Health and agriculture
Poor health, poor agriculture

Growing our food is often bad for our health, just as poor health hampers us in growing our food. And defeating diseases such as malaria can clash with agricultural practice. In the tail of a challenge, the sting of a dilemma.

We can feel it each time a fever aches its way through our bodies. We can feel what we know: diseases such as malaria have a direct and negative impact on many aspects of our lives - including agricultural production. According to the World Health Organisation, the single disease of malaria reduces the gross national product of countries in sub-Saharan Africa by more than 1%, rising to as much as 2-6% in Kenya or 1-5% in Nigeria.

Premature death and spells of illness from infectious diseases cut down tomorrow’s and today’s labour force. It is no wonder, then, that the re-emergence of certain infectious diseases brings not only a shudder to the body of the victim, but also to the body politic, and the body economic, of a nation. There are signs of frightening levels of expansion of diseases that seemed to be getting under control.

The question now is: how much further will they dig into an agricultural sector that is already prey to under-nourishment in terms of income and input and to the ill-health of its people?

The breeding grounds for disease are changing. In Ghana, for example, the massive lakes created by dams in the Volta basin have had the effect of increasing the incidence of bilharzias: among school-age children, it rose from 5% in the pre-dam era to more than 90% afterwards. This was the result of increasing still or slow waters, which encourage the growth of...
Poor health, poor agriculture

gaining ground in many countries as the number one killer of adults, including many HIV sufferers. Of special relevance to agriculture is malaria, and its vector, or carrier, the mosquito, guilty of two million deaths in Africa alone each year.

Weakness and strength

The overall effect of these and other communicable diseases, such as dengue fever, or the yellow fever recently established in eastern Africa, is not only the tragedy of lives lost early, but also the debilitating effect on a nation’s health and welfare of a debilitated youth, and a debilitated labour force. Since communicable diseases are rife in developing countries (developed ones are more prone to death from lifestyle illnesses, such as cancer and cardiovascular disease), it is agriculture which suffers the most. In the field, or the workshop, the energy and concentration of a person is sapped by illness. Accidents are more frequent. A weakened body is further worn down by the strain of ill-designed equipment and the misuse of chemicals in pesticides and processing. Some diseases, such as malaria, are often most prevalent at harvest time, and play havoc with the work force.

The idyllic picture that some urbanites have of rural life is not the same one we see through the mist of pain and sweat, and our exposure to physical, chemical and above all biological hazards. In the field, the harvest store and the fish pond, we stand unprotected from the many dangers, literally bugs and bacteria, that form what the experts call “microbiological production systems” – breeding grounds in short.

Opportunities and threats

Many agricultural practices have the effect of encouraging breeding grounds for disease vectors causing a real clash between the interests of food producers and health. The large-scale dams built for water and energy supply and the small dams and fish ponds currently favoured for irrigation and protein production are both homes to insect larvae and other vectors of diseases. Similarly, the avoidance of pesticides in ‘sound agricultural practice’ has encouraged more insect populations, as has the less politically correct practice of deforestation. Even health-and-hygiene and commercial advances in packaging have their knock-on effects on health. Cleaner food, yes, but the packaging, when discarded, adds to the breeding opportunities for insects.

The clash of interests is most vivid in the case of DDT (dichloro diphenyl trichloroethane) chemicals. Their use in breaking the breeding cycle of malarial mosquitoes is unquestioned, just as their toxic nature for both animals and humans. The United States, for example, banned their use in 1972, and yet did not insist on a total global ban while negotiating, in 2001, the treaty to withdraw all persistent organic pollutants such as DDT. At the same time, negotiations were underway in the World Health Organisation for a new ‘Roll Back Malaria’ campaign which relies in part on continuing to allow the use of DDTs in developing countries to eradicate malaria. Here the world community is caught on the horns of dilemma, and forced to constantly choose for the other, lesser evil.

Of such irresolvable clashes are made the endless agonies of the rural poor, for they will suffer one way or the other, as they always do (they already spend 40% of scarce disposable income on malaria ‘cures’), and, less pitifully, the headaches of policy-makers. It seems that the only real policy in achieving co-existence between the two sectors is to apply the art of compromise, not always the most obvious skill of novice policy-makers.
Ecotourism

The battle for nature lovers

Ecotourism is booming. A growing number of the world’s tourist hordes now seek leisure and diversion in nature, in solidarity with local people and without snapping a twig. If you and the local ecology are their destination, is it all as benign as the ecotourists believe?

