



Spore

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Website: www.cta.nl



Illustration M. Roesch

Environmental conservation

First, food!

.....

When your horizon is the next harvest, and your choice of food for eating or selling is between too little and not enough, the long-term and the long words take second place. We look at the simmering clash between those who plea for production, and those who chant protection.

"The first human right of the day is breakfast!" is a lament often heard in dialogues between people submitting funding requests, their sights fixed on the possible, and donor agencies, focused on the desirable. Such exchanges take place at every level, from village to national and regional institutions. Most readers of *Spore* will have witnessed, perhaps participated in, or even run, several in the last year.

The geographer Georges Rossi is convinced that the debate will continue for a good while yet, and have to be tolerated even if no party feels at all comfortable with them. "In poor countries, the basic needs of tomorrow and the wish to improve the quality of life will make sure that the Western vision of ecology will be noticeable for a long while yet with its

policies seemingly driven from afar by aesthetics, the whims of the well-off. These policies are suffered patiently as politically correct external constraints, the prerequisites which governments pretend to accept as a way to loans and to meet a conditionality of aid. Farmers and local authorities implement them under pressure and then do their best to get round them or drop them as quickly as possible."

In one sense, it is a practice that, despite its ambiguities, works reasonably well for all concerned. There are signs though that there is less and less room for niceties in the negotiations between the haves and the have-nots affecting ACP agriculture and rural development and several other sectors. The issue is about who shapes the relevant global policies, and with what.



In this issue

Has the world been changed today?

Will the world have changed again tomorrow? Probably. Change is always in the air.

Sometimes we can change rules, and instead of breaking them, we can re-make them. The emerging rules about environment and agriculture are not yet, as they say, in the right mix, and so our opening article suggests some changes. At another level, in the world of publishing, we focus on the thirst for gender equity to take hold and look at changes underway. We also look at how yesterday's talk of water conflicts has changed and suggest that, through cooperation, the situation is not as grim as was feared.

What remains unchanged is our format and content, with longer articles complemented by news, views and reviews. But even here, change may be on the way – it's up to you. We have a small survey for you – and your fellow-readers – to respond to, to tell us about how you use Spore, and what you expect of the magazine in the future. As you see, no change in our wanting to hear from you. Go on. Write now.

Hey, look, I'm all global!

While most people have been emphasising the local in development, we have also moved much further along the road of global governance than most people realise. Even if our physical horizons have remained largely unchanged, we have each become plugged into a global culture and a global economy. Like clouds and winds, goods can move across the face of the earth in days, information and opinions in seconds.

Such proximity is new and while it can be very enriching it makes us all more vulnerable. We can all be more aware of what is happening in parts of the world within and beyond our horizon, and how these events interact. For those who have a global view, and are linked into world networks, you can get a good picture of market trends in other continents, or an early warning of storms or plagues of locusts, and make plans accordingly. You can look further and observe, for example, soil degradation and erosion, deforestation and man-induced climate change and its



Photo: H. Dugast © Inesair

Above us only sky? Some greenhouse gases come from rice paddy fields.

impact on food production. Many observers feel that the totality of world agriculture has overstepped the limits of the acceptable. According to the Earth Council, a body of observers based in Costa Rica, we are, using the law of averages, depleting more biological resources than we are replenishing and are using more space than we have. Agriculture in The Netherlands, for example, uses seven times more land outside its borders than inside, principally in Latin America, Africa and Asia, to grow its flowers, tomatoes and animal feedstuffs. There are much such 'ecological footprints'.

Thou shalt neither pollute nor grow

There are many more direct constraints to ACP agriculture than just footprints. Trawl through the world's conventions on biodiversity and climate change, or the Agenda 21 Plan of Action, and you will be able to compose your own list of 'Do

Not's'. All these treaties, launched in 1992, are due for revision at the World (Earth) Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg in September 2002. Their environmental considerations now determine agriculture in ACP countries and elsewhere – mainly in a restrictive way. It is almost as if there is a timetable of measures which, however well-intentioned, will hit agricultural productivity and incomes.

There are already restrictions on the use of fertilisers, herbicides and pesticides, even though often a farmer has no alternative to generate a secure income. Within the next five years, the cost of these inputs, plus that of fuel for local transport and export freight, will rise as 'eco-taxes' are levied on energy in many countries. Over a similar period, the requirements of such standards as ISO 14000 (ISO = International Standardization Organization) for environmental quality will make it harder to enter export markets in the West. These measures in effect raise new barriers in the place of the tariff barriers dismantled by the World Trade Organisation; they are often seen as 'protection by any other name'. Further downstream, there is talk of restricting access to world markets for certain exotic products, such as many tropical fruits, because of the excessive use of energy in their long-distance marketing.

There are other pressures on the 'operating space' of the ACP farmer. The guideline launched by the World Commission on Environment and Development in 1987 for each country to preserve 12% of its ecological capacity (read: land and water area) for biodiversity protection causes a real dilemma: 12% for the other 30 million species on the planet, and 88% for all of us at an average of 1.65 hectares of biologically productive area per person! Rossi questions the approach: "To withhold from rural communities the right to manage all or part of their space just to set up parks and reserves, is that really the best way to assure the unbroken evolution of these ecosystems, and those who live in them?"

Remember the day before tomorrow

Of course, many steps are being taken to help agriculture become greener, especially in being less of the 'third culprit' after industry and transport as a major source of methane, one of the greenhouse gases causing global warming. The widespread research into changing rice cultivation in paddies and into low-cost production of modified livestock feed to reduce gas emissions by animals, are examples of greening.

The trouble is that those who prescribe tomorrow's solutions are not necessarily those who can solve today's problems.

With the formulation of agricultural policy being *de facto* defined by such global events as the Earth Summit, these are the people who are most active in the global culture and who have most access to global information networks.

They do not necessarily have the wisdom that comes from the field, a wisdom fashioned not only by success but also by the failure of a harvest or the loss of a market. They sometimes have too much information, and too few tools to make sound judgements. Why, otherwise, would so much debate be dominated by the false position of "Organic Yes, GMO No"?

Hard questions

Perhaps it is time for the agricultural community to ask some hard questions, and make public the hard answers, about what is being prescribed and which is, in effect, hindering today's production. Are organic methods of production automatically more benign and sounder than inorganic? Can organic farming feed the world, in terms of accessible proteins? Under what conditions? Can small-scale, labour-intensive production meet food security needs adequately? Are we approaching a division into two systems: food production at its most efficient, and agriculture as a modest rural livelihood?

These questions need to be raised as the international community enters the next round of environmental agenda-setting. If they could be raised by representatives of farmers, of all hues and hoes, and others on the food chain, then all the better.

No-one would claim that the world's agriculture should be practised on individual plots of 1.65 hectares – that is only an average. Averages do have their uses though. One 'average' approach, which takes all points into account, would be a fairer debate about the future which includes policies that give ACP agriculture more breathing space in which to meet the needs of today. From there we can reach tomorrow.

See: *News in Brief, for how to participate in Earth Summit 2002*

Further reading: *L'ingérence écologique. Environnement et développement rural du Nord au Sud. G Rossi, CNRS Editions, Paris, 2001. 254 pages.*

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Ecological concerns dominate much of the development agenda. For agriculture:

- many 'green' measures underestimate the needs of today's food security
- the major focus is on future scenarios
- the debate is centred on those with access to global information networks
- there should be more participation by ACP organisations in the next Earth Summit round

Women in publishing

Only a woman's word

ACP women hoe the fields, hold up the sky and keep the peace. They should be publishing more, too.

We are what we eat, goes the old saying. We are also increasingly what we read, and whatever else we absorb from various media: our families, communities, school, print, radio, for example. Yet, at a time when many inequalities between women and men are being removed, the profession that supplies us with much of our information – call it publishing for short – is still lagging behind.

In general, the publishing sector in many ACP countries is waiting to grow outside the educational and children's field: the lack of a paying market, readership levels and technical hurdles in production and distribution head up a long list of problems hindering the growth of literature and professional publishing. Move out to some of the extreme edges of the publishing world, into the realm of agriculture, agri-food and rural development, and you will look in vain for signs of gender equity, with a few notable exceptions. The number of women writers, editors and publishers falls way below the none-too-impressive average of women occupying 25% of media posts quoted by the African Women's Media Centre.

Live hard, smile easy

Even if the publishing profession does not show it clearly, the role of the ACP woman in communication is crucial. Few have put it more clearly than the Kenya poet Lilian Igonga:

*Mama sitting by the fire
Open our eyes
To the coming seasons
Unfold your prime days
And tell us mother, how
To live hard
And yet smile easy
Just like you
Mama sitting by the fire
Open our ears
And smile easy
Just like you*

Such traditional roles as story-telling, predominantly by women, have not always made it in the transition to contemporary styles of communication. There are still many more men writers and many more books written by men, says Asenath Bole Odaga, citing the imbalance in school-going girl and boy students, and the preferences

of men officers in publishing concerns. Even after years of focused activities, the Uganda Women Writers' Association, also known as Femrite, confirms this: its 2000 edition of the Ugandan Creative Writers Directory, published with support from the Alliance Française, lists twice as many male as female writers.

Women bring change from within

While writers are pressuring to genderise publishing, as witnessed by the Women Writers Conference at the Zimbabwe International Book Fair in 1999 on Women and Activism, the profession itself is also struggling to join an era of gender equity. Of the relatively few books published on women in publishing in Africa and other ACP regions, one of the thinnest – and that speaks volumes – has been the directory by the African Books Collective, which gathered details of less than two hundred women professionally involved across the continent.

Change is on the way. Publishing is a relatively "soft" and creative profession, and perhaps easier to genderise than food security. This is certainly the case with such professional bodies as the rather feminised and very dynamic Pan-African Booksellers' Association, the African Publishers' Network with its strong emphasis on promoting gender issues among its membership, and the Caribbean Publishers' Network which fully reflects the pivotal role of women in that region's development. These thrusts are reflected in a new wave of resource materials on editing, production and marketing (see illustration). They are produced primarily by women, and some directly address key themes, such as gender-sensitive editing, to deal with traditional stereotypes.

Lady writer on the PC?

In the already marginal fields of agricultural publishing and associated topics such as nutrition; marketing; finance, credit and savings; organisation and management, the role of women is very small. The vast majority of titles are being originated and designed by men, to this day. Until this imbalance in the messages changes, how much can we reasonably expect agricultural and rural practice to change?

