Most people have a complex relationship with mountains. Even if you have never seen one in the flesh, as it were, they probably conjure up feelings of both awe and reassurance in you. Rightly so. They tower above us, strong and solid in our minds and eyes, yet are as fragile as an eggshell. They seem to entice us, drawing out the explorer in us, prompting one climber to explain why he wanted to reach the world’s highest peak, Everest, with the all-embracing “Because it’s there.”

They may fall in pieces on top of us if we go too close, they may release their waters in floods that bring both fear and fertility to the people on the plain, they may harbour and host essential species. When it is hot and humid on the plain, those of us with the time and the means often retreat to the hills. When we can, we settle there, to be above the noise, or safe from the threats of unknown animals and unfriendly tribes and we often place our capital cities on mountains. From the palace on the peak of Antananarivo in Madagascar, now lost perhaps to history, to the Redhills of Jamaica’s Kingston, or the micro-cities of the Hopi nation on the flattops of Arizonaan summits, we seek refuge in mountains.

There are many definitions of a mountain. According to South African sources, a mountain is an area of above 425 metres of elevation, but the degree of the slope – some say more than 10% – counts too. Mountains and highlands occupy an important part in the agricultural scenario and the ecology of a significant number of ACP States.

In the greater Caribbean area, Jamaica’s famed Blue Mountains are host to a rich biodiversity, the nation’s water supply and a controlled small number of farmers. To the
east, the island of Hispanola is home to both the Dominican Republic and Haiti, with the latter’s massive problems of poverty-driven, uncontrolled erosion. In the Pacific, Papua New Guinea is seriously mountainous, with peaks reaching with more than 5000 m; more than 2 million people live in PNG’s highlands.

In Africa, as well as the isolated peaks of West and Central Africa such as in Cameroon, there are the complex mountain areas of eastern Africa, highlighted in Kenya and Ethiopia’s highlands, and the mountain ranges of southern Africa, from Angola and Namibia across to Lesotho. South Africa is 20% highlands and mountains. In the Indian Ocean, there are mountains of note in Mauritius and the Comoros; Madagascar’s inland chain hosts a unique and collapsing biodiversity. One-tenth of Africa’s surface area is mountainous, and home to about 110 million people, with a range of agricultural problems specific to that geography. A further 160 million people in Africa depend on mountains for their water supply.

Go till it on the mountain

The agriculture of the mountain is a complex one, even if it is largely subsistence. Sometimes – in Africa in particular – the mountain has provided a more reliable and fertile (humid!) livelihood than some dry lowlands, and agriculture has taken root. Complicated systems of cultivation and water catchment and distribution accompany refined methods of pasture management and livestock logistics. The similarities of many agricultural practices across different mountain regions in the world is striking. The transhumance ceremonies of moving livestock to summer mountain pastures in the Causse of southern France take place in an environment of terraced valleys and tiny plots planted with fruit trees and onion plants which is reminiscent of the Ethiopian highlands, Peru’s Golden valley, and the highland rice fields of Madagascar.

Because of their relative isolation, mountain communities are often particularly rich and retentive of their culture, and agricultural practices. Where a rural lowland dweller has nothing but an emotional tug to stop him leaving his village for the promises and disappointments of city life, a mountain farmer will think a hundred times before going down the slope to the lowlands. Indeed s/he will try to go up, cutting more trees for firewood, terracing more slopes in defiance of gravity. The push upwards is driven largely by the upward surge of population growth.

Yet one day, as has been happening for several decades at sometimes alarming rates, the mountain will not tolerate such intense handling. The soils will erode, causing horrific problems of silting and flooding on the over-populated and fertile lowland plains. Entire livelihoods, communities, will be literally washed away.

When man goes to the mountain

The need then is to modulate the impact of man on mountains, a process currently called ‘M mountain development’. This highly selective strategy can have three major objectives. Firstly, to provide a sound, sustainable livelihood to a limited population, whether in agriculture or other activities such as handicrafts or ecotourism. Secondly, to prevent economic and environmental migration to seemingly more hospitable climates below and, thirdly, to protect, preserve and help to strengthen the mountain ecosystem.

The maintenance of a sound ecosystem upstream can mitigate disaster downstream. It also provides a habitat for the species which contribute to biodiversity and it allows for inter-mountain “eco-friendly” corridors along which species can migrate as their home ecozones alter under the influence of climate change. Finally, mountain forests can absorb carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and thus help to reduce the global warming effects of so-called greenhouse gases. In that special way of we humans, where we assign tasks to other parts of nature as if they were there merely to serve the human race, we call these forests ‘carbon sinks’.

Not, though, that it is all give and no take; mountains are as much affected by the continuous process of climate change as anywhere else. In many areas, mountains are getting warmer – the famous snow-cap on Mount Kilimanjaro in Tanzania is predicted to disappear within fifteen years. It is on Kilimanjaro’s foothills that the burgeoning African M mountains Association is establishing itself as a centre to promote more mountain-friendly development practice.

Because they are there

Mountains provide a decent home to a relatively small numbers of rural people, and other species. They have their role to play, agriculturally speaking, in food security, genetic diversity, and income generation. That status should be maintained – therefore there should be neither policies which lead to total depopulation, because that places excessive pressure on other areas, nor policies of deliberate settlement, because the mountain is too fragile and quickly hostile for more people.

In the eyes of a macro-policy maker, the standard toolkit for rural development can apply, but it will not suffice. Participation, empowerment, community development, low-scale credit and savings schemes, stakeholder dialogues – all of these processes can thrive even more than in the lowlands, because social cohesion, and failing that, social control, tend to be much stronger in mountain communities.

However, additional attention has to be paid to the aspects of isolation and remoteness, in particular to infrastructure. For produce and livestock to reach external markets, and inputs to be imported, the routes are longer, more arduous and more expensive. The famous ‘last mile’ in telecommunications – and this applies to all forms of communications – is always going to be tougher, longer and dearer in the mountains. That said, current advances in satellite communication are fast removing remoteness in terms of access to information. This can have its benefits in, for example, agricultural practice and market information, although there may be an erosion of local indigenous knowledge and cultural values.

Like all minorities, the important thing is to get noticed, listened to and responded to fairly. The people and other species of the mountain are perhaps the farthest away from the mindset of the development planner and policy maker, but they should not be forgotten. Taking care of their particular needs will, literally and figuratively, have positive consequences downstream. Because they are there.

For further information:
Year of the Mountain 2002 secretariat.
Website: www.mountains2002.org
The mountain forum.
Website: www.mtnforum.org
African Mountains Association (AMA)
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Mountain development requires a sensitive balance between human and other natural interests:

- recognition of the limits of human settlement
- adaptation of traditions to further reduce erosion and loss of vegetation
- promotion of economic incentives and communications facilities
- recognition by policy-makers...
Shifting cultivation

Ready for the next shift?

Is shifting cultivation (slash-and-burn) just inefficient, and destructive of the soil and local biodiversity? Or does it also offer promising models?

For thousands of years, shifting cultivation has fed many, and it continues to support the livelihoods of 300 million people worldwide. And that is a conservative estimate. It can be defined in numerous ways but it is best described as a practice whereby farmers clear a patch of forest or savanna, often using fire to release the nutrients for growing crops, and then alternate periods of cultivation with periods of fallow, during which the forest and soil fertility are allowed to be restored, while the farmers shift to a new patch. Besides having many names — milpa in Belize, swidden in New Guinea, kenyah in central Africa — this way of farming has many faces, which for a long time were not recognised but lumped together.

The general belief has been that in cases of low population densities and abundant forests, the periods of fallow were long enough to make this method of farming sustainable. Steady population growth during the twentieth century was assumed to have increased the pressure on the forest, unacceptably shortening fallow periods. This also led to soil depletion and shrinking forests and forced farmers to move to more marginal lands. Combine this with agriculture being modernised and intensified, and needing to meet growing demands for food, and it seems not so strange that shifting cultivation was denounced as irrational and destructive. This has certainly been true in part because in the 1990s found that it might be a pity to throw out the baby with the bathwater.