Paradise lost

Less than 7% of ecotourism expenditure is retained as income by the local community, 93% goes in delivering the tourist to the destination, and this is in the hands of externally-operated airlines, travel agents, transit hotel chains, and insurance and transport companies. Little room is left for people-centred initiatives. In the 1990s the highlands of Papua New Guinea became a highly popular destination, but the sector is largely run by commercial tourist operators. A similar development – with notable exceptions in Jamaica - took place throughout the Caribbean. In the Sahel and southern Africa, however, some operators have gone out of their way to involve local enterprises.

At a preparatory meeting for IYE held in late 2001 in Mozambique, government delegates stressed the need to develop the sector for a non-destructive use of nature going hand in hand with rural development. The meeting called for an urgent review of land tenure systems for communal lands since existing nature reserves were demarcated in an era when tenure rights of local communities were not recognised. Another challenge is capacity building of local communities to become real stakeholders and not be squeezed out by commercial tourist agencies, and to be empowered to keep up with changes in demand and custom; there is no sector so fickle as tourism.

A price for everything

Among the many modest success stories throughout ACP countries is the Mount Cameroon Ecotourism Organisation (Mount-CEO), established in Buea Town in 1998. It is a multi-stakeholder structure, made up of local NGOs, village communities organised in currently 9 Village Ecotourism Committees (VECs), local and provincial tourist offices, hotel managers and a climber’s union, with some support from the German agencies DED and GTZ. The programme original-
Rural radio

Winning the heart of your radio

Let the farmers speak! That was one of the key slogans of development communication in the 1980s. It did not always work out as intended, but rural and community radios have come a long way.

Radio used to talk mainly to the urban elite, in the days when national broadcasting companies were set up in the post-independence days of the 1960s. Programmes for listeners in agricultural areas were restricted to homilies to persuade the “rural masses to modernise themselves” and to advice on how to improve the yields of cash crops such as cotton, groundnuts and coffee. These broadcasts were listened to collectively by villagers in radio listening clubs and forums, with discussions led by extension workers.

The 1970s saw a process of decentralisation, with national stations setting up regional ones. Production teams with outside broadcast equipment used to go to the field, and the fields, to interview farmers. Thus was born the notion of rural radio. As the number of rural radio stations increased, they grew closer to their audience, and their programmes became more and more varied. Their programmes were meshed into the schedules of national stations, and sometimes they had their own transmitters.

It was in the early 1980s that the real change came, with the emergence of the first community radio stations; they focused on the needs of local communities and were operated by them. Then, a decade later, the airwaves opened up following the wave of democratisation of political structures in many African countries and community and association radio stations jostled for airspace with national stations.

**FM mania**

The first ‘independent’ radio stations took root in the major urban centres of Burkina Faso, Mali, Madagascar and South Africa, for example. It was not long before these small stations were literally pointing their microphone towards rural areas. Their success was, in a word, dazzling. The fact they broadcast in the language of the local audience, added to the intense thirst for freedom of expression after years of propaganda-style radio, saw to that.

Behind the microphone, though, remained a raft of problems. There was inadequate training for presenters, producers and technical staff. Production facilities were mediocre, transmitter breakdowns frequent, and financial means limited. With a lack of experience and resources, most of these small stations opted to broadcast music most of the time. Listeners, however, were more and more demanding, in terms of programme content, and the local stations sought to respond to this by forming networks and associations to pool resources.

At the same time, training facilities for rural radio stations were being established by such institutions as the Inter-African Centre for Rural Radio Studies (CIERRO) in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, and by several development partners keen to help the sector grow professionally.

Their support came principally in the form of programme banks, or collections, of recorded programme segments about development issues which could be inserted into the programmes of rural and community stations. Among the providers of such materials were CTA, Panos Institute, the Developing Country Farm Radio Network, Syfia and Radio Nederland.

**Laboratory of local democracy**

“Our station listens to its listeners”, says the director of Radio Kafokan in Bougouni in the cotton growing area of Mali. “We give top priority to their concerns, even to the extent of their using air-time to insult the cotton company, CM D.T. Then we play the recording of those programmes to the CM D.T management and get them to respond.”

