A relentless prevention strategy is needed in the fight against locusts, especially in Sahelian countries, where swarms of these formidable crop pests tend to concentrate. In its first issue in 1986, Spore warned, “the fact that there have been no mass invasions….does not mean that the threat is over”, stressing that, “we clearly cannot afford to relax our guard.” These proved to be prescient words. For it was a weakening of anti-locust systems, at both national and regional level, which contributed to two major desert locust invasions, in 1987-89, and in 2002-04, in Sahelian and Maghreb countries, as well as to an invasion of the migratory locust in Madagascar between 1997 and 2000. On each occasion, a delayed response resulted in soaring costs for donors: US$300 million in 1987-88 and $100 million in 2004. Added to those sums were expenses incurred by the affected countries, losses to farmers whose fields were ravaged, and the suffering of those no longer able to feed themselves.

However, the past 20 years have seen significant developments in the tools available for locust prevention. The areas known as ‘gregatisation zones’, where locusts swarm, have been more accurately identified and techniques for collecting information about insect populations have been simplified. In Mauritania, amongst other countries, inspection units use palm-held computers linked to global positioning systems (GPS) and transmit their data via radio to the headquarters at FAO in Rome.
Locusts

There have also been rapid strides in improving the accuracy of aerial spraying. The new generation of organophosphate pesticides is less damaging to the environment than organochloride chemicals such as dieldrin and DDT that were previously used and which are now banned by the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants signed in 2001 by 91 countries (see Spore 107, pages 4 and 5). Eliminating stockpiles of these obsolete pesticides, estimated to total 50,000 t in Africa alone, is an extremely costly procedure and much still remains to be done. The most recently developed products offer a barrier treatment which halts the progress of the locusts, an approach which saves time and allows a more targeted use of the product, which would formerly have been sprayed over entire regions. But more still needs to be done to improve prevention techniques. New avenues of research must be explored if there is to be a fuller understanding of how and why these formidable swarms of locusts form, so that early detection mechanisms can be set in place, based on the ecological conditions likely to favour an outbreak.

Greener pesticides

Studies on pheromones and biopesticides have come a long way in the past 20 years. Less damaging to the environment, these could soon represent a viable alternative to conventional products. Mycopesticides undoubtedly offer the greatest hope. After 10 years of research, the international Lubisola consortium (Biological Control of Locusts and Grasshoppers), which brings together scientists from several continents, has developed Green Muscle, based on a pathogenic fungus. This green pesticide has proved itself in a series of field trials, and in 1997, it attracted the interest of FAO. The involvement of private companies in the programme has now led to production on an industrial scale. In 2000, Niger became the first country to use the product in its anti-locust operations.

But questions linger over aspects related to the use of this living organism. Green Muscle takes between 4 to 10 days to kill the insects — time enough for the swarms to move on before dying. At present, there is no way of telling if locusts have been treated or not, so blanket, rather than barrier treatment is necessary. Another limiting factor is the as yet imperfect understanding of how long the product lasts and how long it remains effective after manufacture. And doubts remain over existing capacities for large-scale production. Currently undergoing trials, the application of pheromones, which interfere with the communication signals between the insects to prevent them from swarming, could prove a useful addition to the present array of tools.

Prompt action costs money

But, however effective they may be, weapons used to fight locusts can only work if they are used in tandem with well functioning surveillance and prevention systems. Some organisations simply do not have the necessary clout. A case in point is the Joint Anti-Locust and Anti-Aviarian Organization (OCLALAV), launched in Dakar in 1965 by a dozen countries, and which, since the 1980s, has received no contributions from member countries and is now widely discredited on the international scene.

The locust invasion that swept West Africa in 1987 was only brought under control after a long delay, the response mounted with hurried and inadequate resources. Faced with the plague of 1997, Madagascar also reacted 6 months too late, the delay caused by a lack of materials and the authorities’ reluctance to use pesticides, which could damage the island’s precious natural heritage. Since then, the new national locust control centre, the Centre national anti-acridien, has been working with the French Agricultural Research Centre for International Development (CIRAD) to set up a GPS surveillance system. In the meantime, African countries are also trying to draw lessons from past failures. In 1994, the Emergency Prevention System for Transboundary Animal and Plant Pests and Diseases (EMPRES) launched a Desert Locust programme, hosted by FAO. In 1997, it received the funds needed to cover the nine countries of the Horn of Africa and the Near East.

A reserve fund is crucial

It was not until 2000 that the Commission for Controlling Desert Locusts in the Western Region, better known by its French acronym CLCPRO, was set up in Algiers. This system, on a smaller-scale and less costly than that of OCLALAV, relies on cooperation between the Maghreb and Sahelian countries. The former offer logistical support (vehicles, planes, etc.) and the latter intensify local surveillance in areas where locusts swarm. The principle is based on the sharing of any information collected as well as tools for prevention. Intelligence gathering is supplemented by satellite monitoring. NOAA and Meteosat supply data about weather conditions while SPOT-Vegetation offers information about rainfall and vegetation.

But, in 2003, CLCPRO had still not received any funding, so was not ready to handle a new invasion. Yet again, urgent appeals went out to the international community. By the time the funds that were pledged finally materialised, a major operation was needed: in the end, 13 million ha had to be sprayed.

Today, the mechanism is working, “Responsibility for maintaining it rests with the African countries”, stresses Michel Lecoq of the Locust Ecology and Control (PRIFAS) at CIRAD, who strongly urges “the setting up of a reserve fund”. He claims this is a crucial step if funding and resources are to be mobilised quickly in case of an emergency. This locust expert believes that FAO should also set up its own reserve fund.

Another pressing need exists for a system which can define varying degrees of alert and intervention. At present, EMPRES outlines what is needed for each country to carry out routine monitoring. But it is up to each country to establish its own emergency plan. A delicate task, given that the technical and legal mechanisms vary from one country to another.

In the wake of the 2002-2004 crisis, EMPRES finally received funding in 2005. “If there is too much money, the various anti-locust units may be tempted to increase staff numbers or the quantity of vehicles, unnecessarily. But afterwards, they have to pay for their upkeep”, warned Lecoq. For that reason, he believes it would be better that “the donors be joint managers of CLCPRO” rather than having to devise last minute strategies when disaster strikes.

See Links page 10 and Publications page 13

OCLALAV: Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, Côte d’Ivoire, Gambia, Mali, Mauritania, Niger and Senegal.
CLCPRO: Algeria, Chad, Libya, Mali, Mauritania, Morocco, Niger, Senegal and Tunisia.

A swarm of desert locusts in Madagascar
Women’s long struggle

If government and aid agencies could divert some of their funds to fulfilling the aims stated above, or at least ensure that the role of women farmers is not overlooked in their schemes, it would not only improve the welfare of rural women but, by increasing food supplies, would improve the well-being and wealth of nations as well.

Spore 12 - January 1988

It is argued that because these programs concentrate on income-generation and the elimination of drudgery in the subsistence sector, instead of micro-enterprise development or cash crop production (projects which usually target men), these approaches tacitly accept the notion that women’s productive work is less important than men’s and, hence, that lower standards for women are acceptable.