The prospects are good. Since this area is often not viable in traditional commercial terms, many publications are produced by non-profit bodies, or by regular publishers with external 'donor' participation through such schemes as CTA's co-publications programme. These publishers in turn are generally committed, in a progressive and proactive way, to gender equity, from their staffing policies to their editorial options. This makes their products more accessible, in terms of content and distribution, to rural readers, where there is already a high-level area of demand, even if literacy levels still require much attention.

Chipping away in a genderly fashion at the existing publishing profession is one thing, but the greatest prospects lie in the field of information and communication technologies (ICT) and the use of electronic publishing. Throughout ACP countries, computer networks are actively used by proportionately more women than in the West. Some say that this arises from the new opportunities offered by the Internet to women's groups hitherto unable to practice their natural art of networking. Relatively new networks like Women's Net and Famafrigue, and the new Hafkin prize (see *In Brief*) underline this.

It is in a more traditional network, however, that we can see the surest signs that publishing is getting properly genderised. The International Women's Tribune Centre, a stalwart for decades of grassroots communication initiatives, has hooked onto ICTs. The IWTC project – 'Rural Women in Africa: Ideas for Earning Money' – has started by operating in rural telecentres in Uganda, and will be usable on stand-alone computers anywhere. It provides rural women with ideas, case studies and an exchange of experience about micro-enterprise, through inter-action with a CD-ROM by mouse-clicks, appropriate graphics and spoken texts in local languages. Now isn't that spot on? It took women publishers to think of it.

A fact sheet listing publications, resource guides and contacts is available with the Web edition of this article (http://www.agricta.org/Spore/spore95/spore95_feature2.html) and from the compilers, at the address of Mediateurs on page 15/Between Us.



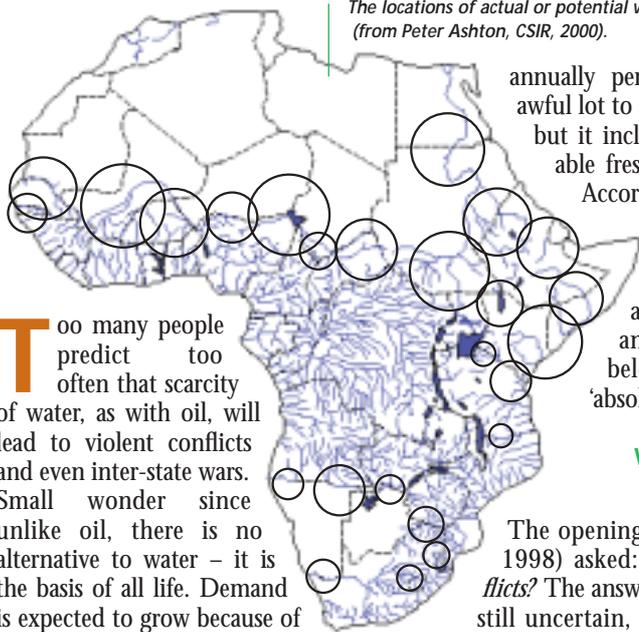
How do you use Spore? see p.14

Ways with water

One thing is as clear as water: the world needs to manage its water better, and waste less. Gloomy scenarios about water conflicts have drowned out a lot of positive initiatives, hopeful experiments and sound policy steps. Shortages have helped people and their governments learn how to cooperate and not compete: how to share, care and spare.



The locations of actual or potential water-related conflicts. (from Peter Ashton, CSIR, 2000).



Too many people predict too often that scarcity of water, as with oil, will lead to violent conflicts and even inter-state wars. Small wonder since unlike oil, there is no alternative to water – it is the basis of all life. Demand is expected to grow because of population growth, industrialisation, urbanisation and agricultural development, whether irrigated or not. By 2025, there will be more than 30 nations in the club of water scarce countries, compared with twenty or so today (on the basis of having less than 1000 m³ of water available

annually per person). This seems an awful lot to drink, wash and cook with, but it includes every drop of renewable freshwater used in all sectors. According to the same international standards, countries with around 1700 m³ already suffer 'occasional and local' water problems, and those with supplies below 500 m³ experience 'absolute scarcity'.

Will there really be conflicts?

The opening article in *Spore* 74 (April 1998) asked: 'Water: will there be conflicts?' The answer, some three years later, is still uncertain, but it is likely to be: 'not necessarily'. Despite previous rhetoric, the conviction has gained ground that solutions simply have to be found – there is no way around it. Some have prophesied conflict but, according to Peter Ashton of the South African Council for Scientific and Industrial Research, this is based on the false assumption that communities and even governments have little or no choice in the matter, and that their only possible, logical

reaction to water shortage is one based on violent competition.

In fact there are other ways out; the best way to prevent and resolve conflicts is through participation of stakeholders, talking and debating as long as is needed. This goes for irrigators downstream on a canal, dependent on their colleagues upstream on the amount of water they let through. Similarly, it holds for different countries making use of one and the same river or underground water stocks. Africa, for instance, has nine major river basins – the Congo, Lake Chad, Nile, Niger, Okovango, Orange, Senegal, Volta and Zambezi – and numerous regional aquifers such as the sandstones of Nubia, and the Congo and Kalahari groundwater basins; they are all shared by numerous countries. It is not surprising that the areas facing the biggest tensions and thus the greatest need for dialogue are located in the regions that are verging between 'emerging water scarcity' and 'absolute water scarcity' (see Figure).

Let's get together

And it is in these areas that dialogues are emerging, rather than water wars. Most countries in the Zambezi basin have drawn up development plans for hydropower, and increased water withdrawals for irrigation, industry and human consumption, but when added up they exceed the amount that can be withdrawn from the Zambezi. As a result, the Zambezi River Action Plan (ZACPLAN) was established in 1987 as the first comprehensive attempt to coordinate activities and establish an effective resources management plan for the basin. Although ZACPLAN is not legally binding on its nine signatories, its acceptance and functioning have become more promising with the ongoing processes of democratisation in Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia and South Africa.

In West Africa, the largest river system, the Niger basin, is the subject of a similar initiative known as the Niger Basin Authority (NBA) which was established in

Water pressures. This seasonally dry tributary of the Nile can become bountiful, the apparently abundant Okavango swamp may be stretched past its protected limits.



Recently emerged and future water-scarce countries

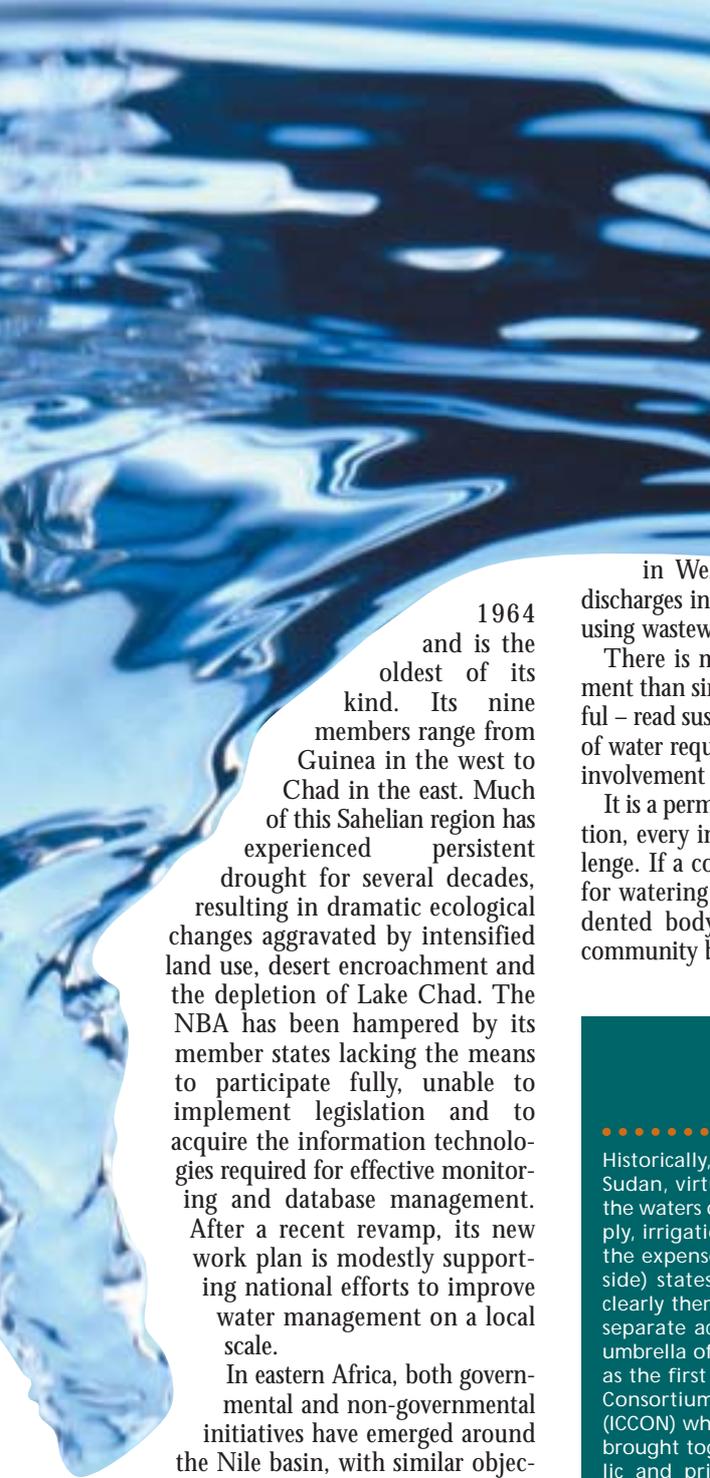
(based on less than 1 000 m³ available per person per year)

Since 1955
Bahrain, Barbados, Djibouti, Jordan, Kuwait, Malta, Singapore

Since 1990
Algeria, Burundi, Cape Verde, Israel, Kenya, Malawi, Qatar, Rwanda, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates, Yemen

By 2025
Comoros, Egypt, Ethiopia, Haiti, Iran, Libya, Morocco, Oman, South Africa, Syria

Many other countries, from Cuba to China, and Senegal to Lesotho, suffer from water-scarcity in substantial inland areas.



such as melons. Pastoralists in Sudan send out scouts to look for sources or simply follow the rains. When water is becoming scarce, the first thing that comes to mind is saving, storing and conserving water and alternative cultivation methods as featured regularly in *Spore*: rainwater harvesting in Kenya, fog collection in Cape Verde, increasing infiltration by constructing small, lunar-shaped ridges

in West Africa, capturing seasonal discharges in small dams in Zimbabwe and using wastewater for irrigation.

There is more to sound water management than simply saving it. Equal and careful – read sustainable – distribution and use of water requires the initiative and ongoing involvement of stakeholders.