**Announcements by radio**

“The radio helped us solve a real problem we’d been having in the village. When someone died, it was almost impossible to get in touch and tell relatives, living in villages which are maybe 30 to 40 kilometres away, so that they could come to the funeral. We had to hire a bicycle or a horse to make the journey in person. If we couldn’t do this and so couldn’t tell people in time, it had serious consequences for relationships between people in the villages, sometimes even leading to splits between families. Now that we have Radio Cesiri, we just pay 500 francs (0.76 €) and everyone gets the news. Now no-one can be upset, thank God.”

- a listener to Radio Cesiri in the rice-growing area of Mali

**Radio soap opera for rural development**

The weekly radio play Tembea Na Majira (Move with the times) has become a big hit on the national radio of Kenya. Produced by the information centre of the Ministry of Agriculture, in collaboration with Media Trust, a British NGO, it now has six million appreciative listeners.

Behind all the sentimental intrigues, arguments and make-ups between its characters, it is a very serious programme. All the ingredients of each episode deal with heavy subjects of great interest to rural listeners, such as dealing with maize pests, violence in marriage and malaria control – using the magic of fiction and the talent of the actors involved.

The Tembea Na Majira approach, along with many other examples of information and communication working for rural development, is featured in Information Revolutions (see Spore 94) ISBN 92 9081-2289, CTA number 1037, 40 credit points.)
Broadcasting is not easy for rural radio stations. They have fairly basic training and equipment, and they often operate in isolated villages without any public services, electricity or telephone. Despite these difficulties, they have become real laboratories for local democracy. Farmers turn to the stations to get advice, and market and weather information. Young people and women put forward their points of view. Researchers and extension agents discuss with farmers and herders. There are programmes linked to health campaigns, or civic rights issues. And the old folk, musicians and story-tellers all have their say, and play, on the area’s cultural heritage.

Where the radio landscape is still dominated by the State, rural radio is mainly used as an arm of agricultural extension. Innovation, though, seems to have the upper hand. South Africa’s networks of community radio stations, traditionally focused in the problems of the townships, are now opening up to rural communities. They are covering such ‘hot’ stories as land reform, or the use of genetically modified organisms or chemical products. Through radio programmes are having on their listeners. How can this be measured when the service of specialised institutes are beyond reach?

This issue has been the theme of a series of six training-action workshops organised by CTA from 1997 to 2001 in Burkina Faso, Madagascar, Mali and South Africa. They drew up a set of practical solutions and simple, reliable tools for quantitative and qualitative surveys of radio audiences which would enable small radio stations to know the profile, habits and preferences of their listeners and to establish a permanent dialogue with them.

Over in West Africa, Ghana’s rural radio approach is swinging away from the old structure of radio forums and towards listener participation in setting up FM community stations under the management by local associations and cooperatives. In Nigeria, the firm grip of the State on rural radio has loosened a lot, and the Institute for Media and Society, an NGO, is setting up rural community stations.

A matter of resources

There are several key areas of attention for a local radio station to deal with if it is to have any reasonable lifespan: improved production facilities; enhanced networks for training presenters, producers and technical staff; tools for audience research. This lifespan will depend essentially on the financial independence of the station, and on its ability to involve financial partners in marketing activities, whilst retaining its editorial freedom; there hangs its credibility with listeners. It will also depend on its ability to make use of ICTs in digital production and in using digital programmes delivered by satellite, the Internet, mobile phones or on CD-ROMs.

How can rural radio make the best use of these new technologies? This was an underlying theme at a workshop organised by FAO in Rome early in 2001 on “New information and communication technologies and rural radio: New content, new partners.”

“Rural radio is in fact the farmers’ Internet,” asserted Jean-Pierre Ilboudo, specialist in development communication. “It offers rural communities the surest route to information and external knowledge, in their own language, and without the barrier of reading. The challenge, then, for the heads of rural radio stations is to use the new ICTs to gather information, and then put it into a form which is appropriate to the socio-cultural context of the listeners.”

Today though the digital divide is still gaping wide in rural areas, and there are several efforts being made to bring it down to size. In Ouagadougou, the international build up a world network of community radio, together with the World Association of Community Radio (known under its French name AMARC) and the Developing Countries Farm Radio Network.