Spore 76 - August 1998

Across the ACP countries, women are coming out of their enforced ‘invisibility’. Through a tide of conference resolutions, commissions and fora over the decades, an awareness has grown of their economic and social role. Gender is now mentioned in all the speeches about development, and the notion of gender, which embraces a strategy to integrate women in development, is sowing its seeds just about everywhere. The Year of the Woman in 1975 triggered off a movement which the international women’s conference in Beijing in 1995 transformed into an unstoppable force.

Spore 87 - June 2000

Biodiversity: a treasure to be shared

Members of traditional African communities have a unique understanding and interpretation of their surroundings. This includes an understanding of the crops and weeds that are used for food and medicine and their relationship to the environment. Today there is a double risk which threatens that understanding. There is a risk that in the quest to grow enough food, modern high yielding varieties (HYVs) will displace traditional crops resulting in genetic erosion, and there is an associated risk that the knowledge of how to use those traditional crops may die out, even before the plants themselves disappear.

Spore 43 - February 1993

One of the principal recommendations of international organizations is that efforts should be made to conserve the wild relatives of cultivated species. They are found in the species’ areas of origin which still harbor many wild species, indigenous varieties and weeds related to modern cultivated plants. The wild species form a natural reservoir for breeders seeking genes for resistance, hardiness or adaptability. In developing countries it is farmers and other rural people who have the responsibility for the evolution of genetic resources: they grow the plants in their farms and gardens.

Spore 54 - December 1994

In the field of agricultural innovation, there is in general too little dialogue between the farmer, the planner and the banker. Given the appeal of biodiversity, the urgency of its erosion, and the topicality of the issue (the Rio+10 summit in late 2002 will celebrate the tenth anniversary of the UN Convention on Biodiversity), surely here there are opportunities galore for finding ways to use credit, savings and finance instruments, all the way along to village level. It would be a brave person who tried to move such triangular dialogues into concrete actions, but, if they could talk, a few million species could be very grateful.

Spore 90 - December 2000

From CD-ROM to cyberspace

The internet and the electronic information services to which it gives access have already shown phenomenal growth rates and have brought prosperity and economic development to users and providers alike. The ACP States should not be left behind. Some are already on-line and the chance is there for others to catch up. The internet, like information itself, should be available for all who need it, but it could be that many of the ACP States will be left further and further behind in a world that is accelerating fast along the world’s information superhighways.

Spore 72 - December 1997

While the techies have been twiddling away with the Internet, and you’ve been wondering if you’d be left out, the phone has still been getting on with connecting people. Yesterday’s future is tantalisingly close, today.

Make that call. Send that email. Yesterday’s future is tantalisingly close, today.

Spore 92 - April 2001
Plants in the spotlight

Cattle just love calliandra

Calliandra calothyrsus is an extraordinarily versatile species.

In April 2002, Spore wrote about its useful ability to release allelopathic or growth inhibiting compounds into the environment, which can reduce infestations of striga weed. In Uganda where dairy farmers were supplied with imported cows, calliandra is helping to solve another problem — how to satisfy the bovine newcomers’ appetite for greenery without causing deforestation and erosion.

Farmers found that a winning combination is zero-grazing with calliandra as high-octane fodder. Dina Twesase is one small-scale farmer who relies on this formula. She feeds her single Friesian cow with calliandra, which she began growing with the help of the Africare 2000 and the World Agroforestry Centre (ICRAF). Farmers in the region have learned the benefits of planting C. calothyrsus in contour hedgerows to conserve soil and water, improve soil fertility, and obtain fencing materials, firewood, stakes and bee forage. But, as Dina has discovered, calliandra really scores as a source of protein for dairy cattle. A supplement of 3 kg of calliandra is equivalent to 1 kg of expensive commercial dairy meal. She grows the calliandra amongst her crops, avoiding the need to convert any of her small property to pasture. In return for the fancy diet, her cow produces 20 l of milk per day.

Spore is 20

Marvellous marula

In parts of Africa, the marula tree is valued so highly that giving someone the seed kernel is considered a true sign of friendship.

Its small golden fruit featured most memorably in Spore 90, which reported how elephants got tipsy when the berries fermented in their stomach. In its native southern Africa, the fruits of the marula tree (Schlerocarya birrea) are used to make a liqueur. More recently, producers have tuned into the potential of this valuable fruit — which has four times more vitamin C than oranges — as a basis for a whole range of other products. A community-based company in the Limpopo Province of South Africa makes fruit pulp, seed oil and skin conditioner from organic marula. Marula Natural Products Pty Ltd operates on fair trade principles and, as well as processing the fruit, acts as intermediary between African producers and export buyers.

Cowpea

Plants battle cowpea pests

Cowpea, Vigna unguiculata (L.) Walp., needs no introduction. Spore has written about this useful grain legume on many occasions, and ACP farmers prize the crop for its high protein levels, resistance to drought and ability to fix atmospheric nitrogen. But while the cowpea’s virtues are well known, the plant does have a major drawback — it is highly susceptible to pests and diseases, with losses of up to 90%. Indeed, Spore has often examined this seemingly intractable problem.

There are some encouraging signs, however. Scientists at the International Institute for Tropical Agriculture (IITA) have developed high-yielding varieties with resistance to major diseases, insect pests, nematodes and parasitic weeds. Varieties with resistance to parasitic weeds such as Striga are currently being tested in farmers’ fields and early maturing varieties with increased drought and shade tolerance are also being developed. Meanwhile, cowpea producers in Benin, Burkina Faso, Ghana, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, and Senegal are learning how to make and use plant-based insecticides. Projet Niébé pour l’Afrique (PRONAF) uses high-yielding varieties that are resistant to key pests, diseases and weeds — including flower thrips (Megalurothrips sjostedti), pod borer (Maruca vitrata), storage weevils (Callosobruchus maculatus) and Striga — combined with botanical insecticides, solar drying, and triple bagging storage techniques. Effective plant-based pesticides include pawpaw, neem and extracts from pepper and tobacco.
Grain amaranth

Grain amaranth makes a comeback

Grain amaranth is one of the world’s “forgotten foods”. Grown extensively by the Incas and Aztecs of Central and South America, this versatile, hardy grain is packed with vitamins and minerals and may hold out hope for improving food security in dryland ACP regions. Grain amaranth is especially suitable for hot, dry conditions, and has good resistance to pests and diseases. It grows rapidly and with little water, and is exceptionally rich in lysine, a critical amino acid often deficient in plant protein. SPAS has supplied certified seeds for planting, and the hope is to tap growing export markets, as well as domestic ones — more than 40 products containing grain amaranth are currently on the health food market in the United States alone.

The magic grass

vetiver

For centuries, the oil extracted from the roots of vetiver grass (Vetiveria zizanioides) has been used in the perfume trade.

In October 2004, Spore wrote about how rural dwellers in Mali and Nigeria were selling vetiver to the cosmetics industry. This remarkably useful plant is also used for soil and water conservation, and increasingly, as an environmental tool. When planted as a contour hedge, vetiver acts as a filtering system that slows down rainfall runoff, reduces rilling and collects soil sediments at the hedge face. In ACP regions, vetiver is used to halt erosion, for example, in the Caribbean, Madagascar, Nigeria, Senegal and parts of the Pacific. In Ethiopia and Malawi, the grass is planted on sloping ground to reduce run off and sediment flows in upper watersheds, thus improving water quality further downstream. Spore 80 reported that trials in Thailand had shown that planting rows of vetiver grass could help absorb agrochemicals, particularly pesticides. Similar trials have since been successfully carried out in China and there is now interest in spreading this technology further afield. In South Africa, vetiver has been used to reclaim toxic mine dumps. Vetiver has the advantage of thriving in both wet and dry conditions, and on both highly acidic and alkaline soils. It also has a high tolerance to pests and diseases. Perhaps its most remarkable feature is its extraordinarily long roots, which will grow to depths of 3 to 4 m. Many cultivars are non flowering, which means the plant cannot become a weed. Once established, vetiver needs little maintenance, and its leaves and roots can be used for thatching and weaving. No wonder the Americans call it magic grass!