Limiting their shifts

The lessons were not slow in coming. The Alternatives to Slash-and-Burn Programme, coordinated by the International Centre for Research in Agroforestry (ICRAF), was established in 1992 on the basis of assumptions similar to those described above. They did not entirely hold true. Case studies around the world indicated that although more than 15 million ha of tropical moist forests disappeared each year due to slash-and-burn farming, only 17% of the shifting cultivators cleared actual primary forest and an even smaller percentage eventually brought about a permanent treeless form of land use. Increased deforestation is more likely to be the result of civil war, drought, market mechanisms and government policies than of slash-and-burn. For instance, changes from communal to private ownership of land is giving way to loggers, miners, plantation farmers and cattle ranchers, at the same time literally stopping the shifting cultivators in their tracks. This applies less to central Africa, where deforestation is in the fringes of the Congo basin is indeed largely caused by smallholder agriculture. Yet there are other reasons for farmers to abandon shifting cultivation and to adopt a sedentary way of farming: the vicinity of markets, schools and infrastructure also encourages people to settle.

Low yielding but stable

No two farmers are the same, and shifting cultivation is not one uniform way of farming. The Overseas Development Institute, a UK based research body, points out that indigenous communities, who often live in remote areas, have developed their way of farming over generations and apply long fallow periods and complex farm management practices. Each decision is carefully taken on the basis of sound agronomic criteria, resulting in a low yielding but stable and sustainable food production. On the other hand, there are the new settlers, often nearer to urban areas, who focus on short-term gains from cash crops, use short fallow periods until the soil is depleted, or just move on and on.

In between these two extremes, there is a continuum of farming men and women who shift part of their operations once in a while but return later. In forests, which can sustain the existing population of shifting cultivators, the practice even contributes positively to the system’s biodiversity. In these cases it is crucial that the mosaic of patches in different stages of fallow, forest cover and cultivation does not get too fragmented and threaten any of the natural tree species in their survival.

Where the shifting cycle cannot be maintained, a conversion to sedentary agroforestry cultivation systems can be an option too. The central issue here is to maintain soil fertility more efficiently. In recent years a whole spectrum of viable alternatives to expensive chemical fertilisers has become available. For instance improved fallow techniques which enrich the natural fallow vegetation through the planting of nitrogen-fixing and multipurpose trees to improve soil productivity. Applying manure from livestock, green manuring, mulching, planting cover crops for intercropping and alley farming are other examples. Agroforestry systems can be good alternatives too, such as multistory cultivation, systems that allow natural tree species to rejuvenate alongside annual crops and economic trees. It would not harm to lend an ear to the traditional shifting cultivators themselves or, as Paul Sillitoe of the University of Durham in England argues, to combine anthropological research with soil science. His work explained how the Wola of Papua New Guinea have developed their own sustainable system while avoiding their traditional long fallow periods. They grow non-perennial crops semi-permanently by incorporating compost from grassy fallows into soil mounds, with sweet potato as a staple crop.

Where there’s a will, there’s a way.

Trees and multistory agriculture in Africa

H Dupriez & Ph de Leneer

ISBN 92 9081 1781
CTA number 860, 40 credit points
Market information services

Mr Two Percent, what hope do you have?

The smart market information service (MIS) combines market prices with the farmer’s savvy. We look at some success stories which have made some farmers very happy indeed, but how long can it all last?

We all have at least one, locked up in the cupboard of our memories. The Marketing Board. Remember it? It’s not that long ago that they were being wound up, as part of the text-book practices and prescriptions of those fresh-faced visitors from somewhere out in outer space known as Structural Adjustment. How many shed a tear when ‘their’ board folded? Did you?

Not that the Marketing Boards were real theirs, for they did not belong in reality to the individual farmer or trader. No, it was more the other way around, or at least seemed to be, if the truth be told. Normally the boards – for all sorts of commodities - were stadal bodies, some with private par-

Made in Mozambique

In Maputo, the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development operates an agricultural MIS known as SMA. SMA produces a weekly bulletin ‘Quente Quente’, and a monthly report. It provides price information on 25 products in 27 producer, wholesale and retail markets throughout the country, as well as regional and international prices of selected commodities and well-presented market commentary.

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FoodNet

The FoodNet project in Uganda is a joint venture involving, amongst others, government services, the International Institute of Tropical Agriculture, and CTA.

The particular interest in the MIS operated by FoodNet is the way it seeks to serve macro-level interests (policy makers and large traders) as well as a micro-level thrust, aiming to provide localised information to small-scale producers and traders. The micro-MIS has focused initially on pilot sites for maize, beans and root crops, with information flows using local radio, email and classical print media.

A similar attempt, involving the governments of Jamaica and the Netherlands, and local financial and information agencies, was made ten years ago in Jamaica to link micro- and macro-levels in a micro-enterprise development project. That project also launched a modest trade information service. The lessons learned at micro-level had to be translated into macro-level policy, hence the all-important emphasis on support and training of stakeholders at different levels in communication.

Bye bye board, hallo market

And then, one day, the marketing boards were gone, and the market place stood unfamiliarly empty. Producers literally scattered for cover, like beetles from an overturned stone, uncertain of where, and on what terms, to buy their inputs and sell their outputs. Traders, more flush with cash and confidence than most farmers, were able to dictate prices for a while.

Gradually, market services were developed and put in place, often by enterprising former officers of the defunct boards or civil servants. In so doing they demonstrated yet again that wherever there is some sure supply and some tangible demand there is a market. And a market for market information services there surely was. It is a new way of organising what has to be one of the oldest professions in the world – the middleman (or woman), the broker. Whether we are looking at the trade routes along the coast of West Africa, dominated for thousands of years by brokers from Benin and Phoenicia (Lebanon in today’s terms), or the inroads made in...
British have a massive surge in strawberry consumption during the June weeks of tennis at Wimbledon, or the Zimbabwean horticulturist to know that the annual peak of all flower purchases in Austria is in the week in September that secondary school examination results are announced. These dates are known years in advance.

More than that, a smart mango producer in say, Mali, may want to know not only what fruits are in fashion in Europe this year, but what produce is being prepared for promotion next year? What are the Brazilians up to? A women's jam-making cooperative in Grenada may want to know what the projected volumes of tourist arrivals are for the coming season not only in their own country but in neighbouring countries too. Is UNIDO helping a British supermarket owner set up a large jam factory that could spell doom for them?

Any level, any produce, but not any price

The task of an MIS is, therefore, much more than simply to provide price information to producers, and offers of supply to purchasers. As MISs establish themselves in most ACP countries, the first challenge is to define the scope of its coverage, in manageable amounts and periods. Scoring on the market place means exploiting your comparative advantage as a supplier, or being better informed than any other potential purchaser. An MIS can operate at any level, handle any type of produce or inputs, deal with any volumes; the more complex the demands of the trading parties, the greater the complexity of the system. The tendency is therefore to compute, and to link up a local MIS with similar MISs in other localities, and with national and international networks. This can place an MIS under technical stress.

The converse can be true too, with highly capitalised MISs following the sadly repeated path of many development projects of being excessively ambitious, overmanned, over-financed and under-used. Several services in the Caribbean and West Africa run the risk of being 'coffee-table exercises, of no use to farmers or to traders in the market place. Yet again, with a more measured and modulated approach to project design, some basic market research and an understanding of local conditions, many efforts could be much better focused.

Who pays in the end?

The prime challenge to establishing and keeping an effective and sustainable MIS is not in getting the technical mix right: it is in achieving financial viability. This is going to have to rely largely on generating income from its users, along the age-old lines of the market place. In some MISs, such as that operated by KACE in Kenya, the standard fee for brokering a transaction is 2% of the agreed sale price. With that sort of fee, there is obviously going to be a temptation for MIS operators to live from being a trading enterprise itself, or from sub-letting its facilities for other uses, or offering technical services. Fair enough, if it can be managed, but the clear risk is that the attention paid to necessary information will wane, and the quality of service to the stakeholder farmer will worsen.