In Niger, the United Nations Development Programme and the government have set up a pilot programme for the application of information and knowledge against poverty. This entails the installation of community radio stations and information centres with Internet access in the poorest parts of the country, and all powered by solar energy. Similar initiatives can be expected in other countries soon.

It is perhaps too early to arrive at a proper evaluation of the relevance and effectiveness of all these activities. What is clear, nonetheless, is the need to avoid rushing at full speed ahead and becoming intoxicated by the power of the technology. This would only be to the detriment of what is the strength of rural radio today: their closeness to listeners, and their ability to walk in step with local communities on their road to emancipation. At their pace.

In any case, let it be quite clear to those sad souls who forecast the demise of rural radio in the 1980s that it is alive and well, in fact, better than ever... Here’s to you, rural radio!

A list of rural radio resources is available from: Spore-desk, PO Box 121, 6700 AC Wageningen, Netherlands. Email: info@spore-magazine.org Website: www.agricta.org/spore/spore97/spore97_feature.html#3

Which programme do you prefer?

Rural radio stations, like any other, need to know the impact that their programmes are having on their listeners. How can this be measured when the service of specialised institutes are beyond reach?

This issue has been the theme of a series of six training-action workshops organised by CTA from 1997 to 2001 in Burkina Faso, Madagascar, Mali and South Africa. They drew up a set of practical solutions and simple, reliable tools for quantitative and qualitative surveys of radio audiences which would enable small radio stations to know the profile, habits and preferences of their listeners and to establish a permanent dialogue with them.
Cassava’s nasty after-taste

The importance of cassava in many people's diets cannot be underestimated, nor should the effects of the sometimes fatally high levels of cyanide in cassava. One example is Konzo, a permanent paralytic condition of the legs which mainly affects children and young women in central and eastern Africa. In periods of drought, cyanide levels in cassava are higher than usual, and in periods of crisis and war, the variety of diets decreases and people rely more heavily on cassava because it requires less inputs and attention. Konzo is also endemic in some areas. In West Africa the condition TAN (tropical ataxic neuropathy) is more common. It is a sensory disease, leading to difficulties in walking, numbness, deafness and blindness.

There is no cure for Konzo but it can be avoided by reducing cyanide intake from cassava. One way is to partially substitute cassava with other crops in the diet. Improved processing is another: traditional methods such as sun drying and heap fermentation leave a lot of cyanide in the cassava flour. Introducing varieties with low cyanide contents is another possible solution; and all these methods can be combined.

How can you measure cyanide levels in cassava plants and products and thiocyanate levels in urine (see Spore 88) and thus predict Konzo? At the Australian National University Dr J Bradbury has developed simple measuring kits, available free of charge on request.

Many African cassava varieties are bitter and high in cyanide levels; this trait is also useful, in that it deters vermin. In the Pacific, where sweet varieties are grown, there is no cyanide problem.

Barbara nut is a new, healthier and tastier kind of butternut (curcurbita moschata) that no small-scale farmer should ignore. A new hybrid with high beta-carotene content and superior flavour has recently been introduced from South Africa. The nut shows a yield potential of up to 35 per cent more than the known open-pollinated selections. This can be attributed to its ability to produce butternuts over a longer period of time.

It is now becoming popular in the regional markets of Zimbabwe, Botswana, Namibia and Zambia, and has promising export opportunities outside the region. Currently, production - estimated in thousands of tonnes per year - is catching on in southern Africa, but the plant has difficulty adapting to being away from its softer, native climate.

From the consumer point of view, its popularity lies in consumer friendliness. It stores well, can be cooked in numerous ways and is easy to process, into baby packs, soups, baking and fritters. The fruit has green stripes with the typical butternut backg - grounds.
Red alternative to Malawi’s green gold

Over the past decade, sweet pepper has been promoted widely in Malawi in an attempt to diversify the country’s agricultural production. It is a good alternative to tobacco, the country’s ‘green gold’ and main foreign exchange earner for years, but whose sales are under pressure from the drop in levels of people smoking worldwide. The paprika growers – virtually all small-holders to a man – currently grow and export 1.5 million kg of paprika a year and there is still room for expansion.

Their produce is exported to regionally (Zambia, South Africa, Zimbabwe) and to the USA and Europe, notably Spain, to be used as spices or for food colouring.