It is a permanent process since every solution, every innovation leads to a new challenge. If a community creates a small dam for watering cattle, the resulting unprecedented body of water makes the whole community brim with ideas. Brick making,

fishponds, keeping rabbits or poultry or communally irrigated plots, to name but a few. This will require new rounds of consensus within the community and with others, upstream and downstream. It requires, too, an explicit say in it by women. They provide much of the labour in the fields, although they usually have neither land nor water rights. Although they participate in the management of small projects, they are usually outnumbered on committees and take a minimal role in decision making. The dialogue and consensus of which a village is capable has to go all the way upstream to provincial, national and even regional authorities.

Even in areas of water scarcity, no village is an island.

1964 and is the oldest of its kind. Its nine members range from Guinea in the west to Chad in the east. Much of this Sahelian region has experienced persistent drought for several decades, resulting in dramatic ecological changes aggravated by intensified land use, desert encroachment and the depletion of Lake Chad. The NBA has been hampered by its member states lacking the means to participate fully, unable to implement legislation and to acquire the information technologies required for effective monitoring and database management. After a recent revamp, its new work plan is modestly supporting national efforts to improve water management on a local scale.

In eastern Africa, both governmental and non-governmental initiatives have emerged around the Nile basin, with similar objectives as their fellow regions in the west and south (see Box 2).

For the island states in the Pacific and Caribbean, water management is not so much an inter-statal issue, but more an internal one. The lower islands and atoll islands in particular depend largely on rainwater and shallow groundwater water resources. The expansion of any sector's water use will require better management to save fresh water, improved water harvesting techniques, desalination of seawater and recycling of wastewater. Some countries may be able to use tourist earnings to meet these costs.

Peoples' coping strategies

Let us leave the national and intergovernmental level for now. After all, their citizens and communities have not been sitting idly. In situations of 'absolute water scarcity' people have developed their own coping strategies. The Bushmen in Namibia find water in fruits,



Photo: E. Heijmans

Overflowing with ideas

Down by the riverside

Historically, Egypt, and to a lesser extent Sudan, virtually monopolised the use of the waters of the river Nile, for water supply, irrigation and electricity. This was at the expense of the other riparian (riverside) states, but nowadays the trend is clearly there towards cooperation. Many separate activities take place under the umbrella of the Nile Basin Initiative, such as the first meeting of the International Consortium for Cooperation on the Nile (ICCON) which took place in June 2001. It brought together representatives of public and private bodies in 10 countries (Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo, Egypt, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, Sudan, Tanzania and Uganda) to celebrate the shared vision 'to achieve sustainable socio-economic development through the equitable utilisation of, and benefit from, the common Nile Basin water resources'.

Earlier, members of civil society organisations had established the Nile Basin Society. Under the motto 'if the people will lead, the leaders will follow', they exchange practical information and hold discussions in a very active, moderated email list in close cooperation with Conserve Africa (see *Spore* 93).

▲ Nile Basin Initiative
PO Box 192, Entebbe, Uganda
Fax: + 256 41 320 971
Email: nbisec@afsat.com
Website: www.nilebasin.org

▲ Nile Basin Society
Website: www.nilebasin.com
Website: http://nile.ca

No water to waste

Proper management of irrigation is key to sound water management. Various tools can help to assess current situations and design future scenarios in water use in irrigation, and also facilitate an informed dialogue for preventing conflicts over water.

The SALTMOD software was developed by the International Institute for Land Reclamation and Improvement (ILRI). It simulates water-management options to affect saline levels in soil moisture, groundwater and drainage water, and calculates how climate, soil, topography and crop-rotation schedules affect various irrigation solutions. Download it free from www.ilri.nl but you must buy the printed user manual. English only.

SALTMOD, *Description of Principles and Applications*
ILRI Special Report 11, by RJ Oosterbaan & R Kselik, ILRI, 2001. ISBN 90 70754 51 7, € 14
ILRI, PO Box 45, 6700 AA Wageningen, The Netherlands
Fax +31 317 495590, Email: ilri@ilri.nl

The Water Resources, Development and Management Service of FAO has developed French and English language tools for information systems on scarce fresh water. Their *Cropwat* programme calculates evapotranspiration, crop water and irrigation requirements and the associated *Climwat* climatic database includes data from 144 countries. Website: www.fao.org/ag/agl/aglw/wdeci.htm

Download the online climate atlas of the International Water Management Institute from www.iwmi.org; it provides accurate data on climate and moisture availability. IWMI's *Water Accounting for Integrated Water Management* software maps water resources, amounts and flows in a river basin.

How do you use *Spore*? see p.14

Cook organically

■ The Pacific's Cook Islands are getting ready to seize the region's organic fruit market which includes New Zealand and Australia. Standards and certification procedures are in place, and production has started with Noni (*Morinda citrifolia*); other fruits will follow. The Cook Islands Organic Association (CIOA) wants the nation's fruits to be totally organic by the end of 2002, with support from New Zealand's development agency and the Bioglobal company. After fish and tourism, fruit is the third largest export, but some production will be sold locally to hotels and restaurants.

.....
Peanuts thrive on fungi

■ Improvements are on the way for Mozambique's important groundnut (*Arachis hypogaea*) crops which have suffered from periods of drought in recent years. Orlando Quilambo, biologist and scientific research director at the Eduardo Mondlane University in Maputo, has discovered a local small-grained variety with better productivity in dry conditions. Just as inoculation with rhizobium increases nitrogen fixation, he confirms that inoculation with arbuscular mycorrhizal fungi increases the variety's tolerance for drought.

Email: quilambo@zebra.uem.mz

.....
Mother-and-child zinc

■ Mothers-to-be should be encouraged to eat zinc-enriched rice according to a report published in June 2001 after a workshop of the University in Wageningen, the Netherlands. Including zinc in pregnant women's diets improves the resistance of the babies against infection after birth, and using enhanced rice, known as one of the new wave of 'functional foods' (see Publications), is a simple method. The meeting emphasised that this is preferable to zinc supplements in the diets of new-born babies – they do not make the necessary enzymes to make zinc work.

.....
Keep Liberia's forests

■ The extent to which Liberia's forest resources have been destroyed by recent conflicts will be assessed by the National Environmental Commission (NECOLIB). With funds of almost € 1 million from the European Union, NECOLIB, with two USA-based partners, Conservation International and Fauna and Flora International, will draw up a long-term conservation programme.

Who's for coffee?

■ How far can the coffee price fall? In early September 2001, it stood at an all-time low of US\$ 0.41 per pound and the trade media were abuzz with the question "Why is nothing being done?". The fall started in 1989 when the USA, consumer of half the world's traded volumes, and Brazil, then, as now, the world's biggest producer, left the International Coffee Agreement and *de facto* abolished the guaranteed minimum price, then US\$ 1.26 per lb.

After a two-year free fall that has not yet stopped, farmers cannot afford to produce at these prices. They are cutting back on inputs, and on labour for picking, unwisely so since the best quality coffee requires multiple picking rounds for only ripe beans.

The impact goes far beyond the coffee fields. According to the report *Bitter Coffee* by the British NGO Oxfam in May 2001 "The livelihoods of smallholder producers are being destroyed. About 20 million households produce the crop, which is often the main – sometimes the only – source of cash income. to buy food items, to pay for school fees and health care, and other cash expenses."

Why have prices fallen? A simple question of supply and demand. Supply has risen by 3.6% a year since 1996, but consumption by only 1.5%. The major consumers in North America and Europe re-exported existing stocks as roasted and soluble coffees. Producers such as Brazil, Honduras, Tanzania and Uganda energetical-



Photo M. Edwards © Still Pictures

It's hardly worth being careful



Photo PAC

ly increased their production, but Uganda's export earnings, for instance, dropped by 40% in two years.

The greatest upsets have come from Vietnam's assertive ascendancy in the production tables, replacing Colombia in second place. With European investment, notably from France, Vietnam now provides more than 900,000 t of the world's crop of 6.8 million tonnes; the problem, however, is that consumption is 6.2 million t.

One solution is retention in stores, but a plan launched in 2000 by the Association of Coffee Producing Countries (ACPC) failed when oversupply outstripped the retained crop. In Kenya, producers united in the Kamuyu and Othaya Coffee Societies are retaining their coffee until they get a reasonable price (between US\$ 3-5), but it could be a long wait. Vietnam, not an ACPC member, has belatedly floated the idea of reducing its supply by 30%.

Niche markets based on high quality, fair trade, or organic products could offer solace for some. Jamaica is very adept at marketing its top quality Blue Mountain beans. Ethiopian smallholders, 95% of the country's producers, are replicating initiatives in Madagascar and Tanzania to certify their coffee as organic; this raises prices by US\$ 0.40 per lb. Some facts of life, though, do not change: Kenyan Arabica coffee fetches five times more than a normal quality Robusta from Côte d'Ivoire.

Such steps aside, the only real solution is concerted action by producers and consumers, says the ACPC. At an almost panic-stricken first World Coffee Conference, in May 2001, it proposed new agreements (did someone say quotas?), processors accepting higher prices, deepening niche markets and environmental and social guarantees for producers. A dash of regulation, after all?

.....
Building up niche markets

■ In marketing language, a 'niche' is a special area for a product or service. ACP agricultural producers are constantly trying to develop niche markets, targeting in particular the Fair Trade, the Ethnic/ Diaspora and the Organic. All, though, glitter more than they glow.

The hard message that a niche is often small was brought home at an 'expert

meeting on ways to enhance the production and export capacities of developing countries of agriculture and food products, including niche products, such as environmentally preferable products' organised by the UN trade body UNCTAD in Geneva in July 2001.

It emphasised that while there seemed to be a mad rush to conquer the organic market

for fruit and vegetable exports, it only represented one or two per cent of overall demand. Worth a go though, the meeting urged, especially if producers also aimed at expanding the domestic market, if standards could be harmonised, and if funders could support farmers during their switch in production. That's a lot of if's in one small niche.

Zambia is the place to bee

■ Honey be, oh honey bee. The Biblical Samson ate it to keep up his strength. It was bartered for silk along the Asian trade routes through Samarkand seven centuries ago. Ancient Greeks and Romans made love potions of it. Honey and other products of the bee hive have kept these and many uses to today. Beeswax is used in cosmetics, medicines, polishes, candles and batik making. Propolis, the sweet-smelling resinous stuff which bees use to build their hives, goes into the making of antibiotics.

Zambia and other southern African countries could be a land "flowing with honey", because large parts of the continent have just the right conditions for bee-keeping, sufficient water sources and flowering trees.