Income from users, as with any network at a given stage of its development, depends on their satisfaction and continued ‘loyalty’. In that sense, the idea of providing ‘value-adding’ services to price information is a sensible way to build up user loyalty, and thus turnover. The problem arises when users are savvy enough to do their own deals directly, without any broker service. When the MIS has no more tricks or special information up its sleeve, it will wither and die. That was not the point of all the investment made in these services. The next step, then, is to help MIS operators to adapt themselves to the changing market place and to stay one step ahead of the competition. Which is where they came in.

For more information, see section Links

The case of KACE

On a typical weekday morning, the trading floor of the Kenya Agricultural Commodity Exchange at the Jamhuri Show Ground in Nairobi bustles with farmers, brokers and traders. Up on the boards, based on faxed and computer-delivered data, are the offers of farmers from various regions to supply all sorts of produce: maize, millet, dry maize, potatoes, ripe bananas (KACE has introduced a banana-ripening plant to help farmers target their sales), beans and sorghum. KACE now has almost 150 members, and the numbers are growing by the month.

After a good three years of gradual expansion, KACE is confident of the future. Their main concern, confined to Spore by a staff member, is in enabling the farmers to learn the rules of the game, and to accept market prices, even if they want higher.

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Malawian women win

July 2001, Jesse Kaunde, an entrepreneurial woman farmer from Malawi, was presented in the name of all women farmers in the country with the African Woman Food Farmer Award of the Hunger Project, worth US$ 200,000. In 1993, with a US$ 600 loan from the National Association of Business Women of Malawi, Kaunde attended a fish farming course and constructed a fish dam. She has three dams and sells fish on the market and fingerlings to other women fish farmers. What’s more, she is one of the few farmers using gravity irrigation for her crops. She cannot dispose of the award money herself – that has been added to a national fund for small loans to women farmers.

A fine cup of coffee

Persuading the coffee world that East African coffees have a high quality and special taste is, in short, what the new East African Fine Coffee Association (EAFCA) aims to do. Low prices for normal coffees and higher ones for high quality coffee, led to 150 producers, coffee authorities and traders of Burundi, Ethiopia, Kenya, Mozambique, Rwanda, Tanzania and Uganda attending EAFCA’s first general meeting in June 2001. Country committees, a market information system, and the EAFCA secretariat will be funded by USAID.

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Now the Web is yours

Is your organisation looking for top quality, professional and sympathetic online guidance on how to make the best use of the Internet? A new Website, designed especially for civil society organisations, telecentres and the like, in developing countries, was launched end-November 2001. It is a really useful resource centre, with more than 20+ sections covering as little or as much as you want to know: Email basics, databases, multilingualism, Web strategies, training (of trainers) and much more. You can download all you want. It is free, accessible and – important in these days of change – robust. Operated by six trustworthy organisations active in the field, often mentioned in Spore (APC, Bellanet, ICD, IISD, INASP and OneWorld), it is already in Spanish and English, with the French roll-out in April 2002 and Portuguese in planning.

Website: www.itrainonline.org

Bitter tastes turn sweet

A new sorghum variety with low levels of tannin has been developed by researchers of the Serere Agricultural and Animal Production Research Institute in Uganda. Tannin gives a bitter taste to common sorghums but this variety tastes almost sweet. It is good to use as a flour which when mixed with wheat flour is suitable for making bread. Its sweet taste also makes it a good alternative cereal for animal feeds. The variety is drought resistant and matures in less than four months. If managed properly, harvests can reach 3,000 kg per hectare.

After the next growing season in 2002, the Uganda Seed Project should have enough seeds to distribute nationwide. In the meantime, the Serere Institute can provide limited amounts of seeds to farmers.

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Diversifying into biodiversity

“The farmer knows best, and if she doesn’t know all the options, then let’s make more information available” was the message emanating from a workshop on ‘Incentive measures for sustainable use and conservation of agrobiodiversity’ held in Lusaka, Zambia, in mid-September 2001. The encounter was collectively organised by the SADC Plant Genetic Resource Centre, CTA and the international partners GTZ, IDRC and SIDA, and pooled the skills of 74 participants from 16 countries in eastern, central and southern Africa and Europe, India and Japan. The topic was discussed in the main article of Spore 90.

As well as stressing governments’ roles in protecting local intellectual property, participants proposed a holistic mass of farm fairs, local seed banks, awareness building, training and information networks to benefit farmers. And they placed their faith in market forces: the farmer should conquer the niche food markets in Africa, Europe and beyond, where exotic fruits, vegetables and special animal breeds can command premium prices.

KISS and tell

A key motto for communicators is “Keep It Simple, Stupid!” or KISS in short. Sometimes though, even information specialists cannot speak clearly, and they end up transmitting convoluted and confused messages. This is lazy, since it often takes a lot of hard work to make a complex subject understandable in simple terms. Tough, but not impossible.

One complex topic is measuring the impact information has on agriculture (or any other field). Take the article on marketing information services in this issue of Spore as an example. If it helps ten MISs in ten countries to become sustainable, and thus enables years of profitable growth in agricultural trade, how much is thanks to the article? Do we include the impact on farmers’ incomes, and what that means for their children’s education? If so, how much? The people who invest in information, including donor agencies, would just love to know the answers and apply them to their publications, rural radio, uses of the Internet and training seminars.

It is an inexact science, as a meeting on ‘Information impact assessment’ in October 2001 in Bonn, Germany, showed. Organised by CTA and the International Institute for Communication and Development with a range of specialised partners, this technical consultation made considerable progress at helping this new profession adopt common standards and evaluation frameworks. They have a lot to do still, in part in making their work understandable to outsiders, and especially to the people who invest in or contribute to it. Get to it, people.

Elsewhere, the Drumbeat network, experts in clarity, exchanges experiences in impact assessment and other concerns of information professionals in development.

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Fruit, fodder and fuel

Mausu fruit or ber (Ziziphus mauritiana) is no stranger in many ACP countries. The tree is believed to originate from south Asia, but can be found throughout Africa, and in the Caribbean on Barbados, Guadeloupe, Jamaica and Martinique. Despite its name, some of its properties and possibilities are not widely known. With good reason the International Centre for Underutilised Crops has included the mausu tree in its first set of publications on underutilised crops.

The mausu is a multipurpose tree, used for hedges and intercropping; its leaves serve as animal fodder and its hardwood timber is well-suited for agricultural implements, building and charcoal. Relatively unknown is the fruit's high vitamin C content - much higher than citrus - and its high phosphorous, carotene and calcium content. The leaves also provide an excellent source of vitamins C and A. To top it all, the tree is drought resistant, salt tolerant and thrives on poor soils.

But the mausu might not be underutilised much longer. Rural communities in Rushinga, Zimbabwe, have started to grow the tree commercially for its fruit, with support of the Southern Alliance for Indigenous Resources (SAFIRE). Mausu jam is already sold in Zimbabwean supermarkets, through the company Tulimara Speciality Foods of Africa Ltd. The company started producing mausu jam some years ago with fruit from pickers but will now also use semi-processed fruits from the Rushinga communities. Trained by SAFIRE, they clean the fruit and extract the juice, thus earning more than if they were selling it raw.

Milk it for all you can

The growth of the dairy sector in many ACP countries, welcome as it is in terms of producers' income and consumers' nutrition, is full of challenges. Among them are issues of marketing, regularity of supplies from producers and delivery to markets, health and hygiene, storage and management.

In a word, the core issue is formalisation. What used to be an informal sector, with its short but uncontrolled networks of delivery to small numbers of customers is now faced with the task of organising itself. This includes making contracts with producers, suppliers, transporters and sales outlets; setting up and implementing rigid procedures for storage and processing of milk products; and safe distribution.