To organise production, processing and export more efficiently, the Paprika Association of Malawi, together with producers, has established small farmers’ associations – 36 in all so far. With these associations in place the growers have gained the confidence of input suppliers, such as fertiliser companies, who are willing to supply them on credit terms. The associations are opening bank accounts for members’ savings, which they can use as collateral for loans. The producers’ associations also have an advantage in marketing since it is always easier to sell in bulk as a group to exporting companies. Prices for paprika vary between € 0.34 to € 1.40 per kg, according to grade. The initiative to establish the farmers’ associations impressed the Danish government into making a grant of M WK 18 million Malawi Kwachwa (€ 300,000) to strengthen them.

Sweet and hot: the lovers’ spice

In an attempt to diversify their agriculture and find niche markets to increase exports, several Pacific countries including Fiji, Samoa and Vanuatu are betting on the cultivation of ginger (Zingiber officinale). The world’s largest producers are India, Indonesia and China; the best quality of the annual world production of 250,000 t is to be found in Jamaica.

On Fiji, it is immature ginger that is most popular with both growers and processors. It is harvested in April and made into syrup for export. In 2001, 1,700 t of immature ginger was harvested and sold at an average price of around 1 US$/kg. Mature ginger is harvested from July to September and despite high demand in local and export markets, its production dwindled from 500 t in the mid-1990s to a mere 180 t. One reason that farmers prefer immature ginger is that it is relatively free from pests and diseases. Mature ginger is subject to root rot caused by nematodes and bacteria.

In Samoa, the ginger sector has targeted the organic market in New Zealand where it obtained an eco-label from the B1O-GRO certification body. Ginger was first grown in Samoa in the early 1980s; exports started a decade later, and have steadily increased from a modest 3 tonnes in 1997 to an estimated 7 tonnes in 2001.

The Pacific ginger sector still has a few tricks to learn. Has anyone thought of doing as they do in Senegal and Côte d’Ivoire and producing ginger cordial? (see ‘Clear and Simple’ on these pages). You’ll see what we mean after a glass or two. Ah, the uses of Spore!

Clear and simple

Throughout West Africa, ginger is used as a beverage. In Côte d’Ivoire for instance, fresh ginger is locally used to make a refreshing drink: gnamakudji. The roots are peeled, crushed, soaked with water and sweetened with sugar. The disadvantage is that this simple recipe keeps only for 24 hours.

At the University of Abobo, Adjamé Komia Mosso has developed a simple method to obtain a clear ginger drink with a longer shelf life.

First weigh the ginger roots, then wash the roots and crush them, un-peeled. Add either 75 ml of lemon juice or 3 g citric acid per kilo of ginger and 6 to 10 litres of clean water. Leave this mixture for two hours at room temperature and then filter the liquid through a cloth. Leave it overnight to clarify.

Add 1 kilo of sugar and heat it for 15 minutes at 75 °C. Let it cool, filter it again and transfer the liquid to airtight bottles or pots. Pasteurise the product by placing the bottles in hot water at a temperature of 70 °C for 30 minutes.

High prices attract clove producers

The Zanzibar State Trading Corporation raised their price for cloves in September 2001. Grade A cloves now fetches TSH 2,500 shillings per kilo, compared to 1,500 before. Other grades can be sold at higher prices to ZCTC, which the government appointed as the sole official buyer. The price hike is partly the result of the decision to follow the trends on the world market but is also discouraging smuggling of cloves out of the country. This year’s harvest of cloves, the island’s main foreign exchange earner, will be around 5,000 tonnes of cloves.

Pesticide watchers

Getting your horticultural produce to European markets involves more than wrapping and transporting it. One of the sets of criteria your fruits and vegetables have to meet is that they not only have to be free from pests but also have to comply with maximum levels of pesticide residues (MRLs). COLEACP, the agency that stimulates trade in horticultural produce between exporters in the ACP world and importers in the EU, launched the Programme Initiative Pesticides (PIP). It provides – online - detailed databases on MRLs in force in the European Union as well as national MRLs of EU member States. The databases include all crop – pesticide combinations in use in ACP countries.

