally, all the major producer organisations have a website, where they describe their activities. But it is difficult to tell which of these are really up and running and the extent to which they may be relevant.

In French-speaking Africa, the richest source of information is the French sustainable development network, Réseau développement durable (ReDéV), and its support group for farmers’ organisations. Its website offers 150 documents, sorted under clear headings, each with a short description, mostly in French. Through this site, you can also join discussion groups and ask specific questions.

French speakers can also consult the useful Grain de Sel, a publication put out by rural development network Inter-Réseaux, whose pages regularly address this debate. The website for the Network of Farmers’ Organizations and Agricultural Producers from Western Africa (ROPPA) offers regularly updated information.

For English speakers, the World Bank website is a good place to read about studies and projects under way, especially those relating to its Agricultural Services and Producer Organizations Project (PSOAP). To find websites of farmers’ organisations, go to the website of Peasants Worldwide, which has links to producer organisations from around the world. Some of these are also listed on the multilingual website of the International Land Coalition.

For further information:

World Bank
http://webworldbank.org/ESSD/ardext.nsf/11ByDocName/TopicsProducerOrganizations

PSOAP
http://webworldbank.org/ESSD/ardext.nsf/09ByDocName/EvaluationsAfricaRegionSenegalAgriculturalServicesandProducerOrganizationsProject

Grain de sel
www.sites-sexeaux.org/publications/graindesel/graindesel.htm

International Land Coalition
www.landcoalition.org/partners/partact.htm

Peasants Worldwide
www.agro-info.nl/scripts/website.asp

ReDéV
http://appui-op.redev.info/index.php

ROPPA
www.roppa-ao.org
Defending ACP trade interests

ACP countries are currently being called on to take part in a bewildering array of trade negotiations, whose outcomes will shape the futures of millions of producers and their families. Yet all too often, their representatives are ill-prepared to fight the ACP corner. In both World Trade Organization (WTO) and ACP-EU fora, ACP countries struggle to defend their vital agricultural interests. With a view to helping them strengthen their bargaining skills, CTA organised a seminar in November 2002 in Brussels, which was attended by 140 people. This report offers a summary of the event, presenting the challenges and issues at stake, but also some ideas for possible solutions. Effective negotiation is much more than simply stating a position and it should start long before the parties reach the table.

This volume contains valuable advice on strategies for identifying and briefing potential allies, both from the EU and from the developing world, and stresses the importance of lobbying well before the trade talks themselves. Effective communication is key to any successful negotiating strategy, and the report singles out the lack of dialogue at national level as one of the main factors limiting ACP countries when it comes to trade negotiations. In many ACP countries, negotiations are conducted without consulting all those who have a stake in the outcome. Urging more effective management of information, and the imaginative use of communication technologies to further dialogue inside and outside ACP countries, the report offers practical solutions.

One such solution includes the use of the CTA Agritrade web portal (http://agritrade.cta.int), now firmly established as an important tool for learning more about agricultural trade and trade negotiations, and exchanging information with other parties who can help to defend ACP interests.

Meeting the challenge of effective ACP participation in agricultural trade negotiations: the role of information and communication
Summary report of a seminar, Brussels, Belgium, 2002
ISBN 92 9081 277 X
CTA number 1171
10 credit points

Gender and the Information Society

September 2002 was one of several initiatives designed to make information and communication for agriculture and rural development more accessible for women in ACP nations. The 5th CTA Observatory Meeting: Gender and Agriculture in the Information Society, was an important step on the path towards ensuring that information and communication technologies (ICTs) play a role in helping rural women to overcome the hurdles they encounter daily as farmers, entrepreneurs and agents of community development. This special report contains the outcomes of the meeting, whose recommendations included better access for girls and women to ICT infrastructures and training, and more care to see that content is geared towards rural women’s different needs and circumstances. But the report is not all theory. As well as discussing the challenges of providing better ICT services for women, substantial space is also devoted to successful examples of rural women being connected to communications technology. At the end of the report is a well documented section with links to organisations, corporations and academic institutions that are active in linking women, agriculture and ICTs.

Gender and agriculture in the information society
Special report of a meeting, Wageningen, The Netherlands, 2002
ISBN 92 9081 283 4
CTA number 1210
10 credit points

Cultivating cotton in Mali

Some 30% of Malian households cultivate cotton, and their profits have enabled them to build their agricultural assets, making them the nation’s most productive cereal producers. Cotton is Mali’s second biggest export and foreign exchange earner. This paper from the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) traces the history of smallholder cotton production in Mali and looks at some of the challenges to what government and farmers alike consider to be a strategic industry.