These major points were all raised during a study visit to the dairy sector in Mali undertaken by 18 representatives of dairy enterprises, milk processors and support agencies in early October 2001. Participants from eight countries in West and Central Africa spent 12 days visiting milk collection points, dairies, bottling plants, and cheese and yoghurt producers and discussing future directions for their work. They highlighted the value of sharing experiences and launched an 'African Milk forum' to continue their discussions by email.

The visited was organised for CTA by Gret (and local partners, Sénèconseils and Service Plus) who will be a focal point for the follow-up activities.

Him a poet and boy he know it

We thought we'd seen them all. Often a seminar produces stylish speeches and lyrical recommendations, but we'd never seen a participant's poem as the summary report of a meeting (although Spore Mailbox does receive readers' poems regularly).

Maybe it was the relief at the end of a fortnight's hard work that drove the regional Question and Answer Service (QAS) workshop in Kingston, Jamaica, to put its findings into rhyme. Fifteen participants from eight Caribbean states, with resource people from Ghana, the Netherlands and Trinidad and Tobago, covered all the steps of operating a QAS (see Spore 94, section Links). The emphasis was heavily on human contact: understand your clients, network with your peers, market to the target, and know yourself - above all, what you know and what you don't know.

All in all, this CTA workshop marked an important step in the devolution of agricultural information QASs throughout ACP regions. The QAS service centre at CTA (address page 15) can provide more details, a detailed report - and the full poem. Here's an excerpt:

The personal touch, remember to share
And well all agree it was worth being here.

Neem hinders pollination

Many people sing the praises of the neem tree, partly because of its insect repellent constituents. Rightfully so. However, its growing popularity is causing problems for fruit farmers with neem in the vicinity. Its insect repelling component (azadirachtin) keeps insects away, thus preventing pollination of nearby flowering fruit trees. In 2001, a mango plantation in Uganda failed to fruit after neem trees, planted in 1999, started to flower for the first time.

Tender boost

Papaya production on the Fiji Islands has steadily increased from 400 t in 1992 to more than 2,600 t in 2000. The pink fleshed Sunrise Solo is an especially popular exportable variety. The construction of a heat treatment facility for meeting pest free export standards has boosted production. The fruits are exported fresh, dried and as paste. Latex from unripe fruits is processed locally into papain, which is widely used as a meat tenderiser.

Bitter, dry and popular

Bitterleaf (Vernonia spp.) is, despite its common name, a very popular leafy vegetable, commonly found in Nigeria, Cameroon, Gabon and the Democratic Republic of Congo. Its rising popularity in and outside its region of origin, plus its scarcity during the dry season, has encouraged the Cameroon training and research centre CFAPP to develop a practical method for drying and conserving the leaves. CFAPP provides training in this and in marketing the end product.

Match and manage

The 17th World Congress of Soil Science, to be held from 14-21 August 2002 in Thailand, will focus on indigenous and scientific knowledge systems. (Note: the 18th conference will be in 2006, in Philadelphia, USA).

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Many people sing the praises of the neem tree, partly because of its insect repellent constituents. Rightfully so. However, its growing popularity is causing problems for fruit farmers with neem in the vicinity. Its insect repelling component (azadirachtin) keeps insects away, thus preventing pollination of nearby flowering fruit trees. In 2001, a mango plantation in Uganda failed to fruit after neem trees, planted in 1999, started to flower for the first time.

Tender boost

Papaya production on the Fiji Islands has steadily increased from 400 t in 1992 to more than 2,600 t in 2000. The pink fleshed Sunrise Solo is an especially popular exportable variety. The construction of a heat treatment facility for meeting pest free export standards has boosted production. The fruits are exported fresh, dried and as paste. Latex from unripe fruits is processed locally into papain, which is widely used as a meat tenderiser.

Bitter, dry and popular

Bitterleaf (Vernonia spp.) is, despite its common name, a very popular leafy vegetable, commonly found in Nigeria, Cameroon, Gabon and the Democratic Republic of Congo. Its rising popularity in and outside its region of origin, plus its scarcity during the dry season, has encouraged the Cameroon training and research centre CFAPP to develop a practical method for drying and conserving the leaves. CFAPP provides training in this and in marketing the end product.

Match and manage

The 17th World Congress of Soil Science, to be held from 14-21 August 2002 in Thailand, will focus on indigenous and scientific knowledge systems. (Note: the 18th conference will be in 2006, in Philadelphia, USA).

WCSS office
Kaastart University
PO Box 1048
Bangkok 10903,
Thailand
Fax: +66 2 94 05 788
Email: o.dst@nontri.ku.ac.th
Website: www.17wcss.ku.ac.th
An even sweeter future

To rehabilitate Mozambique’s biggest sugar plant at Marromeu, near Beira, the owners - sugar company Companhia de Sena SARL and the Government of Mozambique – received a US$ 12 million loan from the Development Bank of South Africa in September 2001. The funds will also be used to improve infrastructure and establish a new sugarcane area of more than 10,000 hectares. Bank officials are enthusiastic about Mozambique’s comparative advantage as a low cost sugar producer. By 2003, the mill should be able to produce 100,000 t of sugar compared to the current 30,000 t.

Naturally online

Learn and share experiences on natural resources management (NRM) in Africa online at Frameweb. It provides links to online databases and country specific information. One user-friendly database, the NRM tracker, in French and English, includes detailed information on cases and projects on NRM. You can upload your own project and check if similar projects are happening in neighbouring countries.

Website: www.frameweb.org

Story Time

Have you established a virtual souk or a regular videoconference with regional training centres? Share your ideas and experiences and learn from other successes and mistakes. The International Institute for Communication and Development and infodev (the Information for Development Program) invite you to share your experiences with Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) for development, in the form of an annual ICT stories competition. You can enter the 2002 competition by writing and submitting your story through the Website: www.icid.org/stories, before 15 April, 2002.

Email: stories@icid.org

Up to the tree line

A conference on the strengths and weaknesses of local community-based management of mountain forests, will be held in Antananarivo, Madagascar from 1 to 30 May, 2002. Association des Montagnes et des Hautes-terres Malagasy

Department de Geographie Universite d’Antananarivo
BP 907
101 Madagascar

My, my moringa

You may know it as the horse radish tree, drumstick tree, ben tree, benzolive tree or Nebeda: the Moringaceae group of 14 species of which Moringa oleifera is the best known. Modern enthusiasts rediscovering Moringa call it the ‘Miracle tree’ because of its many uses. In Africa its leaves are used in medicine and in cooking, and, latterly, as dietary supplements for AIDS/HIV patients; in India its pods are preferred; its oil was used in Egypt 3,000 years ago in perfume, and in Jamaica 200 years ago in cooking. The water cleansing qualities of its dirt-gathering (coagulant) powdered seeds have been known for centuries in Sudan, India and Indonesia.

Encouraging its use and expanding its cultivation from family farms to plantation scale were the major topics of a workshop on the “Development potential for Moringa products” held in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, from 29 October to 2 November 2001. Organised by the plant resources network PROPAGE, in collaboration with CTA and four other partners, it was attended by more than 100 practitioners from public and private bodies from five continents.

A productive workshop it was too (though perhaps not a miracle) with 22 practical proposals for research on genetic improvement, intensive cultivation, uses in fruit storage, improved oil extraction and market development.

A bit of statistics

Get your fruit trees growing

Fresh tropical fruits1 are still winning places on world markets. While total fresh fruit production has risen by 4% annually since 1997, some exports of diverse fruits have grown by more than 10% annually. The bulk of these fruits (98%) are grown in developing countries and the biggest importers are the European Union (41%) and North America (33%). Nonetheless, the traded amount is only a fraction of the total production; less than 10% of the fresh fruits are shipped abroad.

More than 40% of fresh fruits exports originate from Latin America and the Caribbean. Africa, in particular Côte d’Ivoire, Cameroon, Ghana, Kenya and South Africa, accounts for 14% of world trade.