The many uses of

moringa

Moringa oleifera, the oleaginous tree found in most tropical countries of Africa, Asia and America, is no stranger to the pages of Spore.

It made its first appearance in Spore 19 when we wrote about its seeds, which offer an ecological solution to filtering and purifying water. Moringa is also a very generous ‘tree of life’. Its leaves, which are rich in vitamins, minerals and proteins, can be made into a sauce and eaten with cereals. Dried and powdered, they help combat malnutrition, especially in children. This tree may be used in many ways, whether traditional or innovative. In 2002, Spore 100 counted no fewer than 19 different applications. A number of other avenues of research are still being explored, including potential uses as animal fodder, as a vegetable growth hormone, as paper pulp, green fertiliser and as a phytopharmaceutical product. It seems as if moringa has yet to reveal the full range of its virtues.
Closer and closer! For this anniversary issue, we decided to track down some of the readers who had shown an interest in Spore during the reader survey we carried out in 2001. On that occasion, we were inundated with replies, some of which greatly moved and encouraged us, and we are happy to share these with you now.

Four years on, we visited some of those readers in their villages and associations, to get to know them better and see how they use Spore. It was not always easy to find them, some having no address and nothing but a post box number to go on!

So here in these rather special In Brief pages, we offer you profiles of some of the people who find Spore useful. Many of you will almost certainly identify with them and we hope that you will have as much pleasure as we did in making their acquaintance.

Readers’ voices

Ecofarming made easy

Samuel Muhunyu, NGO official

An agricultural engineer by training, Samuel Muhunyu works as country coordinator for Network for Ecofarming in Africa (NECOFA) in Kenya, an NGO that helps rural community groups towards food and nutrition security and biodiversity conservation. He has a strong practical streak and likes to translate words into deeds for concrete results. So when Mr Muhunyu read an article in Spore about urban agriculture (Urban Agriculture and Food Security, Spore 81), he immediately sprang into action, setting up a project targeting urban households. After receiving training in small livestock rearing, 56 urban farmers in Molo Town, mostly women, have now begun rearing rabbits and chickens.

In the following issue of Spore, another article caught his eye, this time on HIV/AIDS (AIDS and Agriculture, Spore 82). “Spore is an inspiring publication for me. In many instances it has triggered thought process in a direction I had not considered before,” reflected Mr Muhunyu. “It had not occurred to me that food, (especially that which is rich nutritionally and in some cases is also therapeutic) is indeed very important to people with HIV/AIDS.” After some discussion, the NECOFA team hit on the idea of setting up a Healthy Food for Healthy Living scheme, of which an important component was the domestication and use of the stinging nettle (Urtica massaica), a traditional vegetable — also used as a drink — that contains iron, calcium and vitamins. This latter product has proved successful as a source of nutrients but also as a cash earner for small-scale producers. But first, Mr Muhunyu and his team faced a problem. “Attempts to dry the nettle in open sun failed because the material lost the green colour (and we think nutrients too),” he explained. Again, Mr Muhunyu turned to Spore. “The article on Renewable Energy in Spore 100 came in handy in identifying a solution,” he said. “With one community group we have fabricated a simple, cheap and efficient drying system for the nettle, after which it is ground and packed for sale in towns. Our Stinging Nettle project is growing and so is demand for the nettle in urban centres like Nairobi.”

When Spore comes out, Mr Muhunyu and his colleagues generally digest the information before presenting it to small-scale producers at their regular group meetings. Often, items give rise to fruitful discussions. A case in point was an In Brief article on natural pesticides (Biopesticides: a good recipe from Niger, Spore 81), which prompted a discussion on the use of botanicals in pest management. The Kenya farmers soon saw there were local products that they too could use. “Interestingly, they realised that the pyrethrum crop that they have farmed for decades is very effective as a biopesticide,” said Mr Muhunyu. “They were amazed by the irony of one going to town — at cost and taking time — to buy expensive and often harmful pesticides and leaving one’s own pyrethrum to go to waste.”

“I translated into Amharic some attractive articles and then sent them to some newspapers and radio broadcasting stations in Addis. For instance, see this photocopy of a newspaper which used the article ‘The future of fog (Spore 88).”

Daniel Assefa
Senior technical assistant,
Ethiopian Agricultural Research Organisation
Nourishing information

The women of the Samwaki association, in Kivu

Mathilde M’Nshangalume, an elderly farmer from the Bukavu region, in the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, cannot believe it: “To think that it took only a few meetings for us to change the way we grow crops and restore prosperity, as if by magic.” The hundred or so female members of the Samwaki association, which roughly means ‘The Voice of the Woman Farmer’, were inspired to take action against the terrible cassava mosaic disease after reading an In Brief article in Spore 115. The disease had ravaged their fields and people were forced to eat roots to survive, so the women planted cuttings of improved cassava varieties and their crops began producing good yields once again.

Spurred on by this success, women from about 15 villages have regularly been walking several kilometres to take part in reading clubs organised by the young people of the community to discuss new ideas and techniques found in Spore and other specialist publications. All of which is like music to the ears of the association’s officials, who, since Samwaki was launched in 2002, have been convinced that information is the key to development.

“Thanks to Spore, we learned how to make a solution based on neem leaves and soap to tackle cowpea pests. We taught the technique to farmers, who used it without too much difficulty. Since then, they are much happier.”Slim, and around 40-years-old, Simon Akonagbo, from Benin, is generous in his praise of the magazine. He finds it a valuable source of information for the Association des amis du village (AAV) farmers’ organisation, which he heads. Since 1997, AAV has worked to spread knowledge of farming techniques at Agamey in the rural district of Lokossa, 120 km west of Cotonou.

Holding the latest issue, Mr Akonagbo recounts how he first came across Spore, “It was in April 1998, and I had gone to visit a friend in Lokossa. He had a copy...” Engrossed in the pages, he remembers being intrigued by two things, the two intertwined leaves of the logo and the name ‘Spore’. He found it a strange spelling, given that he was only familiar with ‘spor’, written with an ‘t’. As he delved further, his curiosity grew. A magazine with information on agriculture! For this farmer’s son, and member of a farmers’ organisation, it was love at first sight. “I asked how I could get hold of it and immediately wrote to CTA.”

Several months passed before two copies arrived. The 20 or so AAV members soon shared his passion. “We used to divide into two groups of 10 to read Spore.” Hardly very practical. A new request was despatched to CTA, which has been sending five copies ever since. These days, the reading is done in groups of four, followed by a discussion on the content of the magazine. Methodically, Mr Akonagbo and his friends pull out the main points of interest and the most useful pieces of information before translating them into the most widely spoken languages of the region — fon, cotafo, adja and mina. Later, they organise meetings with the farmers. “We don’t impose our views on them”, insists Mr Akonagbo. “They tell us their problems and we offer them solutions suggested by Spore.”