In Zambia, about 6,000 beekeepers produce more than 600 tonnes of harvested honey and 100 tonnes of wax annually. The bulk of the honey – 90% – is used and consumed locally. The north western and western provinces are the major producers of honey and the Provincial Forestry Action Programme expects sales to expand in the near future.

Zambian honey is already being sold in England as organic forest honey, with a Soil Association certificate to indicate it is ecologically sound, and more widely through the Body Shop chain (see *Spore* 88). In the United States, a blend of Zambian and Tanzanian honeys is widely sold in health stores as honey with a fashionable 'lap-song souchong' aroma.

The growing interest in African honey comes at a time when more rural communities and small-scale farmers are starting to appreciate the role bees play in nature, and in

income-generation. Around Kitwe, the Workers' Education Association of Zambia is encouraging its members, often civil servants made redundant by structural adjustment, to adopt the technique.

The Kaloko Trust based in Masaiti Boma has already trained about 60 small-scale farmers' groups and started apiaries in Chief Malembeka's area in the Copperbelt Province.

☞ *Kaloko Trust,*
c/o Luansobe Community Projects,
Box 7137,
Ndola, Zambia
Email: kaloko@zamnet.zm

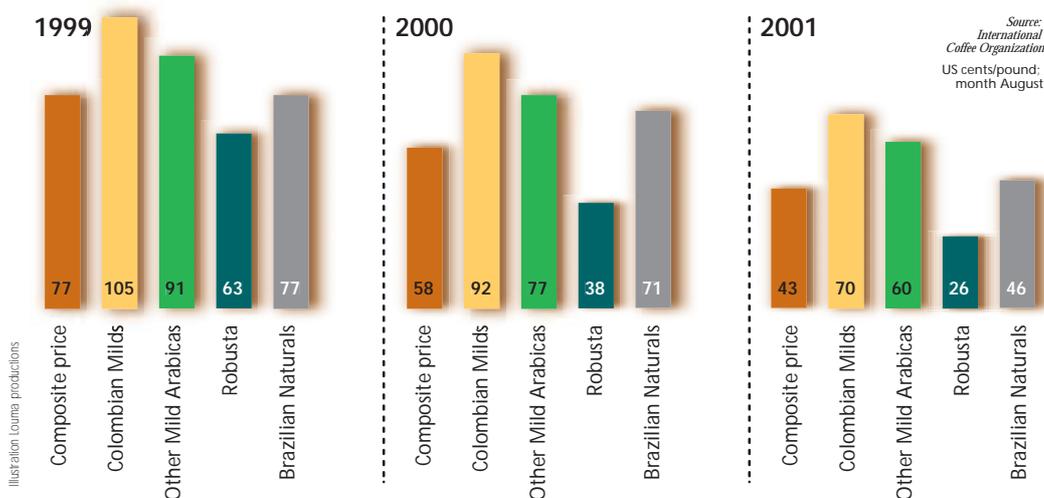
Evaluation is an attitude

■ With "capacity development" at the core of many organisations' priorities, the need for proper and ongoing evaluation is becoming more widely understood. This sensitive area involves people and makes judgements about their work and achievements. It thus requires regular and reliable information.

Since early 2000, five organisations (the International Service for National Agricultural

Research, IDRC, the Swiss and German cooperation agencies and CTA) have worked on a joint programme to refine evaluation techniques for capacity development, with case studies in Bangladesh, Cuba, Ghana, Philippines and Viet Nam. Their July 2001 mid-term review workshop, held at CTA, paved the way for a book, a toolkit, a conference and a Website, to make information more widely available.

Average monthly coffee prices



■ Whilst prices vary according to the variety of plant, the overall trend is a sharp fall in prices, with Robusta varieties falling the most. The composite price is an average of the averages.

Producers of Colombian milds, 13% of all world output

in 2001, are Colombia, Kenya and Tanzania. Producers of other Mild Arabicas (29%) include Burundi, Dominican Republic, Jamaica, Papua New Guinea, Rwanda and Zimbabwe. Producers of Robusta (34%) include Angola, Cameroon,

Central African Republic, Gabon, Madagascar, Uganda and Vietnam. Leading ACP producer is Côte d'Ivoire, with 15% of world robusta output.

As well as Brazil, producers of Brazilian naturals (23%) are Paraguay and Ethiopia.

Women set up factory

■ In May 2001, the Cameroonian women's group GIEFAN opened their cassava-processing factory for producing tapioca, starch, and cassava flours and cassava-bars in Ngoumou, in a cassava growing area near Yaoundé. The women met almost half of the start-up costs of € 61,000 themselves; the rest came from the European Union, through the channels of the UN Development Programme.

A little give in rubber

■ Rubber production in Côte d'Ivoire continues to experience a modest annual growth of 7% to 10%. Following a trend that started five years ago, the country – Africa's largest producer – produced 120,000 t in 2000. The 2001 harvest is nearing 130,000 t and stands to benefit from the price having settled down at around US\$ 0.50 per kilo. Good news for the 7,000 smallholders who account for 40% of production, as well as the five large producers.

Water ways

■ The *Environmental Flows for River Systems* conference, to be held in Cape Town, South Africa, from 3 to 8 March 2002, will focus on the sustainable use of all parts of river systems as well as subsistence use of their resources.

☞ *Southern Waters Ecological Research and Consulting (Pty) Ltd.*
PO Box 13280, Mowbray 7705
South Africa
Fax: +27 21 68 54 630
Email: conference2002@southernwaters.co.za

Join in at Jo'burg 2002

■ The World Summit on Sustainable Development (also known as Rio + 10) will be a summit gathering from 2 - 11 September 2002 in Johannesburg, South Africa, of governments, citizens, UN agencies, financial bodies and other major actors to assess global change since the historic UN 'Earth Summit' in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. Many items on 'Agenda 21' relate to agricultural and rural development; the organisers hope for active participation by groups such as *Spore* readers' organisations. This open event, with genuine dialogue, does require accreditation of your organisation, before April 2002 at the latest.

☞ *UN Johannesburg Summit Secretariat*
Major Groups Relationships
2 United Nations Plaza, 22nd Floor
New York NY 10017, USA
Fax: +1 917 367 2341/2
Website:
www.johannesburgsummit.org

Rural women awards

■ Seven of the 31 women awarded the 2001 global prizes for women's creativity in rural life work in Africa; prizes were scheduled for presentation in Geneva on 15 October – World Rural Women's Day. Laureates include Joyce Vida Donkor (Ghana) for promoting beekeeping as a viable business activity, and Robertine Dembette (Chad) for organising women to lead seed saving, harvesting from the wild and environmental awareness under the motto 'Women take charge'.

Award details and guidelines for nominations for 2002 (before March 2002) from:

Women's World Summit Foundation, PO Box 2001, 1211 Geneva, Switzerland
 Fax: + 41 22 738 82 48
 Email: prize@vtxnet.ch
 Website: www.woman.ch

Women use credit for computers

■ Using micro-credit loans to finance computers and email subscriptions for rural women has earned the Fantsuam Foundation's Bayanloco Community Learning Centre in Kaduna State, Nigeria, the first APC Africa Hafkin Communications Prize. The prize was presented in August 2001. The annual prize, worth US\$ 7,500, is intended for women's initiatives in Africa in the use of ICTs. It is given in honour of Nancy Hafkin, known to many *Spore* readers for her tireless efforts to make ICTs appropriate technologies.

Send nominations for the 2002 prize (before June 2002) as text message (no attachments) to hafkin-prize@apc.org

Website: www.apc.org/english/hafkin/

Castor: more than oil

■ Observing the results of leaving castor plants to grow on fallow land – an increase in soil moisture and organic matter content, and good weed control – Julius Mwangwale, an innovative farmer in Tanzania, has experimented successfully with intercropping castor with maize. His best maize yields, though, have come from leaving the castor plants to run on their own for two years, then clearing the land and cultivating maize. Along with extension officer M V Komba, he is now sharing this technique with other farmers through 'look-and-learn' visits in the region.

M V Komba
 ADP Isangati TF
 Box 1687, Mbeya, Tanzania
 (Groundup, Pelum June 2001)

Hug each other, not the trees



Selling forests by the bag full

■ "Our country is losing 1% of its dry forest areas each year, at a rate of 100,000 hectares" declared the Minister for Higher Education and Scientific Research of Benin at the opening of the international workshop on "Integrated management of natural forest in the dry tropical zones of West Africa" held in Parakou, Benin, from 25 to 29 June 2001.

With such rates of loss not uncommon in West Africa, and with shrinking statal resources available to mitigate the problem, the paths of rural communities and forestry specialists are literally crossing each other literally ever more frequently. Population pressures, the trend towards non-timber forest products such as fruit, honey

and essential oils, rising charcoal production and firewood and game meat consumption all lie behind the growing incursions into the forest. These in turn heighten the risks of bushfires and erosion.

The standard cries at such meetings tend to focus on empowering local communities. This workshop, though, went further. A critical part of the programme was field work, with memorably animated debates raising the question head-on: how can researchers participate? Among the steps demanded, and later adopted as recommendations: improved storage techniques for seeds containing perishable essential oils; shortening the growth period of such plants; development of more appropriate hand

Farm shows come back

■ A long-standing favourite in many farmers' diaries in Malawi as elsewhere, agricultural shows fell out of favour with government backers during the 1990's. Now though, it is the farmers themselves in Malawi's southern district of Mulanje who have re-launched the shows, with the aim of providing a forum for sharing ideas on modern farming methods.

They use them to proudly display their quality crops including maize –the country's main staple, cassava, beans, bananas, pumpkins and sweet potatoes. Good quality livestock is also on display. And, as at any agricultural show worth

its name anywhere in the world, the farmers swap seeds, products, tales, boasts and experiences, though not in that particular order.

Some observers have pointed out what seems to be a small irony. The district of Mulanje is experiencing an acute food shortage, in part because many local smallholders cannot afford inputs and use poor farming methods, as well as suffering from a land shortage. The good quality of crops and livestock being exhibited at their shows reflects the real potential, and the revival of their shows should help local agriculture improve itself.

tools; open exchange of such research on a regional basis; optimal scheduling of controlled fires; and optimal zoning of watering points for live-stock.

The productive output reflects the workshop's inputs: 81 participants from 8 West African countries, South Africa, Benelux and France; 66 papers presented; 400 questions debated. Support came from the people and authorities of Borgou and Alibori, the national university of Benin, the donor agencies of France, Germany and Sweden, and CTA.

The sands are running out

■ The Hartley Sand Trap could mean the end to the curse of sand blocking up filters and irrigation pipes. This simple invention developed and patented by Tim Hartley is worth the while for any farmer or farmers' group involved in irrigation. It removes sand from the borehole, at the well-point or the river, while under online pressure.