The latest figures show that pineapple accounts for 44% of the total traded volume, followed by mangoes (27%), avocados (12%) and papayas (7%).

The increase in demand is mainly thanks to the growing familiarity of consumers with tropical fruits, their taste, nutritional value and cooking qualities. Other fruits like rambutan, lychee, carambola, passion fruit and guava are no longer strangers on foreign markets either. The major hurdles for exporters to overcome are strict regulations and standards imposed by the importers, including sanitary, phytosanitary and logistical marketing requirements.

Getting the numbers right

Statistics. You cannot get very far in today’s world without statistics, but to get anywhere you have to be sure they are available, accessible and reliable. Two regional workshops have recently addressed the specific needs of researchers in agricultural institutions in terms of the collection, processing and analysis of statistics. In April 2001, 17 researchers from seven francophone countries in West and Central Africa attended a week’s course in Cotonou, Benin, whilst 19 East African researchers from seven countries, came together in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, in August 2001.

These workshops are part of a long-term CTA programme to strengthen institutional skills in biometrics (the statistical analysis of biological data) in ACP countries, a process started with a study and a workshop in the mid-1990’s.

Hohenheim, 1996: Strengthening biometry and statistics in agricultural research.

ISBN 92 9081 1676
CTA number 850. 20 credit points

1 excluding bananas
A pineapple a day

Could it be a fairy tale? Pineapples that are good for everybody, farmers, traders and consumers alike? Perhaps not. In 1999, around 170 Ghanaian pineapple growers organised themselves with the prime objective of getting a better price for their pineapples. With support from the World Bank, the farmers established a consortium called Farmapine, which consists of five producers’ associations, who own 80% of Farmapine, and two exporting companies, who own the remaining 20% of the shares. Farmapine provides its shareholders with credit, inputs and advice on cultivation, hygiene and market information. An extra advantage for the farmers is not only higher prices, but prompt payment, two weeks after delivery to Farmapine. This is much more reliable than when they delivered to individual traders and payments were made much later or even not at all.

Farmapine also operates a warehouse, for packing and shipping. The two participating trading companies were chosen for their experience in exporting to the European Union (Ghana’s major market) and their ability to comply with a jungle of regulations concerning uses of chemicals, labour standards, freshness, hygiene, storage and transport.

From a modest 9,000 t in 1992, exports to Europe in 2000 exceeded 35,000 t of pineapples. Of this, more than 12% (or 4,000 t) was exported by Farmapine.

Tanzanian sisal back off the ropes

Sisal has many uses. Future issues of Spore will perhaps contain sisal pulp. It is one of the two natural fibres sanctioned by the coffee trade for use as coffee bags (along with jute) and in the USA lift cables must by law contain a sisal core. More common uses are in mats, carpets and ropes.

Of late, competition from artificial fibres, plastics and cheap jute bags has been severe, causing a steady decline in price and output. Recently, however, Tanzania - once the world’s leading producer - launched a set of measures to revamp the sector.

After a steady decline from the record production level of 230,000 t in 1963, the country now produces only 20,000 t annually and lags behind Brazil, China and Mexico. Tanzania’s production also suffered from a lack of investment in agriculture and infrastructure. All the same, the sisal sector generates US$ 17 million total earnings per year and employs 90,000 workers. This might all change. The Tanzania Sisal Board, comprising government and private sector bodies, wants to raise production to 50,000 t by 2005 by raising efficiency, tapping into niche markets and emphasising its comparative advantage of superior quality to that of other producing countries. Niche markets include increasing demand for degradable wrapping material, sisal pulp in special papers, such as ultra lightweight printing, currencies, cigarette tubes, tea bags and specialised filters, and for the larger market of strengthening recycled paper. The more often paper is recycled, the weaker it gets. To restore its strength, wood pulp is added but sisal pulp, with its higher fibre content could be a good alternative if the price were more competitive and stable quality were guaranteed.

In recent years the less productive public estates in Tanzania, covering 70% of the land under sisal but only producing 25% of the country’s total, have all been sold to private companies. An extensive market study by Hurter Consult has confirmed the possibilities for Tanzanian sisal for both niche and commodity paper markets.

IPM and Organic courses

- The International Agricultural Centre is offering a course on Development of IPM Programmes (12 June - 9 June 2002) and parallel courses on the Role of Pesticides in IPM, and Organic Farming: Principles and Applications, from 10 to 22 June 2002.
- IAC, PO Box 88, 6700 AB Wageningen, The Netherlands
Fax: +31 317 495395
Email: training@iac.agr.nl
Website: www.iac.wageningen-ur.nl

- Two major mergers have recently been concluded in international agricultural research. The International Board for Soil Research and Management (IBSRAM) and the International Water Management Institute (IWMI) now share headquarters at IWMI’s current office in Colombo, Sri Lanka, but keep their separate names.

In the Netherlands, the Agricultural Research Council (DLO), the International Agricultural Centre (IAC), Wageningen Agricultural University and the International Institute for Land Reclamation (ILR) and others have completed their merger as the Wageningen University and Research Centre (Wageningen UR).

In it together

B2B (bull-to-bull) - A bull in Baringo district, Kenya, has taught other cattle to eat cactus (Opuntia megacantha) as fodder, after the thorns have been burnt off. According to a report from the International Development Research Centre, two years of drought had created a severe scarcity of cattle fodder when the staff of the local NGO Rehabilitation of Arid Environments heard about a cactus-eating bull in the area. They brought up the animal and had him eat cactus in front of some 150 cattle of different herds.

In brief

- The Lord of the rings
- The Impact of IPM and Organic courses
- Two major mergers have recently been concluded in international agricultural research.
- The International Agricultural Centre is offering courses on Development of IPM Programmes (12 June - 9 June 2002) and parallel courses on the Role of Pesticides in IPM, and Organic Farming: Principles and Applications, from 10 to 22 June 2002.
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Setting up an agricultural market information service

Know where you’re going

The road to a sustainable agricultural market information service (AMIS) is not necessarily very long but it is full of many steps. It is also full of many temptations which can cause its collapse. Experience in establishing and running an AMIS is comparatively limited. Most AMISs have been launched, usually in a hurry (see the article Mr Two Percent in this Spore, in the last two decades. What are the issues to be considered before making any plans?

There are several definitions of an AMIS; the safest and surest came from the FAO in 1995: “a service, usually operated by the public sector [that has changed in the last six years], which involves the collection of information on prices and, in some cases, on quantities of widely traded agricultural products from rural markets and wholesale and retail markets. It equally involves the dissemination of this information on a timely and regular basis through various media to farmers, traders, government officials, policymakers and others, including consumers.”

A lot of people may come to depend on an effective AMIS. Primarily, it facilitates fair trade and competition for farmers, by improving their bargaining power and lowering transaction costs. By reducing risks and expanding access to information it encourages innovation by farmers (in changing cropping patterns, for example). It can empower the small trader and consumer. It can also provide key data to policy makers on how markets are functioning, and provide timely data for monitoring food security situations.

The widest spread of information available on AMIS is on the Agricultural Market Information Virtual Library, www.aec.msu.edu/agecon/fs2/market_info.htm. This gives access to a fine set of documents, and selected Websites presented by region (including Africa, from Mali to Mozambique), by commodity, on market analysis and on e-commerce. The Library is run by J-C Le Vallée, Department of Agricultural Economics, Department of Economics, Michigan State University, East Lansing, Michigan 48824, USA. Email: levallee@msu.edu. The Department’s Working paper number 64, Market Information Sources Available Through the Internet: Daily to Yearly Market and Out-turns – some of the skills of each of them are needed in an AMIS. A few rules to follow:

Know the products and markets: at the outset, it is important to restrict the range of crops and produce covered to those traded in major markets in the country. Each additional commodity means more data collection and processing, and more communication. It may be far better to cover only six crops and 75% of the market, than twenty-six crops and 90%! Similarly, keep your horizons low: cover the local regions first before trying to cover the national market, let alone the markets of neighbouring countries or even other continents.