He believes that the magazine’s main merit is to have contributed to a change in thinking. “Farmers have always thought their misfortunes were caused by bad luck. Thanks to information from Spore, they are no longer fatalistic, as they have learned that in other climes, farmers are meeting and overcoming the same difficulties as they are.” AAV would like to spread its message further afield, especially in the remote rural areas, but it lacks the resources. Mr Akonagbo’s dream is to have a “small, local rural radio network, to be better able to share agricultural information.”

Dr Frank E Lawrence has spent a lifetime helping rural people in his native Jamaica to understand more about sustainable community development. And Spore has been his constant companion, he says, as he goes about his task of helping communities with agroforestry, small animal rearing, value added food processing, bee-keeping, rain water harvesting and alternative energy projects. “Spore is one of the most useful sources for providing information in helping and motivating small-scale producers,” says Dr Lawrence, who is a minister of religion, an organic farmer and President of the Northern Jamaica Conservation Association (NJCA), an NGO which focuses on designing environmentally sustainable projects with income generating potential. “Due to information and ideas received from Spore, our community won the coveted 2005 Michael Manley Award for Community Self-Reliance and Sustainable Development.” In recognition of Dr Lawrence’s work, the Jamaican government also singled him out for a personal award — the Badge of Honour Award for Meritorious Service in the field of Sustainable Community Development.

Sturge Town, the community which won the award, is one of Jamaica’s oldest villages, set in a hilly, remote area. Its small-scale farmers rely on livestock rearing and the cultivation of vegetables, root crops, fruit, lumber and spices for a living. Lack of water and good roads hamper development, says Dr Lawrence, who believes local farmers need to be more involved in planning and decision-making. “But all these problems can be helped by continuous motivation and creating greater awareness regarding self-reliance and sustainable development.”

Once he has finished reading Spore, Dr Lawrence passes on copies and articles to other people. He particularly enjoyed the In Brief item on Turning back to Traditional Trees in Spore 117, and the feature on Covering the Soil to Make it More Fertile in Spore 112. “We found that very useful in reviving the practice of mulching in our organic farming approach,” he comments.

Simon Akonagbo, Executive Director of the Association des amis du village (AAV) farmers’ association

Dr Simon Akonagbo

“Love at first sight”
Cameroon

Well documented

Gilbert Konango, of the Communauté des exploitants agricoles (CEA) farmers’ association

In the small office of the farmers’ association Communauté des exploitants agricoles (CEA), 14 km east of Douala, Engonga Prétèstat is engrossed in the latest issue of Spore. Asked about his interest in the magazine, he raises his head and, after thinking for a few moments, admits, “I lost my job as assistant accountant in 1988. It’s thanks to Spore that I had the idea of turning to farming. Since then, I’ve read every issue.”

Spore has caught up with him. “Since then we have sent out about 400 kits, each with 100 analyses, to health workers and agriculturalists. There are many who have said that they read about them first in Spore, including Mr Abiye, who is still in touch with me.”

Dr Bradbury has also developed a simple wetting method which greatly reduces the cyanide content of cassava flour. The flour is mixed with water and spread in a thin layer on a tray in the shade for 5 h. The flour’s cyanide content is then determined by a simple wetting method can be found on the CCDN website, and the cyanide kits are still available, free of charge, for readers in developing countries, from the address below.

Spore 20

The others have opted to sit on a bench in the courtyard. All of them are busy reading the few agricultural publications available, among them Spore and several books from CTA. “Everyone who comes here reads it”, observes Gilbert Konango. “They learn about innovations, copy what others are doing and seek technical advice.”

The association has been a subscriber since 1992. Through the years, Spore has proved an indispensable teaching tool for Mr Konango. He uses it to prepare training seminars for farmers. “We look through the back copies to find technical material for the chosen theme”, he explains. The magazine is also a rich source of information for the various reviews published by the association. Among them is the bimonthly Le manioc (Cassava), of which there are a few copies on the table. A useful way of spreading information among the 1200 or so farmers who are members of CEA.

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Making waves with Spore

Samuel Harry Abiye and Dr Howard Bradbury, united against cyanide

One of the most gratifying aspects of Spore is the way it creates a ripple effect, putting readers in touch with one another and acting as a catalyst. One clear example came when Samuel Harry Abiye, Principal Agricultural Officer at the River State Development Programme in Nigeria, wrote to us to tell us how he followed up an article in Spore 88 about the work of Dr Howard Bradbury of the Australian National University (ANU), who had developed a kit to determine potentially fatal levels of cyanide in cassava root and products. “This equipment formed part of the material and method of my post-graduate thesis work on relating total cyanogens to cyanide diseases,” wrote Mr Abiye.

That was back in February 2002. Mr Abiye is still in touch with Dr Bradbury and has in fact now become a member of the Cassava Cyanide Diseases Network (CCDN), an organisation launched by Dr Bradbury in 2000 under the banner of “Working together to eliminate cyanide poisoning, konzo and tropical ataxic neuropathy (TAN).”

Cyanide poisoning is a serious cause of death and disability, especially in Africa where many cassava varieties are bitter and high in cyanide levels. Konzo, a permanent paralytic condition of the legs, mainly affects children and young women in central and eastern Africa, especially in periods of drought, when cyanide levels in cassava are higher than usual. In West Africa, TAN is more common. It is a sensory disease, leading to difficulties in walking, numbness, deafness and blindness.

Dr Bradbury developed his simple kit to measure cyanide levels in cassava plants and products and has so far distributed 400 of them. “I was able to use Spore very effectively to advertise the cyanide in cassava kits,” he said when Spore caught up with him recently. “Since then we have sent out about 400 kits, each with 100 analyses, to health workers and agriculturalists. There are many who have said that they read about them first in Spore, including Mr Abiye, who is still in touch with me.”

The rural radio in Kankan gives my service a weekly slot on the airwaves. The broadcasts are in Malinke. As part of this joint initiative, I offered the radio station the CTA publication Radio serving the rural areas of the ACP countries. This gift has galvanised relations between the rural radio in Kankan and my service.

Lamine Mohamad Bamba
Agronomist, Guinea

The rural radio in Kankan gives my service a weekly slot on the airwaves. The broadcasts are in Malinke. As part of this joint initiative, I offered the radio station the CTA publication Radio serving the rural areas of the ACP countries. This gift has galvanised relations between the rural radio in Kankan and my service.
Cameroon

**Songs from the heart**

**Chief Foudjou, community leader**

As head of his community in Batcham Sub-Division, Cameroon, Chief Foudjou has long been concerned about the lack of education and information for young people in this remote rural area. In 1997, he helped found an NGO called the Rural Development Organisa- tion (RUDEOR) in an effort to address some of the community’s most pressing problems. To date, the organisation has helped improve dirt tracks to improve access to markets, encouraged the use of green fertiliser to improve soil fertility, and even built a school for local children, in the village of Tsopeua. “Our activities have been spurred on by Spore magazine,” says Chief Foudjou. “It has given us the real songs of agricultural knowledge and information.”