Here is how it works. Sandy water enters the bottom of the Trap equipment under pressure – up to 10 bar – and clean water comes out from the top of the Sand Trap under the same pressure. The rising speed of the water is slower than the settling speed of the sand which can therefore never reach the Trap's outlet – only the clean water can.

The accumulated sand can periodically be flushed through from the Trap by opening the flush valve. The maximum flow rate of the trap is 4,000 litres/hour. For higher flow rates, two or more sand traps would have to be installed in parallel. The device costs ZAR 980 South African Rand (€ 142), excluding transport.

Oasis Irrigation
 PO Box 30250
 Tokai 7966, Cape Town
 South Africa
 Fax: +27 21 715 80 08
 Email: oasisirrigation@africa.com

Sticks-in-the-mud that work!

■ It might look like a defensive structure against marauding enemies, but in fact it's just a way to improve yields in your fish-pond. Just place rows of bamboo sticks in the pond about half a metre apart. The sticks serve as a breeding ground for periphyton (algae, bacteria, plankton and other organisms), on which fish thrive well. This cuts down on fish feed, always a considerable expense for fish farmers.

In a joint project in south Asia, researchers from the universities of Mangalore (India), Mymensingh (Bangladesh), Stirling (Scotland), and Wageningen (The Netherlands) spent three years studying, improving and standardising the technique. They had encountered it being used by fishermen in open water, such as the lagoons of Côte d'Ivoire and Benin, and some Asian rivers. The effect of the sticks varies according to the type of fish. In the trials Indian carp and tilapia performed well, with yields increasing by 70 to 80%.



Photo: Fish Culture and Fisheries Group, WURC

The sticks play host to foods fish like

Other materials can be used as substrates, instead of bamboo. The researchers experimented with sugarcane bagasse, PVC pipes and jute sticks. All led to increased yields but none as much as bamboo. The bamboo can be re-used three to four times. Using rotting material should be avoided as it adversely affects fish production. An extra advantage of the stick-method is that they discourage poachers, since the sticks make it difficult

to catch a lot of fish in a short time. The same goes for the fish farmer, who will not easily be able to catch small amounts of fish, but can best remove the sticks at one time and harvest all the fish in one go.

✉ Ekram Azim
Fish Culture and Fisheries Group
Department of Animal Sciences
Wageningen University
PO Box 338, 6700 AH Wageningen,
The Netherlands
Fax: +31 317 483 937
Email: ekram.azim@alg.venv.wau.nl

Bake that cake!



■ You never knew that they bake cakes in Barbados? I tell you, it's almost become the national symbol of that dynamic Caribbean island. It seems that just about everybody who was at Caribbean Expo in London, England, between 27 and 29 July 2001 remembers that cake from Barbados more than anything else.

Barbados was just one of many nations with exhibits at this trade fair; as well as virtually the entire Caribbean, under the motto of 'seventeen nations, one destination'. West African states, notably Nigeria, made their presence felt, celebrating



Photos E. Heijmans

In marketing, it helps to get noticed

Nigeria's strong historical ties with the Caribbean.

Most of the several dozen exhibitors were small-scale food processing companies selling the spices, teas, sauces, relishes and rumcake for which the region is rightly famed, as well as horticultural producers. Paying a great deal of attention to

presentation and packaging, the enterprises were clearly aiming at the quality markets of Europe, starting with the British Isles. Twenty-six were supported by the CTA and its sister organisation for small industry, the Brussels-based Centre for Development of Enterprise (CDE). Not a few made the point that the British market, with its very strong Caribbean diaspora market, is the soft underbelly of Europe, but it will take a lot more energy to make headway in the less familiar markets of continental Europe.

One small baker with a relatively small turnover, Baker's choice, made the real point though. Target your market, sweeten them up, package it nicely, get them to talk about you all over the world, and you'll have to work day and night.

Must get that recipe. It's probably got a rum ting innit.

Up, up and away

■ The FANRPAN network has taken action to improve its networking activities, reports its July 2001 newsletter *Dialogue*, now appearing on a bi-monthly basis in printed and Web editions. The Food, Agriculture and Natural Resources Policy Analysis Network for Southern Africa became operational in 1999; the intensification of activities was launched at the second meeting of stakeholders held in Harare, Zimbabwe, in May 2001. Eight national partners and representatives of USAID, SADC-Hub and CTA focused on agricultural trade issues.

✉ FANRPAN, PO Box CY2765,
Causeway, Zimbabwe
Email: mhungwe@fanrpan.org
Website: www.fanrpan.org

Urban agriculture studies

■ Fourteen scholarships are available for masters and PhD students on urban and peri-urban agriculture. They can be used for field research from 3 to 12 months, up to CAN \$ 20,000. For 2002, apply before end-December 2001.

✉ Agropolis
IDRC
CP 8500, Ottawa, Ontario, K1G
3H9 Canada
Fax: +1 613 567 77 49
Email: agropolis@idrc.ca
Website:
www.idrc.ca/cfp/agrhome.html

Women's know-how comes together...

■ 'Gendered Worlds: Gains and Challenges' is the theme of the Women's Worlds 2002 Congress to be held in Kampala from 21 to 26 July, 2002. Sessions include agriculture, environment and water management.

✉ Department of Women and Gender Studies
Makerere University
PO Box 7062, Kampala, Uganda
Fax: +256 41 54 35 39
Email:
gendermu@africaonline.co.ug
Website: www.makerere.ac.ug/
womenstudies

...and is disseminated

■ "Kampala Know How 2002" will be held as a conference within the WW02 conference from 23 to 26 July, 2002. Organised by the Isis-WICCE exchange network, KKH-2002 will enhance working links between research, activism and information flows.

✉ Isis-WICCE
PO Box 4934, Kampala, Uganda
Fax: +256 41 543 954
Email: isis@starcom.co.ug
Website: www.isis.or.ug

Question and Answer Services

At your service, Madam (Sir)!

How do I stop black spots developing on mango slices when drying them in a solar drier? How can we write up a business plan for our cooperative's fish canning plant? How can we certify our produce as organic? Which 'partners' can we approach for training in public relations, to perform better in the new policy dialogue for next year's UN conference?

A multitude of questions like these are put by rural communities, agricultural enterprises and specialists each year to, well, anyone who will listen. Farmers, processors, women's

groups, extension workers, exporters, researchers, policy makers – virtually every reader of *Spore* – for example, ask such questions from time to time.

Know what you want

Where should you go with your questions? If you know who has the answer you are already a long way to knowing the answer yourself! Often, the shortest way to find out is to contact a Question-and-Answer (QAS) service.

CTA's former, centralised QAS began in 1985. Since 1997 CTA has supported decentralised services provided by

organisations in ACP countries. These are now growing into a network of service centres. With more than 10,000 clients a year, the network which CTA supports is one of the world's largest customised services specialising in agricultural information.

Get what you want

Getting the best answer out of a QAS depends mainly on the quality of your question. QASs are run by dedicated staff, with access to many sector specialists and, above all, a lot of library information. They are often more accustomed to helping researchers and although their

staff are now more aware of the needs of farmers and rural communities, they still sometimes give rather theoretical and impractical information. But you are the customer, so you should make the running. Make your questions as precise as possible and you will avoid the risk that the specialists misinterpret your needs.

Go to them now, you have plenty to ask and nothing to lose! It may cost you a wee bit; most centres charge for photocopies and sundries, and sometimes a small professional fee. All the more reason to explain precisely what you want.

Behind the QAS counter

This manual draws on the experiences of the existing QAS network, and will be used during its further growth.



Nine sections take you methodically through basics like 'What is a QAS?' and user needs. Locating information, management and organisation, promotion and quality are all dealt with. The manual even briefly explains how to 'network' but it misses out on simplicity and humanity – the good old human touch which will adapt a QAS to local needs and circumstances.

All in all, you get a full insight into how a QAS operates and therefore a good understanding of how it deals with a customer. Very helpful if you are one yourself.



Manual for the management of Question-and-Answer Services. CTA, 2001. 132 pp. ISBN 92 9081 2443 CTA number 1043. 20 credit points.

QAS by region

Service centres will be set up in about 30 countries over four years. If your country is not listed, write to the centre most convenient to you. They will try to help as circumstances allow. Failing that, write to CTA.

Southern Africa

(Angola, Botswana, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Swaziland, Zambia, Zimbabwe)

Regional Focal Point

Programme for Agricultural Information Services (PRAIS)
Library and Information Services
University of the Orange Free State
PO Box 301 Bloemfontein
9300 South Africa
Fax: + 27 51 448 0692/ 430 6423
Email: agric@hbib.uovs.ac.za

Eastern Africa

Ethiopia, Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda

Regional Focal Point:

Agricultural Information for Development of Eastern Africa (AGRIDEA)
Agricultural Research Information Service
PO Box 11098
Kampala, Uganda
Fax: +256 41 566049
Email: aris@imul.com

Ethiopia sub-node

Librarian, Headquarters Library
Ethiopian Agricultural Research Organisation
PO Box 2003 Addis Ababa
Fax: + 251 1 611222
Email: iar@telecom.net.et

Kenya sub-node

Information and Documentation Service
Kenya Agricultural Research Institute
PO Box 57811 Nairobi Kenya
Fax: + 254 2 583344
Email: resource.centre@kari.org

Tanzania sub-node 1

Information and Documentation Unit
Division of Research and Development
PO Box 2066, Dar-es-Salaam
Fax: + 255 22 2865312
Email: drd@ud.co.tz

Tanzania sub-node 2

Sokoine National Agricultural Library
PO Box 3022
Morogoro
Tanzania
Fax: + 255 23 2604629 / 2604562
Email: Library@suanet.ac.tz

Indian Ocean Countries (IOC)

Comoros, Djibouti, Mauritius, Madagascar, Seychelles

3 Regional Focal Points:

Food and Agricultural Research Council (FARC)
Réduit, Mauritius
Fax: + 230 454 7026
Email: farc@intnet.mu

Mauritius Sugar Industry Research Institute (MSIRI)

Reduit, Mauritius
Fax: + 230 4541971
Email: m.s.i.r.i.@msiri.intnet.mu

Centre d'Information et de Documentation Scientifique (CIDST)
BP 6224
101 Antananarivo
Madagascar
Fax: + 261 20 22 24919
Email: cidst@bow.dts.mg

West Africa

Benin

Faculté des Sciences Agronomiques
Université des Sciences Agronomiques
Bibliothèque (BIDOC)
BP 526
Cotonou
Fax: + 229 301638 / 300938
Email: bbidoc@hotmail.com