Just as AGS Bulletin 125. Another publication Understanding and Using Market Information is on the same website and is available in print form from: Marketing and Rural Finance Service, Agricultural Support Systems Division, FAO, Viale delle Terme di Caracalla, 00100 Rome, Italy. As AGS Bulletin 125. Another publication Understanding and Using Market Information is on the same website and is available in print form from: Marketing and Rural Finance Service, Agricultural Support Systems Division, FAO, Viale delle Terme di Caracalla, 00100 Rome, Italy. Fax: +39 06 5705 6850/4961.
The food processor's guide

It's quite a recipe. Take a growth sector, add ten enthusiastic practitioners mainly from ACP countries, give them time and space to work together, let them write up what they know best, add a few herbs of grammar and some spices of style, let the juices do their work as they say, and you will soon have a sturdy and practical guide to, in this case, food processing.

And have this guide you really should, if, like many others, you have selected food processing as a sector with almost endless opportunities for generating income using locally available resources. Or you may work in a support role, in an advisory service or finance institution.

This book will not tell you how to store dairy products, package sun-dried fruits, track down hand-operated canning plants, think through recruitment or design a poster. (Later volumes will deal with specific products and operations; the first two in preparation cover milling and baking, and the processing of fish, meat and dairy products; others will follow.) Instead, this book will help you deal with such topics, but only if you genuinely want to know, whether from your backyard worktable with six co-workers or your bottling unit with sixty employees.

Apart from a chapter full of nutritional data and explanations of food poisoning, bacteria, storage techniques and the effects of heat, moisture, air, light and acidity (for example, split fruit juice can erode a concrete floor), it is more about ‘process’ than processing. It explains feasibility studies; dealing with suppliers, retailers and customers; setting up production; laws covering hygiene, labour and labelling; managing the business; customer care; and quality control. Probably the only notable omission is relationships with trade unions, since this sector is one of the most unionised in ACP countries.

The book presents a fine set of conventional wisdoms: the chapters on finance and organisation, for example, could have come from any standard textbook on enterprise development. Its user-friendliness even includes a feedback form which many readers will no doubt return to share experiences and improve the resources lists for future editions.

Two aspects make it outstanding. First, the clarity of presentation and text, despite the editors' lavish use of the passive tense (normally a no-go area, according to the manuals about writing manuals) and excesses in slapping the label ‘case study’ on what are often just calculations or home truths. That's labelling, they might say. Secondly, as well as the ‘Tips for success’ which kick off each chapter, it's the little gems of caution that make the difference. Here are three:

Avoid hiring unsupervised students to do market research; think twice and twice again about cutting out the middleman; 50% of business failures come through hiccups in the distribution chain. And best of all: you have many customers, but it is the consumer who decides if your products will sell. This one will. Order it now, it will help you sell your products like hot cakes.

Setting up and running a small food business. Opportunities in food processing.
Edited by P J Fellows and B Axtell.
ISBN 92 9081 246X
CTA number 1041. 40 credit points.

All around seeds

For ages, farmers have developed and produced their own seeds and exchanged them with neighbours and this is still common practice. Somewhere in history, commercial companies emerged to produce and trade seeds and governments started to play a role in plant breeding, seed production and distribution too. The contemporary issues of intellectual property rights, biotechnology, biodiversity and farmers’ access to seeds, all entered the arena.

In seed provision, Robert Tripp analyses these developments in terms of each key player, traditional suppliers, commercial enterprises, government, aid agencies and seed projects. Each gets a chapter full of realistic and critical treatment and shows the route towards desirable management of agricultural development. The author takes you by the hand through all the controversies of seed supply. Even if you have a vast appetite for grasping the complexities of seed supply, this well-written and structured book will sate you.

Seed Provision & Agricultural Development
ISBN 0 85255 420 6
GBP 14.95 • e 24.30
James Currey Publishers
73 Botley Road
Oxford OX2 0BS, United Kingdom
Fax: +44 1865 24 64 54
Email: orders@plymbridge.com

© SPORE 96 • PAGE 11

• Publications

Farming in the Pacific

A set of papers releasing a wealth of information on traditional farming systems in the South Pacific has emerged from the workshop organised by the Institute for Research, Extension and Training in Agriculture (IRETA) and supported by CTA in October 1999.

ISBN 982 175 136 9
US$ 20 • e 22.30
For IRETA address see below.

The chickens and pigs of the Pacific

A state-of-the-art manual on the pigs and chickens industries of five Pacific countries: Fiji, Tonga, Solomon Islands, Samoa and Vanuatu.

The Monogastric Livestock Industry in the South Pacific Region. Status, Production Systems and Constraints
By A O Ajuoyi and M Umar.
ISBN 982 175 149 0
US$ 20 • e 22.30
IRETA, Apia
Psipula Campus
Private Mail Bag
SAMOA
Fax: +685 22347
Email: uspireta@samoa.usp.ac.fj

What are the odds?

A report of a specialist workshop on the role of statistics in planning and analysing agricultural experiments in the South Pacific, held on Samoa, from 28 August to 1 September 2000, organised by IRETA, with support from CTA.

Statistical methods for Agricultural Experiments
By D Hunter
ISBN 982 175 149 0
US$ 20 • e 22.30
IRETA, Apia
Psipula Campus
Private Mail Bag
SAMOA
Fax: +685 22347
Email: uspireta@samoa.usp.ac.fj

Water works

A good review and overview of the prospects of various irrigation technologies for smallholder farmers.

Smallholder irrigation technology: Prospects for sub-Saharan Africa
By M. Kaye
ISBN 92 5 104 591 1
US$12 • e 13.40
FAO Sales and Marketing Group
Viale delle Terme di Caracalla
00100 Rome, Italy
Fax: +39 06 57 03 33 60
Email: publications-sales@fao.org
Count your chickens after they are hatched!

No one needs to be told about the purpose of a home garden but some practical advice about the do’s and don’ts in your garden is always handy. Improving nutrition through home gardening is certainly not the first of its kind, but it is a sound and comprehensive training package designed for community development and extension workers in Africa. Its information sheets and illustrations can be used in training sessions with people who want to establish a personal or communal garden.

The manual also integrates food production and nutritional aspects to assist people in improving the quality of the food production in their gardens. It not only shows how, when and where to grow plants that are particularly nutritious, but also gives recipes for nutritious dishes, such as for weaning or for young children.

Learning the hard way

It is commonly accepted nowadays that participation, bottom-up approaches and the exchange of knowledge are keys to the success of development programmes. How to make them work in practice is a completely different kettle of fish. As usual, actions speak louder than words.

New ways of developing agricultural technologies is a good example of such actions. It is the account of an integrated pest management programme on the islands of Zanzibar that started as a top-down programme but, through living and learning, changed its approach to a participatory one. It adopted and applied concepts like on-farm experimental learning and Farmer Field Schools.

Descriptions of sites-specific situations on the islands of Pemba and Unguja illustrate the changes that took place. The book concludes, rather naturally, that participatory approaches can indeed work, but it is far more interesting to read how this happened.

Nutritious dishes from the garden

No one needs to be told about the purpose of a home garden but some practical advice about the do’s and don’ts in your garden is always handy. Improving nutrition through home gardening is certainly not the first of its kind, but it is a sound and comprehensive training package designed for community development and extension workers in Africa. Its information sheets and illustrations can be used in training sessions with people who want to establish a personal or communal garden.