Building on successes in African agriculture: Mali’s white revolution: Smallholder cotton from 1960 to 2003
By J Tefft
Downloadable from: www.ifpri.org/2004/06/math/ focus1206:focus1206:051

Indigenous ideas

The expanding global economy creates both opportunities and threats for indigenous peoples. This book takes indigenous peoples as actors, rather than as victims, and looks at some ways in which these communities can benefit from the changing pressures of market and state, without sacrificing their own history, visions, and strategies.

In the Way of Development: Indigenous Peoples, Life Projects and Globalization
Edited by M Blaser, H Feit & G McRae
ISBN 1 84277 193 0
GBP18.95 • €27
Zed Books
7 Cynthia Street
London N1 9JF
UK
Fax: +44 207 837 4014
Email: zedbooks@zedbooks.co.uk
Website: www.zedbooks.co.uk
The latest on sleeping sickness

Millions of people continue to suffer as a result of trypanosomiasis, which primarily affects rural dwellers and their livestock in developing countries. This new text book examines the most recent advances in the control of the disease — popularly known as sleeping sickness — in both humans and animals.

Considerable progress has been made in the past three decades, in fields that include molecular biology, understanding insect behaviour and geographical information systems (GIS). Combined with satellite imagery, these GISs are beginning to offer useful tools for combating the disease, by making it possible to predict the likely distribution of the tsetse fly, the vector of trypanosomiasis, with a fair degree of accuracy. But the authors of this state-of-the-art reference book — which brings together leading experts from Africa, Europe and North and South America — maintain that much still needs to be done. Nowhere is this more so than in the case of chemotherapy. New drugs for the treatment of the disease in either humans or livestock continue to be elusive. Highly toxic — and expensive — arsenicals still dominate the treatment of human African trypanosomiasis.

This book should be of interest to scientists wanting information about the latest research on this important issue and development officials seeking to reduce rates of poverty, suffering and death caused by the disease.

Blue Gold

Did you know that by 2020, the world will be eating almost as much farmed as wild fish? That marine bacteria could yield a cure for cancer? And that deep-sea bacteria may be exploited to gobble up oil spills?

Blue Genes: Sharing and Conserving the World’s Aquatic Biodiversity looks at the extraordinary speed at which demand for aquatic genetic resources is growing, largely fuelled by rapid strides in science, and wonders why governance and policy lag so far behind.

But as well as pointing out the promise held by the Earth's aquatic genetic resources, the authors are full of ideas on how to realise their potential, and share the benefits more fairly. Special attention is paid to the rights of indigenous and local communities who provide access to these resources and their role in managing and conserving aquatic biodiversity.

Case studies include an example of how to shape negotiation tools, based on a marine bio-prospecting agreement in Fiji.

The power of donkeys

Just over one quarter of the world’s donkeys are now found in Africa, and the numbers are growing, as small-scale producers discover this handy animal’s usefulness for cultivating land, drawing water from wells and transporting goods to market. In the Sahel region of West Africa, donkeys have traditionally been used for carrying a wide range of goods but in recent years their popularity has grown even more, and donkeys now play an important role in rural economies. Indeed, the use of donkey carts is spreading in most countries of West Africa, benefiting communities that were unfamiliar with these animals just a generation ago.

In other parts of the continent, their use is firmly established. In Kenya, donkey power plays an important role in the smallholder agribusiness sector. In South Africa, the use of donkeys for traction purposes has increased dramatically over the past decade or so, due to the droughts of recent years. But, according to the Animal Traction Network for Eastern and Southern Africa (ATNESA), which compiled this book, even better use could be made of the donkey, whose potential for rural dwellers continues to be badly neglected by governments, research establishments and extension providers.

Packed with case studies, the book provides some convincing arguments for paying greater attention to this useful animal.
The voice of experience

Nigerian veterinary surgeon Dr Stephen Adejoro has more than 25 years experience as a veterinary extension and skill gap management consultant in livestock and poultry production. Over the years, he has kept detailed documentation of his field experiences, and has now begun publishing them as books. The original idea was to help educate poultry and livestock farmers in Africa, but the response has been such that requests have come in from as far afield as Papua New Guinea.

These first three titles have a very practical slant, with advice for existing and potential livestock and poultry producers on aspects that include feeding, disease control and marketing. The author’s pragmatic approach is evident throughout. As well as offering guidance on the do’s and don’ts of poultry and livestock rearing, he provides valuable help on how to assess profit margins, and just as importantly, on how to improve them.