Côte d'Ivoire

Centre National de Recherche Agronomique, (CNRA)
BP 1746,
Abidjan
Fax: + 225 45 3305
Email: cnra@africaonline.co.ci

Ghana

Ghana Agricultural Information Service
PO Box M.32,
Accra
Fax: + 233 21 779809/ 777655
Email: Insti@ghana.com or
jsam@workmail.com

Nigeria

Nigerian Agricultural Question and Answer Service
c/o NAERLSAHmadu Bello University
PMB 1067, Samaru, Zaria,
Nigeria
Fax: + 234 69 552198 or 550563
Email: naqasabu@hotmail.com

Central Africa

Cameroon

Service d'Appui aux Initiatives Locales de Développement
BP 11955
Yaounde
Fax: + 237 225162
Email: saild@camnet.cm

Chad

Centre National d'Appui à la Recherche
BP 1228,
N'Djamena
Fax: + 235 523214
Email: cnar@bow.intnet.td or
cnauser@sntd.undp.org

Caribbean

Trinidad & Tobago, Jamaica and St. Lucia

Regional Focal Point

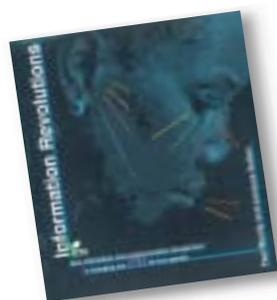
Caribbean Agricultural Research & Development Institute (CARDI)
UWI Campus, St Augustine
Trinidad & Tobago
Fax: + 868 645 1208
Email: ic@cardi.org
National service expected in Jamaica in 2002

Pacific

Papua New Guinea
Department of Agriculture and Livestock
PO Box 417,
Konedobu
Papua New Guinea
Fax: + 675 321 1387

Publications

Information is power, remember?



Take this book in your hands – or, if you are all wired up to the Internet, wrap your hands around the electronic edition on your screen – and you should feel it vibrate. You will not put it down easily, with its colourful pages and lively texts, as excited as they are exciting. Almost forty examples are described from across communities throughout ACP States of how information projects are helping rural people to change their lives.

It is a sensual volume. Just as that saying goes about the pictures being better on the radio, you will find yourself hearing the buzz of a radio drama feeding imaginations, the drone

of a television commentator adding data to pictures, the rustle of newspapers quenching the thirst for knowledge, the gabble of a group discussion bringing harmony and ownership to a village group, the bargaining gains of a farmers' group improved by up-to-date prices.

You will, later on, find yourself wishing that more information could be presented like this, reaching out, touching you. The authors elaborately persuade us that information is a basic element in human interaction, and thus in development. With their eyes and their hands, they inspire us with the ways that literacy work, newspapers, radio, TV, video, telecentres, market information services, Internet and other electronic messaging, resource centres and other media are being used by local communities to take more control over their rural lives and livelihoods, to build new partnerships and priorities with researchers and extension workers, to inform as well as be informed.

They call these the *Information Revolutions*. After every revolution there comes a reckoning, and so it shall be with information. We shall have to face, very soon if not today already, the issues of who controls the media and the content. We also need to persuade those who think in terms of finance, costs and 'rates of return' on investment that there is an equation to be made which shows that investing in information is a good deal. In the meantime, let us be grateful for this tribute to information which proves that information is not just a commodity, not just bits and bytes, but is essentially energy.

Get energised. Get this book.

Information revolutions: How information and communication management is changing the lives of rural people
by P Mundy & J Sultan. CTA. 2001. 241 pp. ISBN 92 9081 2289 CTA number 1037. **40 credit points**
This publication can also be downloaded in pdf format, free of charge, in chapters, or in a full file of 1.9 Mb from the CTA
Website: www.agricta.org/pubs/inforev/index.htm
Also available in French

Keeping those gender gains



When the first objective of genderisation has been achieved, and the personal and institutional promises have been made to integrate women's and gender perspectives into development policies and practices, that is when the real work begins.

How do you turn commitments into action, how do you institutionalise them? The over-

all issues are complex especially in a rural context: some, when isolated, are relatively simple, such as the disaggregation of data to have statistics broken down between male and female on, for example, land rights, labour inputs, working hours and financial management. Others involve legislative changes and, hardest of all, they all involve a change of culture and attitude by every individual.

The latest issue of the *Gender, Society and Development* series of the Netherlands' Royal Tropical Institute (KIT), *Institutionalizing Gender Equality* features vivid, hands-on descriptions of how change is being adopted in a cotton development board of Mali, an agricultural research institute in Kenya, as well as a rural development body in Nepal and an

NGO in Nicaragua. A rich index, bibliography and resource list emphasise the networking nature of the book. This is the real 'right stuff', all the more persuasive because it shows how change can take hold and take over.

NB: the book was developed by KIT; to increase circulation it is co-published with Oxfam, who will distribute it worldwide, except to continental EU.

Institutionalizing Gender Equality. Commitment, policy and practice, a global source book
A co-publication of the KIT Press, Royal Tropical Institute, Amsterdam and Oxfam Publications, Oxford. 2001. 174 pp.
ISBN 0 85598 459 7 (Oxfam edition)
GBP 12.95 • € 21
Oxfam Publications
274 Banbury Road
Oxford OX2 7DZ
UK
Fax: + 44 1865 312 600
Email: publish@oxfam.org.uk

Widen your horizons!



This CD-ROM database of 4,000 agricultural information centres is technically correct and simple to use, although its manual's use of non-agricultural examples from other databases suggests a lack of user-mindedness.

It is extremely focused on North American and European centres, with a mere handful of developing country services – and mainly the older and Northern-linked institutions at that. Why? Perhaps the compilers knew not how to explore beyond their own horizons, and perhaps they just never got enough replies to their questionnaires.

Its basic data covers centres' addresses, Internet references, topics covered, numbers of documents and staff. There is no imaginative mention of links to networks, membership of thematic groups, or titles of bulletins in the helpful style of, say, the International Union of Associations. It amounts to an update of an already inadequate directory of 1995, rather than a new edition.

A shame, since so much more information is openly available than the compilers found. We compared the database with a sample issue of *Spore*: of the eleven agricultural information centres mentioned in *Spore* 80, the database lists just two – both European. The result is surely better than nothing, but it is to be hoped the noticeable omissions of ACP institutions are corrected in future editions. Maybe they should make themselves better known, as well as the compilers looking further.

Agricultural information resource centers – A world directory 2000 (CD-ROM)
compiled by IAALD, National Information Services Corporation, USA. 2000.
CTA Number 1040.
80 credit points

Rave over rattan

Rattan, its taxonomy, biology, ecology and economy are the topic in number 205 of the international journal *Unasylva* (Volume 52, 2001/2), dedicated to forestry and forest industry and published by the FAO. Specific articles focus on rattan development in western and central Africa, its uses, processing and marketing.

Unasylva is published four times a year in English, French and Spanish.
Subscription: US\$ 36 • € 40.20 annually. Single copies only available on request.
Marketing and Information Division
FAO, Viale delle Terme di Caracalla
00100 Rome, Italy
Fax: +39 06 5705 3360
Email: publications-sales@fao.org

SOFA 2001

■ The issues in this annual review and data collection include the WTO negotiations on agricultural trade, the economic impact of transboundary plant pests and animal diseases. Also: the agricultural situation by regions, focuses on Ethiopia, Viet Nam and Haiti and the usual time series data for 150 countries together with the FAOSTAT TS software.

State of Food and Agriculture 2001
Rome, 2001, 322 pp. + CD-ROM
ISBN 92-5-104600-X
US\$49 • € 53.75
Available from FAO, address elsewhere these pages

Here's to your health!

■ An intriguing book on a new trend in the industrialisation of food production called 'functional foods'. This refers to any modified food or ingredient that may provide a health benefit beyond its traditional nutrients. The book introduces the industry's strategies, the contradictory responses from science and the public and the debates and ethical dilemmas arising from this new trade.

The Functional Foods Revolution.
Healthy People, Healthy Profits?
By M Heasman & J Mellentin,
Earthscan, 2000
GBP 18.95 • € 30.75
Earthscan Publications Ltd
120 Pentonville Road
London, N1 9JN, UK.
Fax: +44 171 278 1142
Email: earthinfo@earthscan.co.uk

Potassium potential

■ What it is, what it does and how much you should use. How crops respond to potassium, as well as to a shortage of it. All packed practically into a handy manual.

Potash Facts: Potassium, an essential nutrient
International Potash Institute (IPI),
2000. 10 pp.
Available free of charge and downloadable from
www.ipipotash.org
IPI
PO Box 1609
CH-4001 Basel, Switzerland
Fax: + 41 61 261 29 25
Email: ipi@ipipotash.org

Organic online

■ A new Website dedicated to organic farming was launched by CABI Publishing in May 2001, with more than 100,000 abstracts on organic research, weekly news stories, research papers, and books. Some information, such as news headlines, jobs, legislation and courses, is freely available to all users. The abstracts database, full news stories and research papers are only available to paying subscribers. (organisations GBP 275 and individuals GBP 75 per year).

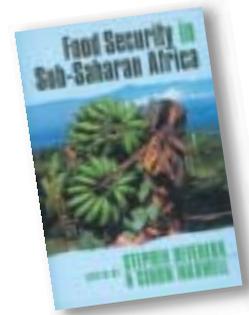
Website: www.organic-research.com

Some are more food secure than others

■ The days when a majority believed that 'food insecurity' just meant insufficient food production at national level are over. Food insecurity is experienced at household level and concerns not only a family's production but also guaranteed access to food in order to secure its livelihood. In *Food security in Sub-Saharan Africa*, the editors describe the various schools of thought about food and livelihood security. Various contributors each shed their own light on different approaches to food security. Why is there often enough food in the markets during a famine? Why do droughts or other natural disasters not automatically lead to

famine? What is the role of international markets, of trade and aid? The relation between nutrition and food security is analysed as are the sometimes questionable roles of interventions such as food-for-work, food supplements, subsidies and grants.

This thought-provocative book puts paid to some simplistic myths, for instance that increased production alone solves food insecurity. The richness in angles and examples might be confusing at first but it certainly helps the reader understand why sub-Saharan Africa is the region in the world that suffers most from food insecurity and famine.



Food Security in Sub-Saharan Africa
Edited by S Devereux & S Maxwell,
ITDG Publishing, 2001. 350 pp. ISBN
1853395234
GBP 15.95 • € 25.90
ITDG Publishing
103-105 Southampton Row
London WC1B 4HL
UK
Fax: + 44 20 7436 2013
Email: marketing@itpubs.org.uk

Unknown but not unloved



■ Some crops are less used than others, perhaps some even too little. According to the International Centre for Underutilised Crops (ICUC), tamarind (*Tamarind Indica L.*) is one such, and the first book in their new series 'Fruits for the Future' is dedicated to this plant.