DRC

**For the young**

**Edmond Mahuta, coordinator for the Association paysanne pour le développement social de Masi-Manimba (ASSOPADEM) community organisation**

The story began in the early 1990s. And it must be said that it began rather badly! At the request of a German company, Edmond Mahuta and about 15 young people decided to start a business growing peppers in the Masi-Manimba region, 250 km east of Kinshasa. They harvested 30 sacks, each weighing 10 kg. Happily, they sent the first two parcels to Germany by post. Not a word! So they decided to sell their product on the local market, but there were no buyers there either. The group quickly became discouraged and broke up. Only Edmond and a friend called Gilbert remained, but they were determined to continue their struggle against unemployment and idleness, which befell many young rural dwellers in DRC.

Gilbert stayed where he was while Edmond left for Bindungi, about 100 km further south, to grow peanuts on 2 ha of land. “The teachers and some other young people from the village approached me and asked if we could do something together”, he recalls. November 1995 saw the launch of the Association paysanne pour le développement social de Masi-Manimba (ASSOPADEM) community organisation, which Edmond coordinates to this day. This farmers’ NGO had a two-pronged goal — to ensure the food security of communities living in the region and to find work for its young people.

With a background in humanities, Edmond studied a correspondence course on farming and community development from the Institut africain de développement social (INADES) in Kinshasa over the next 4 years. Out in the field, the members of the association carried on, season after season, growing maize, cassava, peanuts, soya, cowpeas, etc., until in 2001, a priest called Franklin Munguba introduced them to Spore. The magazine “changed our whole way of working the land”, explains Edmond Mahuta, with some emotion. The women of Bindungi, who used to grow a few meagre okras, grew 4 ha of vegetables in 2004. “It was all thanks to techniques learned in Spore”, claims Edmond.

Each issue is read and dissected in groups, under the guidance of the association’s agronomist who, when necessary, offers explanations to the women, many of whom are illiterate. Fifteen, twenty, thirty… the numbers taking part in these sessions are growing all the time.

Ghana

**Goats and garlic**

**Samuel Apiiga, broadcaster, animal scientist and extension agent**

In Bolgatanga, Ghana, Samuel Apiiga is a well known face and a familiar voice for local farmers. An animal scientist, he works as an extension agent, training farmers in the production of cattle, sheep, goats, rabbits and pigs, as well as poultry, especially guinea fowl.

But Mr Apiiga also wears another hat, as broadcaster of a rural FM station (URA-Radio FM). On his weekly programme, he gives tips to listeners on indigenous breeds. “It was a useful and I learned a lot from it,” he said. “Spore has helped me in so many ways,” said Mr Apiiga. “It has increased my knowledge on the latest improved agricultural technologies, especially for animal husbandry. It helps me in my broadcasting work. It even helped me write my MSc thesis, on rural poultry.”

High on his long wish list for the communities he serves are more opportunities for rural extension agents to receive training abroad on information dissemination. “As a broadcaster, I see how important it is to pass on information on agriculture and development,” he said, as he got ready to go on air for his Monday morning show.

Mr Apiiga’s favourite recent article was in June 2005, a feature on indigenous breeds. “It was excellent and I learned a lot from it,” he said. “Spore has helped me in so many ways,” said Mr Apiiga. “It has increased my knowledge on the latest improved agricultural technologies, especially for animal husbandry. It helps me in my broadcasting work. It even helped me write my MSc thesis, on rural poultry.”

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- Readers’ voices
In 2007, Jean-Claude Minkala will be retiring, but he has no intention of remaining inactive for long. With the help of Spore, this health assistant from the University Hospital in Brazzaville is planning to become an ‘agropastoral farmer’. In his late fifties, Mr Minkala explains the reasons for his decision to change profession. "I always said that when I retired I would not do a job that involved looking after people. The ancillary staff who work in the public surgeries don’t have a very good reputation. And I wouldn’t want to be mixed up with that lot."

Information and life can take some strange twists and turns. One day in the mid 1990s — one of his brothers just back from Cuba talked at length about an agricultural magazine published in the Netherlands, and advised him to write and ask if he could receive it. He was quick to follow this piece of advice, which, as things turned out, opened up new horizons for him. By reading Spore, Mr Minkala gradually learned how to breed pigs, chickens, etc. "The magazine also helped me to start growing fruit trees — orange, mango and safou..."

It was at Mindouli, a place 180 km south of Brazzaville, that he decided to base his agricultural activities, with his father on the spot to supervise. Then the war of 1997 wiped out all his plans. His father was killed, his livestock were slaughtered and his crops were devastated. Everything would have to be rebuilt from scratch. But Mr Minkala never stopped reading Spore. An open-minded person, he was looking for any experiences or solutions which might help his own situation. Faced with a local conflict over the management of pastureland, he found the address for the director of the development project, Programme Sahel Burkina. He sent him a document about a joint management initiative between herders and farmer-herders from Kishi Beiga, in the north of Burkina Faso (Spore 85). "At Mindouli, we had the same problem", he explained. "When an ox strayed from its pastureland to go and graze in someone else’s field, the owner had to pay F CFA5 million (€7,622). That’s impossible! It poisoned relations between farmers. I used the experience from Burkina Faso, putting the idea before local communities. And we have managed to resolve the conflict."

When a fragile peace returned to The Republic of the Congo in 2003, Jean-Claude Minkala relaunched his activities, with his retirement in mind. He would love to visit other countries such as Burkina Faso to learn some of the recipes developed by NGOs and presented in Spore. "For example, I would like to go and see how you make mango liqueur and bread from cassava flour...."

Mr Guissou took his time before subscribing to Spore in 1997. Ever since, his favourite magazine has had a special place on his desk. The issues have piled up over the years. When it fails to arrive on time, he rushes to the documentation centre. Impatient, he fears the worst. In the Netherlands, would the parents of his "beloved" prevent her from coming out? He could quite believe it, since in his country, a prospective husband must tend the fields of his future in-laws and make them gifts. And he knows he has done none of these things. Then, another thought comes to mind: could she have been carried off by some rival, perhaps by the postman? Comparing the magazine to a talented chef, he confides, "I want to discover what she has prepared, in the hope that this time, the dish will be even better than the one before."

Like any attentive companion, Spore, plies him with advice. Working on a water and soil conservation project in 1994, Mr Guissou began experimenting with living hedges. These natural barriers protect plants from strong winds in the dry season and ensure that market gardeners get a good crop of vegetables. But to introduce a new technique, it is not enough to shout it from the rooftops. You need to know how to put across the message, and engineers are not always very good at that. "The technical publications and leaflets I order help me to develop the right approach for dealing with rural communities. As a result, I am better able to judge what kind of message to get across to people, and can more easily assess their needs and take their concerns into consideration", explains Mr Guissou. In the articles he writes for specialist magazines, he frequently quotes Spore. "Unlike other publications which focus too much on one aspect, Spore has a more multi-disciplinary approach", observes the researcher, who has done work on the jujube, inspired by an article from the magazine.
A swarm of information

Locust invasions, and methods of tackling this scourge, are a vast topic. Before turning to the internet, anyone new to this subject would do well to leaf through the French comic strip, Les dents du ciel, which offers an excellent introduction. Both informative and entertaining, it charts the fortunes of Boukari, an African farmer, who leaves his village to join a crop protection team. Though the first volume of this bilingual portal of the Locust Ecology and Control research unit at the French International Development Agricultural Research Centre for (CIRAD) is out of stock, the second is still available at CTA.