A Handbook for Poultry Practitioners and Consultants (Layers)

By Dr S O Adejoro


ISBN 978 2716 95 2

US$15 • £12

A Handbook of Poultry Feed Formulation in the Tropics

By Dr S O Adejoro


ISBN 978 330272 6 2

US$12.50 • £9.50

A Handbook on Cattle Fattening and Poultry Layer Rearing for Portfolio Wealth Maximization

By Dr S O Adejoro


ISBN 978 330272 6 2

US$10 • £7.50

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Oyo State

Nigeria

Fax: +234 2 8100866

Email: soavet@yahoo.com

Website: www.soavet.net ms

Knowledge of trees

The range is vast, spanning land restoration, seed production, non-timber forest products and income generation, to name just a few. ACP regions are well catered for, with chapters on traditional Pacific Island agroforestry systems, tropical green manures and cover crops and the genetic conservation of tropical trees.

At the end of the book is a useful resource section, with information about organisations, websites and publications which may prove helpful to readers wanting to pursue a particular angle of agroforestry production.

The Overstory Book: Cultivating Connections with Trees

Edited by C Elwzich


ISBN 0 9702544 3 1

US$49.95 • €39

Permanent Agriculture Resources

P.O. Box 428

Houlouaia

HI 96725

USA

Fax: +808-324-4129

Email: overstory@agroforestry.net

Website: www.agroforestry.net

Pros and cons of GM crops for Africa

■ Should African countries embrace genetically modified (GM) technology to help feed their people, or should they opt for caution? That question is explored by a recent paper, written by researchers at the International Maize and Wheat Improvement Centre and the Kenya Agricultural Research Institute. The paper focuses on Kenya, where GM maize is in the experimental phase. The authors conclude that most objections to the new crops are not backed by evidence and that small-scale farmers and consumers stand to gain from their introduction.

Debunking the Myths of GM Crops for Africa: The Case of 8t Maize in Kenya

By H De Groote, S Mugo, D Bergvinson & B Odhiambo


People’s radio

■ Thinking of starting a community radio station? First, read this book, available free online, which has invaluable guidelines for the setting up and management of community radio. This handbook discusses the strategic role of community radio as a tool in social and economic development, and stipulates the prerequisites for a successful station — that it should be participatory, use local languages and be non-profit making. It also outlines the role community radio has played and continues to play in South African society.

Community Radio: The People’s Voice

Edited by J van Zyl


The challenge of rural education

■ More than 70% of the world’s poor live in rural areas, and it is now widely recognised that tackling the illiteracy and low school achievement rates in these regions is a crucial step on the path towards sustainable development. A joint study conducted by TACO and UNESCO presents a new perspective for educational development in rural areas, countering conventional wisdom and educational policies that have held sway in recent decades. A key message of this publication is that ‘business as usual’ and ‘more of the same’ will not solve the rural education problem.

Education for Rural Development: towards new policy responses

Edited by D Atchoarena & L Gasperini

Downloadable as a PDF from: www.rdfs.net/linked-docs/ERP.pdf
Food and nutrition security remains a major challenge for sub-Saharan Africa. But could better communication help improve the situation and, if so, how? This question was at the heart of the CTA Annual Seminar 2004: Role of Information and Communication Tools in Food and Nutrition Security in ACP Countries, held in Maputo, Mozambique, from 8-12 November 2004. The event sought to examine the role of Information and Communication Management (ICM) tools in achieving food and nutrition security (FNS) and draw up recommendations for concrete actions in ACP countries.

Ms Isatou Jallow, Executive Director of the National Nutritional Agency, Gambia provided shocking data on FNS deficiencies in Africa: one-third of African countries are below the recommended calorie intake, and millions of children die of nutrition-linked diseases every year. “Malnutrition haunts you throughout your life and impacts on the next generation,” she said. “The vicious cycle starts with malnourished mothers, who give birth to under-weight infants, who grow into malnourished youngsters. They, in turn, become pregnant too young and too often, thus perpetuating the cycle.”

The challenge is to communicate with policymakers and to educate and inform the poor and disadvantaged. Female literacy must be a priority. But it is also vital to choose the right mix of information and communication technologies (ICTs) for different target groups.

**First, let's educate rural women!**

During a visit to the seminar, Mrs Graca Machel, who served as Mozambique’s first post-independence Minister for Education and is currently President of the Foundation of Community Development and Chairperson of the National Organization of Children for Mozambique, spoke passionately of the need to pay more attention to women. Here are some key excerpts from her address.