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Improving nutrition through home gardening. A training package for preparing field workers in Africa P.O. 2001. 282 pp. ISBN 9251043884 USD 22 • e 24.55 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

New ways of developing agricultural technologies: the Zanzibar experience with participatory Integrated Pest Management

By G C A Bruin & F Meerman, co-publication Wageningen University and Research Centre and CTA. 2001. 167 pp. ISBN 90 6754 624 0 CTA number 1047. 20 credit points
Ground for new thoughts

Pius Ngeze argues that practical guides on soybean and sweet potatoes, as well as soil fertility, have long been sceptical of the importance of these crops. Ian Scoones, however, in his latest book, Dynamics and Diversity, argues that African soils, with their volcanic origins, are highly fertile and that soil processes can be released through volcanic activity. This is why he once seemed to share - with volcanic origins are highly fertile; soil processes releasing nutrients can proceed much faster under certain regimes of temperature and moisture, varying depending on soil conditions. The book includes detailed field studies with farmers in Ethiopia, Mali, and Zimbabwe, showing that the cropping strategies and soil degradation and fertility issues, which all illustrate a rich diversity.

Scoones stresses that these dynamics and diversity which should be the starting point for policy makers, extension workers, and scientists in developing new ways of thinking about farming in Africa.

Dynamics and Diversity: Soil Fertility and Farming Livelihoods in Africa
Edited by I Scoones, Earthscan - International Institute for Environment and Development (IED) and Institute of Development Studies, Sussex (IDS).
2001. 244 pp. ISBN 1 85383 829 9
GBP 27.55
Earthscan Publications Ltd
120 Pentonville Road
London N1 9JN, UK
Fax: +44 20 7278 1142
Email: earthinfo@earthscan.co.uk

You can’t live without them

Garlic, leek, and onion may never be staple foods but countless dishes around the world would simply not be the same without them. These three plants are such obvious ingredients in a diet that they are often overlooked in agricultural handbooks. That is pity, since all manner of considerations are involved in the cultivation of these members of the onion family (Alliaceae). After his earlier, similarly practical guides on soya bean and sweet potatoes, Pius Ngeze has given us a splendid step-by-step manual to cultivate these three crops. The book addresses climate and soil fertility requirements and describes the best ways to sow, transplant, weed, and harvest. The book is also a large section on major diseases and pests.

Learn how to grow onions, garlic and leeks.
CTA number 1006. 5 credit points

Training is serious fun

Are you planning to become an agricultural extension worker or trainer or, if you are one already, would you like to refresh your knowledge or learn new tools? Learning together is a good, practical handbook for that purpose, dealing with both practice and theory. One section deals with communication and best and worst practices. Another describes the various steps to define the need, content, planning, and implementation of training. Links with agriculture and related issues cover participation, gender issues, local knowledge and cultural aspects. Taking these into account will heighten the impact of your training. Finally, while practical examples, tools, role-plays can be found throughout the entire book, there is also a concluding section dedicated to making your own materials. It includes making puppets, producing posters, ways to discuss animal anatomy and games for forming and warning up groups.

Learning together: The agricultural worker's participatory sourcebook
CTA number 1045. 80 credit points

How to obtain these publications

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

If you are not eligible for a free subscription to the PDS, or if you need publications beyond your free credit allocation, you may buy publications on CTA’s list from our commercial distributor: Triops, Hinderburgstrasse 33, D-64295 Darmstadt, Germany. Fax: +49 6151 334 048. Email: triops@net-library.de; Website: www.net-library.de

Time to beat the bugs...

A video on the sterile insect technique - no offspring, no insect pest reproduction - intended as a teaching aid for college and university courses. The accompanying booklet can be freely copied and used as lecture notes.

The sterile insect technique: an environmentally-friendly method of insect pest suppression and eradication
Video, by the Animal Production & Health Section of the joint FAO/IAEA Division. 28.5 minutes, in PAL, NTSC and SECAM and available for free to course organisers and lecturers in ACP countries. Apply to the section of the joint FAO/IAEA Division below.

...on fruits...

This account of research efforts to improve and implement the area-wide control of fruit flies as a way of minimising the use of pesticides and protecting the environment, is based on an FAO/IAEA International Conference, and the Fifth International Symposium on Fruit Flies of Economic Importance, both held in June 1998 in Penang.

Area-wide control of fruit flies and other insect pests
Edited by K-H Tan, School of Biological Sciences, Universiti Sains Malaya, Penang, Malaysia. 2000. 782 pp. ISBN 963 861 195 6
A limited number of copies are available for readers in ACP countries. Apply to the joint FAO/IAEA Division below.

...and livestock


Animal trypanosomosis: vector and disease control using nuclear techniques.
Published by Backhuys Publishers, Leiden, Netherlands, 1999. 311 pp. ISBN 90 5782 048 X
A limited number of copies are available for free distribution to those affected countries. Apply to: Insect Pest Control Section Joint FAO/IAEA Division
P O Box 100
A-1400 Vienna, Austria
Fax: +43 1 26 007
Email: official.mail@iaea.org

For healthier livestock

Two new practical issues in FAO’s new Animal Health Series.

Manual on the preparation of African swine fever contingency plans
US$ 20 • £ 22.60
Manual on procedures for disease eradication by stamping out
US$ 22 • £ 25.90
For FAO’s address see page 11.

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Connecting and engaging

A major gain from the fourth Consultative Expert Meeting of CTA’s Observatory on ICTs (information and communication technologies), held in May 2001 (see Spore 94), is the information made available about ‘wireless’ communication. The report of the meeting includes a wealth of clear detail. It discusses the applications of new technologies, such as mobile telephones and satellites in various orbits above the Earth. It discusses the ‘bandwidth’ problems which determine the quantities of information that can be exchanged through the Internet, and it explains how data broadcasting allows documents to be transmitted to local receiver radios linked to a computer. Who knows, maybe one day soon Spore may be ‘broadcast’ to subscribers? This Wireless Working Document can help you understand a lot of options and is a solid introduction to a complex topic.

At the other end of the information spectrum, far away from the issues of delivering data, is the question of persuasion. How do you persuade someone to use particular information, to go and look for it and to assess its value? The new Working Document on ‘Evaluating information’ tries a special approach. It is essentially an introductory manual for project managers. It recognises that evaluation can be threatening, and so it is written in a friendly and familiar style, in the form of a letter to ‘you’. Its goal is to provide the project manager with a series of guidelines, checklists and practical suggestions for carrying out an evaluation of an information project. There is nothing new in its content, but its novel way of talking with the reader is a good way to get evaluation accepted as part of the family, instead of as a stranger to be feared. The author, Byron Mook, has wide experience of evaluation in agricultural research.

Mailbox

As well as replying to the Spore reader survey, don’t forget to drop a note to the Spore mailbox. You’ll be surprised who you meet there! Write in, right now.

Save cash with termite soil

Erik Petersen of ASAL Consultants in Kibwezi, Kenya, has been prompted to exchange experience with Professor Gupta of the Centre for Alternative Agricultural Media in India, whose use of termite soil as a cleansing agent was described in Spore 94. He reports that “we have used termite soil to replace 80% of the cement for building water tanks in Kenya and Zambia. This has given us a great cost reduction”.

No more finger-tip shelling!

Benjamin Dembele, President of the Urban Group for Poultry and Farm Development in Bonoua, Côte d’Ivoire, tells us “how our fifteen farms get together to get and discuss Spore. When we go back to town, we run a reading club to reach out to more entrepreneurs. We are all convinced that Spore is a communication tool for rural communities. We could even say that Spore means to us what the Internet means to developed countries. In fact, Spore is our Internet, an essential tool. And, we want to be kept up to date with everything going on in agriculture, so Spore should consider setting up a radio station, with no advertising.”

We are hearing you loud and clear, Mr Dembele. Maybe one day you will be on the radio too! Perhaps the local FM station in Mpraeso, north-west of Accra in neighbouring Ghana, cannot be received in Bonoua. That’s a shame because Samuel K Allotey, who works with the Ministry of Food and Agriculture there, broadcasts an extension show. “Although I am not a well-trained radio presenter, your information in Spore has helped me a lot in the presentation of agricultural programmes on the station. My listeners have shown much interest and acknowledged that the programme is actually serving its result-oriented purpose.”

Do you broadcast, or listen to, radio programmes which use material from Spore? Please write in and tell us.