If you are affected by these highly destructive insects, either directly or indirectly, a look at the United Nations information service. Also worth a read, though only available in French, is Histoire d’un siècle de lutte anti-acridienne en Afrique, a book which outlines the stakes for current and future research initiatives, in the light of past invasions.

The website of the research group Lubilosa contains copious information on the promising mycocide Green Muscle. Finally, if the issue of obsolete pesticides interests you, the Africa Stockpiles programme has a website which offers a pan-African inventory of stocks and initiatives to dispose of them.

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For further information

Africa Stockpiles
www.africasstockpiles.org

CIRAD
www.cirad.fr/index.php/acridologie
http://locust.cirad.fr

CIRAD and ISPI
http://ispi-lit.cirad.fr/introduction.htm

FAO
Locust Watch
www.fao.org/ag/locusts
Locust-webspecial.PDF

IRIN
The Eighth Plague. West Africa’s Locust Invasion
www.irinnews.org/theweb specialised/Locust
IRIN webspecial.PDF

Les dents du ciel II ou la lutte intégrée contre les criquets en Afrique sahélienne
By M Launois & T M Luong
CIRAD-GERDAT-PRIFAS- CTA, 1996, 46 pp
ISBN 2 87614 222 8
CTA Number 719
10 credit points

Lubilosa
www.lubilosa.org

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Plants between the lines

The on-line encyclopaedia Wikipedia is an excellent source of information on all the plants featured in this issue. Below you will find other sources for each plant.

Site Web:
http://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Main_Page

Calliandra
World Agroforestry Centre (ICRAF)
United Nations Avenue
Gigiri
PO Box 30677-00100 GPO
Nairobi
Kenya
Fax: +254 20 722 4001
Email: ICRAF@cgiar.org
Website: www.worldagroforestry.org

Calliandra calothyrsus:
www.worldagroforestry.org/Sites/TreeDBS/aft/speciesPrinterFriendly.asp
?id=410

Cowpea
International Institute for Tropical Agriculture (IITA)
PO Box 5320, Ibadan
Oyo State, Nigeria
Fax: +234 2 241 2221
Email: IITA@cgiar.org
Website:
www.iita.org/crop/cowpea.htm

Grain amaranth
Strategic Poverty Alleviation Systems
PO Box 7795-00200
Nairobi
Kenya
Fax: +254 20 722 4001
Email: ICRAF@cgiar.org
Website: www.worldagroforestry.org

ICRAF has an excellent database on Calliandra calothyrsus:
www.worldagroforestry.org/Sites/TreeDBS/aft/speciesPrinterFriendly.asp

Grain amaranth
Strategic Poverty Alleviation Systems
PO Box 7795-00200
Nairobi
Kenya
Email: spastrategy system@yahoo.com

The Plant Genetic Resources (PGR) Newsletter, jointly published by FAO and the International Plant Genetic Resources Institute (IPGRI), has a search facility on its website, which will find recent articles on grain amaranthus.

Website:
www.ipgri.cgiar.org/
pgrnewslettereditorial.htm

Marula
Marula Natural Products Pty Ltd
9th Floor, Devonshire House
49 Johannesburg St, Braamfontein
Johannesburg
South Africa
Fax: +27-11-403-0285/6496
Email: mnp@lantic.net
Website: www.marula.org.za

The Kew Garden Survey of Economic Plants for Arid Areas (Sepasal) database has a comprehensive entry on marula, including characteristics, uses and distribution.

Website:
www.kew.org/ceb/sepasal/birrea.htm

Moringa
Réseau Moringa
PROPAGE
211, rue du Faubourg Saint-Antoine
75011 Paris
France
Fax: +33 1 40 09 04 79
Email: Armelle@moringanews.org
Website:
www.moringanews.org/index.html

Africa Stockpiles programme has a website which offers a pan-African inventory of stocks and initiatives to dispose of them.

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The Eighth Plague
By J Roy
L’Harmattan, Paris, 2001, 294 pp
ISBN 2 7475 1330 0
€22

IRIN
The Eighth Plague. West Africa’s Locust Invasion
www.irinnews.org/theweb specialised/Locust
IRIN webspecial.PDF

Lubilosa
www.lubilosa.org

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A swarm of information
Publications

In its lifetime, Spore has seen the publication of all kinds of books, every one of them chosen with the aim of offering that extra touch — through references, tips or food for thought. But what do we really know about the genesis of these publications, and what happens to them after they are featured?

At CTA, we have some idea of the titles which have most captured your interest. See our ‘Top Ten’ 2005. Some readers write to tell us how they have used the information. Our co-publishers also provide us with feedback. Sometimes, a book will give birth to an entire multilingual family, with translations into Arabic, Swahili, Portuguese or Vietnamese.

To mark its 20th anniversary, Spore remembers some of the books co-published by CTA which have proved especially popular with readers.

Protect crops naturally

■ At its birth, in 1986, it measured 14.8 x 21 cm and weighed 188 pages. Born to a German mother, it made its debut in English at CTA and in Spore, issue 11. “In natural crop protection, we are applying nature’s own instruments. Even though they seem to belong to another age, they can still today contribute to an appropriate pest management, the more so as they minimize the risks for farmer, consumer and the environment.”

It was with these words that Gaby Stoll introduced her book Natural Crop Protection in the Tropics. “At that time natural pest management really had no positive reputation,” she recalls. The manual soon became much sought after, mainly due to the clarity of the information it contained, and its clear, easy-to-use style. “Having almost finished the first draft of the book, I was not satisfied with the logic of it. I imagined my father, a smallholder in the south of Germany, I wanted him to find the exact page in the book when he stood in a field with a pest-related problem. Today, I believe that this became the secret of the book.”

The book’s initial success has never flagged. The manual has been translated into eight languages, including French (in collaboration with CTA in 1988), Spanish and Thai. Comments received over the years resulted in a revised edition being published in 2000, in both English and French. The manual has changed look and gained weight — it is now 386 pages. While not as light as before to take into the field, it still retains “a well-deserved place on — and off — the shelves of farmers and their advisors”, as Spore 91 observed.

Small manuals with big ambitions

■ Of Dutch stock, it first saw the light of day at the Agromisa Foundation in the 1970s. From 1986 onwards, it had CTA as godfather, to watch over it as it grew. We are, as you may have guessed, talking about the Agrodok series. In English, French and Portuguese, the Agrodok manuals have won over thousands of producers, trainers and field agents. Whatever the subject, be it agroforestry, dairy products or rearing rabbits, their practical information is highly prized. The proof is that Agrodok titles always feature in the Top Ten of CTA’s Publications Distribution Service.

The 40 or so titles are available on-line (www.anancy.net). In December 2005, Agromisa and CTA formalised their partnership to encourage local reproduction and diffusion of Agrodok manuals. In the next issue of Spore, look out for the latest releases in the series, on beekeeping products and mushroom production.

First aid — and more — for your animals

■ The idea first came to a British vet working in the Caribbean. In 1991, inspired by the success of Where There is No Doctor, Dr Hadrill suggested that CTA publish a manual which explained how to treat animals when there is no vet available, or when it is difficult to find one. “It has become clear to me that there are many places in developing countries where government veterinary services are unable to provide an adequate service to livestock owners because of lack of resources, human and financial”, he wrote, “This situation is worse in harsh environments where there is most need — in mountainous or semiarid areas livestock are often vital to sustain human life.”