“We are living at a time of exciting and unprecedented progress. But tragically there are so many, particularly in the rural areas who have nothing to put on the table. We have to ask, “What is going wrong?” Before we talk of communication, let’s ask, “Who is growing the food?” It’s the women — crossing borders to buy and sell, poor-or-no schools. We need more schools to improve female literacy, in particular. We need communication channels that are accessible and affordable, and in local languages. We need to manage Nature, particularly water. Women produce 70-80% of Africa’s food. We need more and better processing. We need to diversify the crops we grow. We need to manage Nature, particularly water. We need to diversify the crops we grow. We need more and better processing.

Women produce 70–80% of Africa’s food. We know what are women’s roles, but we don’t know what are women’s rights! The economies of Africa are held together by women — crossing borders to buy and sell, to do the housework, work on the farm, all is unseen and unrecognised, and doesn’t appear in the statistics. But things are changing: it’s not by chance that the President of the Pan-African Parliament is a woman. We fought for it!”
The result is a communication system that had opened the way for private investment. Policies towards telecommunications in 1997 change. Taking Uganda as an example, he FNS, the attitude of policymakers must programmes to play their role in developing Tanzania, said that for ICM policies and human resource development.

stressed the need to invest in skills and that, due to a lack of knowledge, only a small the University of Mozambique pointed out rated into more modern ICTs. Speaking of new ICTs, Professor Venancio Massingue of media, including radio, TV and print, still remain valid tools, as well as traditional communication methods such as drama, poetry and song.

The latter could also readily be incorporated into more modern ICTs. Speaking of new ICTs, Professor Venancio Massingue of the University of Mozambique pointed out that, due to a lack of knowledge, only a small fraction of ICT’s potential is exploited. He stressed the need to invest in skills and human resource development.

Dr Andrew Tema of Sokoine University, Tanzania, said that for ICM policies and programmes to play their role in developing FNS, the attitude of policymakers must change. Taking Uganda as an example, he showed how the liberalising of government policies in Uganda had opened the way for private investment. The result is a communication system that offers support to agriculture through rural radio, farmers field schools, tele-centres and the Internet.

Case studies from Kenya, Mali and Mozambique all showed how ICTs, linked with rural radio, were transforming rural people’s access to vital market, pest and agrometeorological information. “A major lesson is that knowledge is power,” said Dr Adrian Muhkebi, Executive Director of the Kenya Agricultural Commodity Exchange (KACE). “Smallholder farmers are being empowered to bargain for better prices in the market place.” Key challenges, however, remain access and cost. According to Professor Firmino Muscavele of Eduardo Mondlane University, Mozambique, Africa has only 2% of telephone lines and less than 1% of Internet hosts, 0.2% of fax machines and 0.4% of the content of the Web.

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**Better poultry production**

Meanwhile, from Nigeria, Ms Victoria Meremikwu, a lecturer in animal science at the Cross River University in Obubra, writes to tell us the good news that “broiler production, which is the fastest means of meeting the animal protein need of every nation, can now be practised by subsistence farmers.” Normally, as she rightly points out, “conventional intensive systems, especially the use of broilers, are beyond the scope of subsistence farmers.” To address this problem, a project sponsored by the Canadian International Development Research Centre (IDRC), investigated the performance of started broilers, using the subsistence free-range production system common in Nigeria. The experiment involved the comparison of various feeding regimens using started broiler chicks, treated with antibiotics, vitamin and mineral supplements and vaccinations, before being randomly distributed to 12 households for free-range rearing. The regimens were: intensive system on commercial broiler finisher ration as control group; free-range system using a maize-meal supplement; a free-range system with a toasted full-fat soybean meal supplement; and a free-range system on commercial grower ration supplement. This latter option produced the best scores in terms of survival rates and cost per kilo, “proving that free-range poultry production using high production broiler chicks is feasible, if combined with a relatively low level of inputs in the form of supplements and vaccinations”. Many thanks for sharing these interesting trials with us. Let’s hope they are soon translated into more animal protein for Nigerian households, and better profits for poultry farmers.

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**A Spore ambassador in Ghana**

Reader Samuel Anyogodem, from Ghana, is a health worker with a special interest in agriculture, who passes on advice he has gleaned from our pages, when he is out and about for his work. “I serve as a link between Spore and less privileged people who are mostly peasant farmers,” he explains. “I talk to farmers, offering advice on bush burning, compost manure, animal rearing and crop cultivation… I would love to read in Mailbox, extracts of the little I am doing to touch the lives of some people.” We’re happy to oblige, Mr. Anyogodem. Keep up the good work!