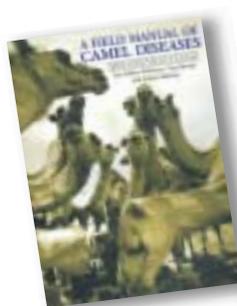
This is a well-structured handbook on all aspects of the tree. Its past, present and future, and its geographical and taxonomic aspects are all well-covered, along with cultivation methods and its many uses. The tree provides shade, the leaves and flowers are used in curries and as fodder for animals. Its fruits are used fresh, for flavouring or making juice, jams and syrups. The hardwood is ideal for furniture and charcoal making and the bark is used for dyeing and tanning.

A concluding chapter defines areas of potential growth,

future prospects and research priorities. A very handy appendix gives contact details of resource bodies and individuals worldwide who can supply seeds, or tell you more about tamarind and conserving its genetic resources.

Tamarind
By HPM Gunasena & A Hughes,
ICUC, UK, 2000. 171 pp. ISBN
0854327274
GBP 15 • € 24.70
Free for orders from ACP countries
ICUC
University of Southampton
Southampton SO17 1BJ
UK
Fax: +44 2380 677519
Email: haq@soton.ac.uk

Care for your camels



■ Did you know that the camel is the most efficient domesticated animal for converting fodder into work, transport, milk and meat?

Veterinary services are rare in camel-herding areas (which

include the Sahel and East Africa), warn the authors of this practical guide to caring for the single-humped camel, the dromedary. The manual is not intended to replace such services, but to ease communication and cooperation between the pastoralist, the vet and other specialists, in part by preventive care and early diagnosis. Ninety ailments are described, according to symptom and the affected part of the body, in a clear and concise style, making much use of common, local and scientific terms.

The basis of the book is an intensive 'Write-In' session of

twenty practitioners from Africa, and West and South Asia who came together at a writing workshop in 1997, to pool and produce texts and drawings. Their knowledge will radiate far with this splendid guide.

A field manual of camel diseases.
Traditional and Modern Health Care for the Dromedary
By I Köhler-Rollefsen, P Mundy & E Mathias, ITDG Publishing, 2001.
254 pp.
ISBN 1 85339 503 X
GBP 12.95 • € 21
ITDG Publishing
103-105 Southampton Row
London WC1B 4HL
UK
Fax: + 44 207 436 2013
Email: marketing@itpubs.org.uk

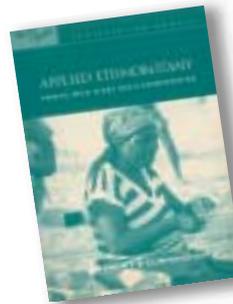
People and wild plants

■ The title *Applied ethnobotany* is too difficult a title for such an accessible and clear book as this one on the impact of people harvesting wild plants. While reading it, an elaborate and very practical mix of anthropology, geography, biology, economics and agriculture is being poured into your head, all focused on the use of wild plants and their conservation in Africa.

This is an undervalued aspect of African agriculture which is still strongly connected with plant species that are not really cultivated but do provide all kinds of products and uses: not only for foodstuffs, but also for medicines, weaving, dyeing and local rituals. Conserving it means first understanding it.

The book provides tools to bridge the gap between local and scientific interpretations, to obtain the right information, and to link Linnaean taxonomy – the international system of Latin scientific names – with local names. What are locally used measures for quantities, or local inventory and conservation methods? How much root can be cut off or bark harvested without damaging the plant? Mapping the local markets where wild plant products are sold offers information on trade and can thus indicate whether certain plants might become endangered.

This rich source of information makes you realise that another dozen volumes like this



are needed to cover all of Africa's wild plant species, their use and conservation.

Applied Ethnobotany: People, Wild Plant Use and Conservation
By A B Cunningham, Earthscan, 2000. 300 pp. ISBN 1853836974
GBP 24.95 • € 40.50
Earthscan Publications Ltd
120 Pentonville Road
London, N1 9JN, UK
Fax: +44 171 278 1142
Email: earthinfo@earthscan.co.uk

Meaningful maize

■ Maize has more uses than any other cereal and is nutritionally superior to most others, except in its protein value which suffers from very low levels of essential amino acids. Besides its obvious uses around the kitchen, maize is also an important raw material for industrial uses, such as starch.

Much research work and countless breeding programmes have been dedicated to improving the production, value and performance of maize – sometimes very specifically, such as raising the levels of amino acids. *Tropical maize improvement and production* is a collection of various examples of these quests for improvements.

The first chapters describe the origin, morphology, physiology, types and uses of maize. The core chapters are dedicated to breeding techniques: to improve hybrid breeding, to breed special purpose maize or, through breeding to improve the plant's abiotic stresses, to make it resistant to insects, drought or nutrient deficiencies. The concluding chapters describe research experiences at a more managerial level, such as integrated pest management and post harvest management.

This is an interesting publication for maize specialists who do not want to re-invent the wheel but seek to build on results achieved by their predecessors.



Tropical maize. Improvement and production
FAO Plant Production and Protection No 28, 2000. 376 pp.
ISBN 9251044570
US\$ 30 • € 33.50
FAO Sales and Marketing Group
Viale delle Terme di Caracalla
00100 Rome, Italy
Fax: +39 06 57 05 33 60
Email: publications-sales@fao.org

How to manage vertisols

■ Based on a workshop held in Zimbabwe in May 1999, the book reviews the current state of knowledge on, and the practical aspects of the management of, vertisol soils in Africa. Country papers cover Ethiopia, Ghana, Malawi, Sudan, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

The Sustainable Management of Vertisols
Edited by J K Syers, F Penning de Vries and P Nyamudeza,
CABI Publishing, 2001. 320 pp.
ISBN 0851994504
GBP 55 • € 89.25
CABI Publishing
Wallingford, Oxfordshire
OX10 8DE, UK
Fax: +44 1491 83 35 08
Email: cabi@cabi.org

Fifteen ways to fight pests

■ A set of methodologies for integrated pest management (IPM) developed with smallholders. Useful in research at farm and field level in sub-Saharan Africa, especially in combination with *Learning and Livelihoods* (see Spore 94, p 13).

IPM for smallholders. A researcher's case book from Malawi
By J Lawson-McDowall, S Abeyasekera, B Mwale et al.
Published by Natural Resources Institute (NRI), UK, 2001. 89 pp.
ISBN 0 85954 526 1
GBP 15 • € 24.35
Please quote PSTC33
NRI Catalogue Services
c/o CAB International
Wallingford
Oxon OX10 8DE, UK
Fax: +44 1491 82 92 92
Email: nri@cabi.org

Desert cheeses

■ Camel milk is widely used for milk and butter, but rarely as cheese. Normal cheese-making procedures work well, but take more effort than with other milks. All is revealed, described and compared in this manual.

Technology of making cheese from camel milk (Camelus dromedarius)
FAO Animal Production and Health Papers, No 113, FAO 2001. 70 pp.
ISBN 9251031541
US\$ 12 • € 13.40
FAO, Viale delle Terme di Caracalla
00100 Rome, Italy
Fax: +39 06 5705 3360
Email: publications-sales@fao.org

Publishers' tool box updated

■ BookAid's superb list of Information and Training Resources for Publishing and Bookselling is now available online in PDF format, in its 2001- 2002 edition. It describes almost 200 books, newsletters, journals, and booklets on all aspects of publishing, and how to purchase them from ITDG Publishing.

How to obtain these publications



The green leaf symbol indicates publications that are on CTA's list. Subscribers to the Publications Distribution Service (PDS) can obtain them from CTA. All other publications, indicated by an orange square, are available from the publishers listed, or through commercial outlets, but not from CTA.

Publications on CTA's list are available free-of-charge to PDS

subscribers. Subscribers can order publications on CTA's list up to the value of the credit points available to them. Subscribers can only request publications on the order forms provided.

Non-subscribers who wish to join the scheme should write to CTA for an application form. Applications will be considered from agricultural and rural development organisations in the ACP (Africa, Caribbean and Pacific) Group of States; individ-

uals resident in ACP countries may also apply.

If you are not eligible for a free subscription to the PDS, or if you need publications beyond your free credit allocation, you may buy publications on CTA's list from our commercial distributor: *Triops, Hinderburgstrasse 33, D-64295 Darmstadt, Germany, Fax: +49 6151 314 048, Email: triops@net-library.de; Website: www.net-library.de*

Reader survey

How do you use *Spore*?



How do you use *Spore*? How much does it help you in your work, your thinking, your education? Is there anything else that *Spore* can do for you?

We want to know how every reader uses *Spore* and what more you expect from your magazine. Together, *Spore* readers are the people who make ACP agriculture work – ask yourself, who do you know who does not know *Spore*?

Who uses *Spore*?

This 95th issue of *Spore* – and 45th issue of the Portuguese version, *Esporo* – has a circulation of more than 42.000 printed copies to subscribers in 126 countries, nearly all in ACP countries. There are several thousand more readers on the World Wide Web. Because most subscribers share their copy with several other people, the actual number of readers is much higher.

Our goal is that for each reader, each issue has at least one idea, news item, publication, event, technology or example to help in their important work. Do we succeed?

How well does *Spore* work for you? Tell us, and your replies will help it work even better.

Win a prize draw!

This is not a competition between readers, because everyone uses *Spore* in a unique way, and each one is important. But to encourage you to write in, we shall hold a random prize draw. On 1 March 2002, at CTA headquarters, we shall put all entries into a (big) box and pull out three at random. Each of the three 'winners' will be offered 200 credit points, plus a new subscription to *Spore*. If the winner is already a subscriber, s/he can nominate another subscriber or receive 50 extra credit points.

Questions

Please reply to as many questions as possible, ideally on maximum one sheet of paper.

- 1. About you:**
(line by line)
Your name, gender, position/ job, organisation, your CTA-PDS subscription number (if you have one), postal address, country, fax, email (if you do not use email now, do you plan to use it by end 2002?).
- 2. Your daily work:**
(choose one or more)
actual food/ livestock production; food processing; marketing; extension or support services; finance; research; policy formulation; other.
- 3. Your copy:**
How many people read it?
Do you read it in the month of publication?
Where do you keep old copies?
- 4. Which three sections are your favourite?**
Long articles; News items; Links; Publications; Between Us; Viewpoint.
- 5. Which sections should we expand?**
- 6. Which sections should we shorten?**
- 7. Which subjects we should feature more?**
- 8. In general, is the frequency of 2 months:**
too infrequent; ok; too frequent
- 9. Is *Spore***
too short; the right length; too long; too varied; too technical; too 'political'; too superficial; the right balance.
- 10. Your uses of *Spore***
Please describe in your own words as many uses as you feel important (send photos, pictures, examples of publications).