Contact was made with Oxfam and the publishing house, Macmillan. It took almost 10 years to produce Where There is No Vet, in 1999 (see Spore 83), and a further 3 for the French version. The book was redrafted several times, as various prospective authors pulled out. It is, in fact, no easy task to describe in simple words the health problems of animals in developing countries and to explain how to deal with emergencies, carry out simple operations and use remedies to good effect. The eventual author, Bill Forse, proved to have the rare ability to combine the expertise of a vet with the know-how of a livestock breeder and the skills of a writer. In the course of the project, he used an extensive network of contacts and travelled widely, from Ethiopia to Senegal and from Mali to Pakistan, passing through Uganda and Tanzania on the way.

Since its publication, more than 7,000 ACP subscribers have ordered the book from CTA and thousands of readers have bought copies from co-publishers. And the family has grown, with translations into Shona and Ndebele in Zimbabwe and an adaptation in Cameroon, amongst others.

Where There is No Vet
By B Forse
CTA • Macmillan • Oxfam
ISBN 0 333 58899 1
CTA number 917
20 credit points
The colours of Africa

In southern tropical Africa, Pterocarpus angolensis, also known as African bloodwood, is widely prized for its timber, which is used for making furniture, flooring, wood carvings, boats and windows. The roots of this tree are also pounded to a powder to yield a colour-fast, brownish-red dye which is used in the cottage industry in Namibia and Zimbabwe, mainly to dye palm-leaf fibres for basket weaving. The tree is one of 30 species of wild and cultivated plants used for dyes and tannins in tropical Africa that feature in a new book in the Plant Resources of Tropical Africa (PROTA) series.

A range of plant species are used for dyeing fibres, food or skin in tropical Africa, and many plant species also contain tannins. The advent of synthetic dyes, in the latter half of the 19th century, led to a decline in the commercial use of many natural ones, though they were often used locally. Recently, interest in natural dyes and tannins has been revived worldwide, mainly because these are less polluting and toxic than their synthetic counterparts.

This volume offers a comprehensive view of the main species used for dyes and tannins, as well as accounts of 43 species of lesser importance. Some of the main species described are widely known. Henna (Lawsonia inermis) is one of the world's oldest dyes, with written records dating back 2,500 years. Originating in Asia, it has become widely naturalised in Africa, particularly on alluvial soils along rivers. Bixa orellana, also known as annatto or the lipstick tree produces an organic dye, often used in the food industry to give a red or orange-yellow colour to cheese, butter, oils, margarine, ice cream, bakery products and rice.

But the book also gives useful insights into local uses. In West Africa, the Baoulé people of Côte d'Ivoire use a paste of crushed annatto seeds, lemon juice and water to colour doorposts, wooden masks and toys. In Kaokoland, Namibia, Ficus glomera is an important tanning agent, used to give leather the red colour favoured by the Himba people. The bark also produces a brick-red dye, popular in Ghana, Mali and Sierra Leone for dyeing cloth and raffia. As well as describing the plants' properties, uses and geographical distribution, the book also offers information on husbandry methods.

Keeping an eye on markets

Given the trend towards globalisation, farmers in the South have much to gain by taking more of an interest in the marketing of their products. The latest AgriPromo Dossier aims to help them meet this challenge by offering tips on how to improve access to agricultural markets. This collection of five booklets comes in the form of a series of articles written by African agronomists and economists. The first booklet offers a short but useful historical overview and an assessment of the marketing of food crops, cash crops and export crops in Africa from the 1960s to the close of the last century. The second sets the scene for the new international trade picture, focusing in particular on the creation of the World Trade Organization (WTO) and new agreements with ACP countries. A whole booklet is given over to examples of producer organisations involved in marketing; coffee growers in Burundi, cereal exchanges in Burkina Faso, onion farmers in Cameroon and the wholesale regional market in Côte d'Ivoire.

Marketing of agricultural produce: Helping farmers to position themselves better in agricultural production and marketing

Dossier AgriPromo n°4
I Ouédraogo, F Ngang Fru, M-C Houédanou (eds)
Inades-Formation/CTA, 2005
ISBN 90 5782 160 5 (with CD-ROM)
CTA number 1266 (within CD-ROM)
40 credit points
CTA number 1267 (with CD-ROM)
60 credit points

Plant resources of tropical Africa 3: Dyes and tannins

Edited by D Cardon & P C M Jansen
PROTA Foundation/Brightstar Publishers/CTA, 2005
216 pp.
ISBN 90 5782 159 1 (without CD-ROM)
90 5782 160 5 (with CD-ROM)
CTA number 1266 (within CD-ROM)
40 credit points
CTA number 1267 (with CD-ROM)
60 credit points

A locust invasion in pictures

Mauritania was badly hit by the desert locust invasion of 2004-2005. A reporting team for the Franco-German television station Arte visited the area on three occasions during this period to follow the relentless progress of the swarms and the ravage left in their wake. With support from CTA, the crew produced a 52-minute documentary of the invasions. It shows villagers struggling to fight off these insects, as well as the means used – too late – by local authorities and United Nations representatives to halt their spread. The film documents how Garalla, a small village in the south of the country, a short distance from the border with Mali, endured this scourge and the havoc that it wrought. With no harvest, young people were forced to leave for the towns and families fell into debt to buy food and seeds. Haunting images to keep in mind to ensure a faster and more effective reaction to the next invasion.

The war of the locusts
A 52’ documentary by P Carcanade & L Cibien
Arte/CTA, 2005
CTA N° 1285 (DV/D)
N° 1286 (videocassette)
20 credit points

Sustainable soil fertility

Here is a clutch of useful resources on soil fertility. First, a CD-ROM containing a record of CTA’s October 2003 seminar on Information support for sustainable soil fertility management, with extracts from the debate and working groups. Another CD-ROM, this time from FAO, summarises the factors that control soil erosion and the methods available to mitigate the problem. Meanwhile, two titles from the Regional Land Management Unit (RLMA) of the World Agroforestry Centre (ICRAF) look at how agroforestry can improve the soil. Soil fertility and land productivity focuses on the eastern Africa region, highlighting some of the factors that lead to poor land productivity. Agroforestry for the montane zone of Uganda presents ideas on how to incorporate trees in the farming systems.

African food security

This CD-ROM contains proceedings from the 2004 CTA annual seminar held in Maputo, Mozambique, which focused on the role of information and communication technologies (ICTs) in food security with emphasis on new actors identified by the Cotonou Agreement — farmers’ organisations, NGOs and small enterprises in the private sector. Role of information and communication tools in food and nutrition security in ACP countries
The first editorial meeting I took part in was a daunting experience — keeping up with the rapid French, the lively exchanges between team members and all the technical jargon. Gradually things became clearer, as I got used to the different topics on the table as well as to the personalities around the table.

I well remember lively discussions with one French-speaking CTA staff member who was on the editorial committee. His version of spoken English sounded very much like French, and he was passionate about his opinions, often putting them across vehemently, and sometimes rolling his eyes when he thought something was boring or pointless. Another, on the other hand, always had a story or a parable to tell when explaining things, which made whatever he was talking about come alive.

There were sometimes lengthy debates about translations of new terminology. A good example was the word “gender”. In one memorable article, for Spore 77, it was translated into French as “la sexospécificité”!