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**Mailbox**

From three different countries, we hear from readers who are helping to spread the word about better agricultural practices, be it tips on crops, poultry rearing or how to instil a passion for farming in the next generation.

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**Down at the school farm**

At the Chepeneria Girls’ Secondary School in Kenya, agriculture is an important part of the curriculum. But the best results, says teacher Kennedy Mukhwana, are obtained when the girls are allowed out of the classroom to spend time tending crops on their own school farm. “The most effective way of teaching agriculture is the practical approach,” asserts Mr. Mukhwana.

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**Reader services**

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Email: spore@cta.int

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CTA publications mentioned in Spore are marked by the green leaf symbol, and these are available free-of-charge to subscribers to CTA’s Publications Distribution Service (PDS). Other readers can buy these titles from CTA’s commercial distributor. Only agricultural and rural development organisations and individuals resident in ACP countries can apply for PDS subscriptions. Each PDS subscriber is assigned a certain number of credit points annually for purchasing publications on CTA’s list. The list of CTA publications can be consulted on CTA’s electronic catalogue: www.cta.int
- All other publications, indicated by an orange square, are available from the publishers listed, or through commercial booksellers.

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Fax: +44 1438 748844
Email: CTA@earthprint.co.uk
Website: www.earthprint.com
Cotton, setting the example

You can't eat cotton. And yet, according to Ndiogou Fall, president of ROPPA, the debate currently under way in this sector — relating to its management at both local and international levels — can contribute to food security.

Agricultural sectors

The priority today, is access to information

“Thoughts and deeds”

Once these organisations have been consolidated, they will enable our members — within their own families and households — to improve their standard of living and working conditions. If we don’t do that, I will consider that we have achieved nothing. That is why thoughts must be accompanied by deeds. And whilst we reflect on policies, we must make an equal effort to put programmes in place which will enable our rank and file members to increase their earnings a little more each day. That is very important for us.

We cannot continue with partners who spend all their time thinking, but who never translate those reflections into actions. It is vital that the system be based on both thoughts and deeds.

Some avenues are beginning to emerge. That means dealing with partners who are new to us, a process which engenders hope, but also concerns. These meetings force us to reflect on ways of effectively following up the issues which are developing. How can we ensure the participation of producers? How can we guarantee that their proposals end up on the table, and that they address current concerns?

There are so many questions that need to be asked if we are to provide answers for some sectors, which have been mired in crisis for a long time now. It is a huge undertaking, but this is where we plan to concentrate in the years to come.

The opinions expressed in Viewpoint are those of the authors, and do not necessarily reflect the views of CTA.

The example of cotton has shown us that today one of our priorities must be access to information. This access needs to be organised, managed and improved upon, from the regional level to the national or international level, and vice versa. For that to happen, we need to look at the information picture, define a strategy for information and communication and put it into practice as quickly as possible. A study of the cotton sector has also shown us that our other challenges include organising and managing platforms, training leaders among farmers and developing human resources within the network. At this stage, these leaders need to be supported by being quickly informed of events inside the country, in the region and at the international level. They have to be able to grasp in real time how to draw up strategies. Otherwise, they will not be able to look ahead.

We don’t want to be just a simple organisation that makes daily records about the state of the sector. We want to be able to look ahead. We want to be able to say: “these are the developments taking place in my country and these are the kinds of organisations and actions which we can put in place in order to be ready for them, and, when the time comes, to reap the benefits”.

But remember, we are not just cotton producers. Besides, there is not a single farmer who produces only cotton. For us, cotton is an entry point, a model. And we envisage the same approach for other sectors, encompassing the whole range of family farming activities.

Not forgetting cereals

We need to take the same approach with rice, groundnuts, oil-producing crops and especially cereals, since these are the main food sources for our people. Another priority is to ensure food security for the African people, with as much food as possible coming from what we ourselves produce. That is also the goal of the “Africa Can Feed Itself” programme, which sets very clear objectives for our agriculture. This programme combines aspects of cereal and foodstuff production with export-based agriculture and livestock rearing. We are interested in agriculture in the broad sense, and that is what we are trying to work on, so that we end up with a clear understanding of each of these sectors. Each sector represents an entry point, to enable us to understand the system as a whole and determine in each case what is missing, what needs to be done or changed.

In a general sense, we need to act so that in each country ROPPA members can use the tools available to defend their interests.