Illustrations: M. Roesch

Five ways to reply

before 1 February 2002

1. Write the ten questions and your answers on paper and mail them to:
Uses of *Spore*,
CTA,
PO Box 380,
6700 AJ Wageningen,
The Netherlands
2. Type the questions and your answers on computer and e-mail them to:
uses-of-spore@spore-magazine.org
3. Get the list of questions sent to you by email, by sending an email to questions@spore-magazine.org, and reply by email
4. Fax your replies to 00 31 317 460067
5. Visit the CTA Website and fill in the online form:
www.agricta.org/UsesOfSpore

Timetable

Send your reply to be received by 1 February 2002.

In *Spore* 98 (April 2002) we shall announce the winners of the draw – having informed them directly – and give a short description of their entry.

In *Spore* 99 (June 2002) we shall give a short report on how the survey went.

In *Spore* 100 (August 2002) in a special section, we shall reproduce a selection of what we found to be the most innovative, instructive, constructive, exemplary, replicable or reliable uses and requests. This will be part of the celebration of our 100th issue, about which more in *Spore* 96 and later editions.

We cannot return any replies, nor attached photos, pictures, publications.

I saw it in *Spore*

In recent letters to Mailbox, readers have reported these uses of *Spore*

- farmers adapting anti-erosion technologies
- teaching material in schools and universities
- staff training in service agencies
- reproduction in newsletters, annual reports
- updates on new publications
- links to external information and courses
- radio broadcasts of translated articles
- discussions in readers' circles
- updates on emerging technologies
- project selection by donors
- scene-setting agriculture amongst broader issues (GMOs, climate change, genderisation ...)

Mailbox

Don't know how climate change is affecting you, but at the *Spore* mailbox, the letters just keep flooding in... Have you written to *Spore* lately?



Anyone seen a sisal stripper?

Alan Chadborn at the Design Centre, c/o WAM, PO Box 50, Katakwi, Uganda enquires "about methods of treating sisal to protect it from rotting. The ropes made here traditionally by hand are mostly used for tethering animals whilst grazing. They get wet in dew and rain which soon makes them soft and rots them. Any chemical treatment here would have to be harmless to the skins of goats and cattle.

The equipment needed is first for decorticating, or rather removing the soft cells from the fibre. This is currently done by pulling it between the person's heel and a metal edge such as a hoe. Secondly the fibres are rubbed between hand and leg to twist them into strings; these are then plaited into rope.

In our workshop we are making a range of tools for carpenters, blacksmiths and farmers. Our aim is to teach blacksmiths to make tools to extend their rural business. If you can help me find plans or descriptions for the above tools, we could make some prototypes."

Affordable grain protection

In July 2001, Charles Mbambo wrote from Zimbabwe that "maize harvesting is now over, and everyone is looking forward to storing the grain. It has to be protected against weevils but the price of pesticides is unaffordable for poor farmers. Dear farmers, may you try burnt cow dung to protect the grain. Collect dry dung and burn it. Fill two 20 litre containers with ash and mix thoroughly with 90 kg of maize grain. The odour of the ash will repel such weevils as *Stophilus granarius* and the lesser grain borer, *Rhizopertha dominica*. It's easy, does not involve money but only costs your spare time and energy to do it"

The Anasazi people of what is now south-western USA used similar techniques with their maize, using sheep manure ash.

Why less information for vets?

The veterinarian Michael Tilakun from Amuro-Kelle in Ethiopia tells us that "integrated working with veterinary services is the choice of rural livelihood for all development and livestock health care is essential for health, directly and indirectly. But *Spore* publishes few details about animal health and should give them greater emphasis."

Maybe it's not enough, but *Spore 94* opened on animal and human health. Your comments on that article will be most welcome!

Silk threads back a long way

Gareth Davies writes from Waterloo in Belgium in response to the article inspired by ICIPE on "Silk route now through Africa" in *Spore 92*. "The manufacture of local 'silk' and its use in garment making in Africa does predate ICIPE. There used to be a West African tradition of fancy embroidery based in natural 'silk' extracted from spider webs of different varieties."

The course clan complain again!

F K Chadokweezda, Librarian of the International Corps Heralding Oneness in Gokwe, Zimbabwe, softens us up with his gratitude for our marvellous services: "Every page of *Spore* is sweets to the sweet. But," he goes on, "where are those courses? The totality of your readers, me included, yearn for a long distance degree in Agriculture. Please bring back that dynamic innovation that has left a dark patch on our educative magazine."

Dear Mr Chadokweezda, and many others! We have not eliminated information on courses and meetings, we have simply included them in the general news section. Have a look in the yellow section of News in Brief.

Learning through study circles

Responding to the general decline of agricultural extension programmes in the Sahel and elsewhere, Moussa Idi Abdou, an extension officer in Keita, Niger, urges people "to consider the study circles method which was developed in 1981 by the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions. The study circle is composed of six to ten volunteers who wish to work together to solve common problems, and assign themselves learning tasks and mobilise their teachers. They meet regularly, usually every week. This makes sure that people at the grassroots are reached as quickly as possible."

We have also heard of weekly study circles being held over the Internet of agricultural trade union workers in Barbados, Kenya, Peru and South Africa to deal with health and safety issues.

Learn from your mistakes

The lessons, disappointments and pleasant surprises of two years' experience were the common focus of a workshop on CTA's work on market information services and the three pilot MIS projects in Ghana, Kenya and Uganda. The report of the consultation, which was held in Wageningen in October 2000, outlines a set of measures taken to share more information. In particular, attention is paid to the key areas of the quality, regular flow and reliability of information on the one hand, and, on the other, the financial issues of integrity and sustainability.

Technical consultation on the development of market information services for small operators in the agricultural sectors of ACP countries.

Edited by K Batjes-Sinclair,
CTA (working document), 2001. 83 pp.
CTA number 8023.
5 credit points



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Elizabeth Mary Minofu Sibale is an agricultural scientist specialised in maize. She has worked for the research department in Malawi's ministry of agriculture. She is now a programme manager for the food security programme of the EU Delegation to Malawi. In 2000, she won the annual award of the World Bank Group and IMF Africa Club for her work on breeding Open Pollinated Varieties (OPVs).

A major problem in agriculture remains the availability of the right seeds against the right price. The most discouraging thing is that the cost of improved seeds is growing by the day, which is not only disadvantageous to smallholders. It is also a stumbling block to any country seeking to achieve food security for all its citizens. In the case of Malawi, for example, before hybrid seeds were introduced in the early 1950s, farmers did not bother to buy seeds. They used their own or exchanged them with neighbours. The introduction of hybrids was accompanied by subsidies on seeds and other inputs. It was, then, not so much a burden for a poor smallholder to start buying these seeds.

The situation is different nowadays. In 1987, the government started implementing the IMF/World Bank recommendation of structural adjustment and slowly removed its subsidies. This made farm input prices, including hybrid seeds, unaffordable for smallholders. Maize production declined as some farmers who had adopted hybrids fell back to local maize production.

Need for intermediate product

In Malawi, 90% of the land area used for maize is on smallholdings; of this 80% is sown with low-yielding, unimproved varieties. It was therefore logical to initiate a maize breeding programme that would offer an intermediate product, a variety that farmers could afford, that was higher yielding, yet similar to local varieties in terms of storage and processing, and from which farmers could save their own next year's seed. This is where the OPVs came in. Although open-pollinated maize varieties cannot compete with hybrid maize in performance in high fertility environments, they do perform better than hybrids in low fertility environments. That is why I would recommend OPVs to poor

Seeds

Seed security for smallholders

Seed is the most important input in agriculture and, compared to fertilisers, pesticides and labour, still the cheapest. Two keys to better yields are good cultural practices and the improvement of local, open-pollinated varieties.

smallholders in ACP countries whose land is mostly less fertile due to intensity of growing crops without following crop rotation concepts.

Beyond affordability

The sad thing is that though researchers have come up with a number of OPVs, many commercial companies do not want to promote and sell these varieties. But why? They fear losing their trade since most OPVs can be recycled for three years without losing their productivity. This recycling might be a disadvantage to the commercial companies, but there are cost advantages to a smallholder. Food production for the household will not fall as would be the case if primitive local varieties were used as an alternative. In this sense, therefore, I will commend to governments of ACP countries and other decision-makers to encourage the use of OPVs among poor smallholders. This is how they can achieve food security. Remember, in poor countries like Malawi, smallholders form the bulk of the population. What is the purpose of promoting hybrid varieties, favourable for rich farmers, and leaving aside OPVs which are ideal for the smallholder majority? On that note, it is important to think about the type of farming systems and the target community when thinking about agricultural development. Promote what is ideal for smallholders to smallholders. The ambition to achieve food security for all should be the mantle of agricultural programmes, not promoting the commercial activities of seed companies.

Save seeds

Another point to note on farming systems is that of input management. In our research in Malawi it turned out that under low input management system, hybrids had no significant advantage over OPVs in yield performance. Smallholders who are mainly poor do not grow their seeds under high input management. There is no sense, therefore, in encourag-

ing them to grow the elite or hybrid seeds for if they do so, they will lose yields significantly.

One other point I want to emphasise is training. This goes with the common song of empowerment. Smallholders need to be trained in seed production as well as in processing and marketing skills. This should be provided to the farmers in their cooperatives. It will ensure that the farmers themselves come up with their favourable varieties of seeds in terms of traditional and scientific demands.

Traditionally, in Malawi maize is pounded in a mortar to remove the bran before it is taken to be milled into flour. Subsistence farmers always favour varieties of maize as hard as local varieties for these

“ensure that the farmers themselves come up with their favourable varieties”

purposes. If farmers are empowered to produce OPVs which favour these traditional methods, then their food security could be assured. Such programmes will also ensure a constant flow of pure stock into the seed production system, as farmers will never worry about going to buy seeds even after the three year time span for OPVs. In Malawi the government and donors like the European Union have been facilitating such training programmes. The result is that the seed of crops that five years ago could not be found on the market can now be purchased: improved OPV maize, groundnuts, beans, soybeans, pigeon peas and many more.

All in all, I would define the major challenges in food security as strengthening the seed system and intensifying farmer training on good crop production practices for maximum benefits.

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