The magazine has evolved over the years from a top-down bulletin to the more accessible and attractive publication that it is today. It has been successful in efforts to innovate and increase its regional flavour and has also adopted a more “how to” approach to articles. The layout has changed since I first joined. We used to have sections such as Speaker’s Corner tucked away on page 7 — we now have a Viewpoint on the last page.

For any of you who wondered about the name Spore

A spore is a reproductive corpuscle in fungi and the name given to a grain of pollen of certain plants, such as mosses and ferns. It is this image of the tiny seed, flying and multiplying wherever the wind takes it, that inspired the title of the magazine. A name which aptly reflects its calling to ‘disseminate information to inspire ideas’, a notion held dear by CTA ever since Spore was conceived and launched.

Just this once, there is no Mailbox in this issue. But don’t let that stop your letters, and do let us know what you thought of this anniversary edition. Mailbox will be back in the next issue.
few people can ignore the pace of change in the development of information and communication technologies (ICTs). But harnessing these new technologies so that people in the South can use them to manage their precious natural resources remains a considerable challenge. How can ICTs be used in natural resource management (NRM) by all stakeholders — from governments and planning authorities to local communities — without disenfranchising the people whose livelihoods depend on such resources? That was the main question on the table when CTA held its annual Observatory on ICTs from 26–28 October 2005 in Wageningen. The event, which was jointly organised by CTA, Alterra (Wageningen University) and the International Institute for Geo-Information Science and Earth Observation (ITC), drew experts from the three institutions, as well as some 20 overseas participants from a range of backgrounds, including government ministries, universities, research institutions, farmers’ associations and NGOs. Four areas were identified for special attention, all of them related to issues of land tenure and access: ICT use in the context of customary land tenure and cadastre development, pastoralist and rangeland issues, community-managed forest issues, and applications of participatory geographic information systems (PGIS).

New tools

ICTs should be combined with traditional techniques in a people-centred approach. Participants agreed broadly on a range of issues concerning better NRM in ACP countries. They stressed the importance of formally registering customary land tenure systems, called for a change in the way modern surveyors operate with respect to land tenure issues and urged governments and local planning authorities to work more closely with communities.

ICTs can help communities take greater control over their natural assets, make it easier to plan activities for community forests and add value to forest resources, the experts agreed. The imaging component of these tools can help communities, particularly indigenous peoples, to visualise NRM, and facilitate its monitoring and evaluation.

The rules of the game

While the gathering stressed the potential of ICTs in improving NRM, it also recognised the importance of documenting instances when these technologies have failed, so that mistakes can be avoided in the future. Indeed, the use of ICTs in NRM continues to pose significant challenges, and it is important to design the right tools and set the correct pace for different circumstances. Technical services should be included in any ICT package, and it is crucial to draw up clear guidelines on ownership and security of data. Local rules must be established to ensure that natural resources are fairly distributed, and to see that power is not concentrated into too few hands.

An e-consultation carried out after the meeting identified a range of areas and potential NRM projects in which ICTs could be used.
Robert Delleré

Long live Spore

An agronomist, Robert Delleré was head of CTA’s Technical Division for 10 years, and became Spore’s first editor-in-chief. Now working as a freelance consultant, he traces the magazine’s journey since the pioneering days of those first issues.

Nothing gives me greater pleasure than to share my thoughts on this the 20th anniversary of Spore. My memories of those early days — the excitement of creating a new magazine and with it, new friendships — are still very vivid. More than anything else, a magazine acts as a link between people — those who conceive, research and write and those who read, apply and react. Spore brings together men and women from widely different backgrounds. It is this human aspect which makes compiling a magazine such an absorbing task.

Allow me to mention a few of the pioneers: the inspiring Gunter Gruner, CTA’s guardian angel at the European Commission; the editorial team at Periscope; Dominique Hounkonnou, who, laid the foundations for Spore’s production with me; Daniel Assoumou M’Ba, who gave the fledgling publication its short, bilingual name, which so cleverly conveys the idea of spreading information to the four winds; Michael Pickstock, who opened up the English-speaking world to us; the Lusophone team led by Álvaro Soares de Melo who, in 1993, launched the Portuguese version. One of Spore’s merits is to have built bridges between linguistic communities that are often worlds apart, and to have reunited the big ACP family.

Now, 20 years later, I am happy to see how Spore has stayed its course. As a faithful reader, I have seen how improvements have been made, with small touches here and there. Before I left, Spore expanded from 12 to 16 pages and introduced colour photographs, and the editorial teams who followed have had the wisdom to focus their efforts on the magazine’s presentation, as well as its content. Design and illustration play an important role in drawing the reader in. The excellent quality of the paper means that copies can be passed from one reader to another. As for the text, the introduction of the Mailbox has offered an interactive tool which has breathed new life into the magazine and which ably complements the Viewpoint column. The team has avoided the pitfall of allowing Spore to become an in-house magazine. Of course, it is the brainchild of CTA, and has quickly carved its place as the Centre’s flagship publication. But by tapping a wide variety of information sources, Spore has broadened the scope of its coverage, as well as its readership. Several university professors have told me that they use it to find examples to illustrate their courses; extensionists read it to find new and appropriate techniques and farmers value it for its very useful practical advice.

The remarkable thing about this magazine is its consistency through the years. As CTA developed, Spore has maintained its look and feel. Readers are loyal and are creatures of habit. My hope is that though it carries on changing in keeping with the times, Spore will continue for a long time yet to follow the formula which has made it so successful.

The French have a charming slang for a newspaper. They call it a duck. So let us wish long life to our little duck! Having come of age, it deserves not just one, but two awards, so it may continue to swim upstream to accomplish its destiny.

Dominique Hounkonnou

A grain of hope for the youth

I have always taken a special interest in Spore. When I left CTA, that’s what I most regretted — leaving Spore — because I know that it is one of the most popular technical magazines in Africa. Its great advantage is that it contains practical information and it arrives every 2 months right into the villages where people live.

Now that I am often out in the field, I have a good idea of what attracts the average reader. First, they rush straight to the In Brief items, which they devour before looking at the rest of the magazine. These briefs, as well as the technical articles, when they have a practical slant, offer information which readers can use on their own. That is especially important for the young, who are often tempted to try a new life in the city. Reading about other people’s experiences gives them hope. They draw on them to improve their own lives.

Anything which helps limit the rural exodus is important. That emerged clearly from the Observatory on ICTs and youth at CTA last year. Above all else, young people are interested in anything that can liven up village life, and make it more attractive than it was in their parents’ day. They need activities which offer some interesting added value. That is where Spore can play a role, by giving concrete examples which can open up new horizons. Examples related to agricultural production and to small processing units, service enterprises, small-scale irrigation, solar energy, small plantations, market gardening, etc. And let’s not forget the role of ICTs. Farmers’ groups which open up multi-centres to have access to information on the market price of products — all these initiatives help ferment ideas for other projects. Spore has a role to play for these farmers of tomorrow, hungry for ideas that are original, and profitable. That is why I believe it is crucial that more and more people receive this magazine and that CTA continues to widen its readership.

These days, I spend more time in the villages, and I can see even better than before — Spore is extremely useful to our rural populations, and it is also unique. It is up to CTA to make sure that it listens closely to its readers, so that it can serve them even better in the future!