Sorrel for sale

Samuel Taryanouba, of the Groupement de Producteurs de Karkandji (GPX, BP 97, Kouma, Chad) says the group “comprises twenty farmers of sorrel (oseille de Guinée in French, karkandji in Arabic, bisap in Wolof and agra in Jamaica). We have agreed to put half our earnings from selling sorrel into a local savings and credit fund for farmers to invest in farm improvements. We grow it organically, and dry the leaves in the sun. Please announce in Spore that we are ready for customers from afar.”
Back home to Mauritius!

After no less than seventeen years of service with CTA Mohun Narain, who in recent years has led CTA’s Information Policies and Partnerships Department, is set to enjoy his retirement on his island home of Mauritius. Mohun, whose quiet diplomacy and sharp mind will be missed at CTA, is looking forward to an active retirement and expects to maintain his involvement with agricultural development. We wish him and his family good health and every success!

Speaking to Spore, Mr Narain explained how new ICTs have led to a rethinking of the basic elements of agricultural extension since CTA was established, and how he had enjoyed working in these new areas. But it has been his work in the Pacific and in the Caribbean that has given him the most satisfaction, confirming our suspicions that he is an islander at heart.

Mohun, whose quiet diplomacy and sharp mind will be missed at CTA, is looking forward to an active retirement and expects to maintain his involvement with agricultural development. We wish him and his family good health and every success!

Do not disparage!

- Writing from Umberleigh in Devon, England, Trevor Wilson takes us firmly to task and introduces a useful distinction between judgement and implementation. “Unfortunately some of your authors disparage things about which they clearly know nothing. I refer, in particular, to the remark in the lead article “Can we all be policy makers?” of Spore 93 (June 2001) about “ill-judged and ill-fated policies such as the groundnut scheme in the East Africa of the 1940’s ... The scheme can hardly be considered to have been a “policy” matter in the modern sense. It was not ill-judged although it was initially ill-executed mainly because agriculture cannot be managed like a military operation.” After listing the various benefits reaped from the scheme such as infrastructural improvements which led to diversified production, improved cash earnings and food security, Mr Wilson concludes: “It is easy to disparage early attempts at development and emphasise the negative aspects. It is more honest, however, to look for the benefits and emphasise the positive ones. An objective benefit-cost analysis of the totality of the groundnut scheme would certainly show very high economic rates of return.”

Thanks, Tshepo!

- Álvaro Soares de Melo, formerly responsible for Spore’s Portuguese-language sister publication Esporo, has some words of thanks for Ms Tshepo Khumbane of South Africa and her viewpoint “Subsistence lives” in Spore 95/Esporo 41. “Congratulations for your courage in defending subsistence agriculture against the economics-driven trend of globalisation. You are not alone in this struggle. In fact, we cannot even think about food security and sustainable development in Africa if we undervalue this most representative sector of agriculture.”

Spore six days a week!

- The Cooperative Agricultural Centre of Benin, in Houêgbo, Benin, tells us that Spore, and other publications ordered from CTA, have been given pride of place in their information centre. “Open six days a week, the centre runs a special Reading Club for farmers’ groups and village associations, who have used Spore’s practical information on small-scale food processing, animal health and new technologies as well as making new contacts. It has been planning a Best Readers’ Group competition for the end of 2001.”

You’re welcome to send us details of all the groups’ uses of Spore, to be included in the Uses of Spore survey mentioned on these pages.

Reader survey update

Have you sent in your response to the reader survey of How You Use Spore, which was introduced in the Between Us section of Spore 95? As we go to press with Spore 96, we have already received many replies by mail, email and the special form on the CTA Website. Whichever way you choose to send us your response, we look forward to receiving it soon – and before 1 February 2002 in any case.

Check your issue of Spore 95 for more details, or fill in the form on www.agric-ta.org/u/seeOSpore.htm. If you prefer, we can send you a form by fax (fax us on +31 317 460 067) or send us an email with the subject ‘form’, to usesofspore@spore-magazine.org.

It will take you just a few minutes, so if you can, do it now.

Spore is a bi-monthly publication providing information on agricultural development for ACP countries. Spore is available free-of-charge to relevant organisations and individuals in ACP and EU countries. Subscriptions may also be purchased from Triops (see page 13).

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Poverty eradication

From dream to reality: hope in the Sahel

The World Food Summit held in Rome in November 1996 confirmed that access to food and the availability of food was still a major challenge. Soon, a little later than originally planned, the Summit’s achievements will be reviewed, more than five years after the event. Now, as in 1996, there are some hopeful trends against a background of massive challenges.

The number of people in the world categorised as genuinely undernourished has decreased from 920 million in the early 1970s to 840 million in the mid 1990s, but still one in five inhabitants in developing countries, many of whom are in ACP countries, are still in need.

The nine Sahelian countries which comprise the Inter-State Permanent Committee for the Struggle against Drought in the Sahel (known as CILSS, formed from its French name Comité Permanent Inter-États pour la Lutte contre la Sécheresse au Sahel) are a representative sample of this panorama. With a total surface of about five million km², they have a total population of 54 million, with a growth rate approaching 2.8%. One-third of the population lives in urban areas. Almost three-quarters of the countries’ overall area has an annual rainfall below 300 mm, but it is home to 10% of the population, who live mainly as pastoralists. Many more people – 80% in all - have made their homes in areas where rainfall ranging between 300 mm and 1,200 mm makes dry-land agriculture possible. However, for almost three decades, the Sahel area has suffered from a prolonged drought with only intermittent relief. Sahelian countries are amongst the poorest in the world.

The soils are generally shallow and poor in nutrients; the vegetation is a savannah with annual grasses. Water resources are generally scarce, despite some permanent rivers that allow some irrigated crops. Some of these rivers also cross the territories of other countries in West Africa. Cattle breeding plays an important role in the economy in such countries as Niger, Mali or Burkina Faso, where it represents around 15% of the Gross Domestic Product.

Drought and desertification are the main obstacles to development with two black shadows always present, hunger and poverty.

These countries recognised early on in their current drawn-out crisis that, because of their relative smallness, they had developed a common political will. That is reflected in the creation of the CILSS, which was set up in 1974. Since that time it has sought to establish common strategies and development policies.

Tough policy measures

Together, these global objectives form a mighty raft to carry many hopes, but it also carries many monumental preoccupations which, uncomfortable as they may be, need to be addressed. Let us examine some of them.

First of all, it has to be said that the price policies for export trades, which are determined by the industrialised countries, are putting at risk commercial exchanges between the CILSS member states. Having no access to more developed technologies, they cannot reach the scales of productivity reached in industrialised countries or compete with their prices. How can they respond to such competition in the global marketplace? Surely, this requires protective mechanisms for local production which will draw out its full potential and stimulate regular growth in local and regional markets.

Secondly, the effective decentralisation of power is indispensable for political stability. It allows decision-making by local communities, who must be empowered to strengthen themselves and to shape their destiny. In this, central bodies will have to play the role of planning agents, regulators and coordinators in the allocation of available resources.

The consolidation of local production requires a fundamental and active integration into local productive and cultural structures and systems. Experience has shown that the imposition of external solutions is usually a path for disappointment, or even disaster. Central in this is the way in which external methods often have a negative impact on family structures, and on the all-important role of women. Not only are their functions in the production system put at risk, or even removed, but their marginalisation also threatens their irrepressible task of transmitting cultural values to the next generation.

Another essential factor is political stability between neighbour countries, and within them. The starting point must be respect of traditional structures, without imposition of Western models of democracy. Accordingly, traditional systems should be strengthened, to enable them to better evolve and adapt to new conditions.

Finally, the haemorrhage of rural exodus has to be brought under control, on the basis of integrated development programmes, where education, training, health care and support to the social structures of local communities are common parts of a common strategy.

The world has by now accumulated sufficient experience and wisdom, over so many years, to know that if these premises are not taken into consideration, then we shall all be spectators, or even players, in the collapse of hope and its replacement by a failure of unimaginable proportions.

“External solutions often have a negative impact on family structures and on the role of women.”

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