High voices

With the International Year of the Mountains well on its way, it is essential that mountain people’s own stories can be heard loud and clear. At Website: www.mountainvoices.org, operated by Panos, you will find people’s testimonies from a dozen mountain areas around the world. For instance, thirty villagers from Ethiopia’s North Wollo district relate what they think about the shrinking carrying capacity of their farming systems and people from central Lesotho explain how the construction of the Mohale dam affected their lives and how they experienced mountain agriculture before their relocation.
Drip by precious drip

Private partners in public places: it works well

Even when it is scarce, private initiative will always find its place, just like even scarce water will always rush to fill a dip. And so it was in the late 1980s in much of sub-Saharan Africa (SSA). Where there were irrigation systems in place, State operators were pulling out fast, to stem the financial losses caused by poor performance.

Enter the private sector, in the forms of commercial and community initiatives. To the surprise of some observers, privately developed and managed irrigation schemes have now shown their viable business potential. Small-scale, informal schemes run by women's groups and farmers associations have joined the successes of larger, well-equipped irrigated farms.

This trend, together with an impressive collection of experiences from all over SSA and from as far afield as Bolivia, was examined by a regional seminar on private sector participation and irrigation expansion held in Accra, Ghana, in late October 2001 and sponsored by CTA, FAO, and Colombo Plan with water management agencies IWMI and IPT RID. More than 80 participants, from 20 countries in SSA and development partners, worked their way through issues of facilitating the entry of new operators, transferring ownership from State to private bodies, training needs and – the key issue for many – stable financial models for achieving profitability.

Getting organised

One of the most notable changes to the rural landscape of late has been the growth of farmers' organisations and associations. At the local level, they have replaced or complemented the work of extension boards and some cooperatives, with tasks ranging from advice, financial organisation and marketing to representation.

Nationally and globally, their federations have taken their place in organs of consultation and decision, from National Assemblies and Senates to the General Assembly of the United Nations. Not always with complete success: “We get invited, we get listened to, but do we get heard?” is how one delegate put it at CTA’s December 2001 seminar in Douala, Cameroon, which focussed on so-called umbrella, or Apex farmers’, organisations, and their strategies of information and communication.

Their styles of organisation vary; sometimes they are formally rigid as legal federations; others are federal in nature but loose networks in name; some are self-appointed NGOs who have earned their representativity through hard work, others have, since the outset, been profoundly democratic and transparent.

Their special position viz-a-viz their members gives them a special responsibility in communication. They are key points in a two-way, or even many-way, flow of information. They can translate, often literally, information; pass it on to other networks, or collect it from them; digest it and repack it for members, or the outside world. Whether the content be on cultivation or storage techniques, or inputs, finance, marketing or training, their role is to constantly match supply and demand.

For one intense, and intensely convivial, week, more than sixty delegates from umbrella organisations all over Africa and development partners exchanged experiences and aspirations, and drew plans to grow further together. Amongst their priorities: a raft of capacity building measures in publishing, the logistics of communication including the Internet, and rural radio. The world will be seeing, reading and hearing a lot more of them.

In brief •

Local commons go global

Local – global interactions is the main thread of an international conference on “The commons in an age of globalisation”, it will be held from 17 to 21 June 2002, in Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe and is organised by the International Association for the Study of Common Property (IASCP).

IASCP Conference
Centre for Applied Social Sciences
University of Zimbabwe
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Email: iascp@cass.org.zw
Website: www.indiana.edu/~iascp/2002.html

Too much of a kind

While fishing in the Ogooué, Gabon’s largest river, you will most likely catch no name (Heterotis niloticus). The fish, which can reach a length of up to 1 meter, is a filter feeder, eating plankton and algae. The no name was released in the early 1980s in the rivers of Gabon but thrived too well, became too numerous and is now becoming a nuisance since it deprives other species from their food, much to the dislike of local fisherfolk. The no name of Gabon does have a name elsewhere; nok (Sudanese), N’diaguel (Wolof) and bali (Hausa).

Irrigation network launch

A new online network, aimed at exchanging experiences, innovations and research results in the field of small-scale irrigation in western and central Africa, was recently launched by Arid (Regional Irrigation and Drainage Association). The website provides case studies from 23 different countries, documents and discussion lists. Already some hundred members have registered and are sharing experiences through the network.

Website: www.hipponet.nl/arid-l/home.html

Cooperatives own part of the Web

Since 30 January 2002, cooperative organisations can register their own address on the Internet. Instead of being a so-called dot.com, or dot.org, they can be a dot.coop. Among the pre-registered coops are fruit producers in the Caribbean, dairy coops in India, and the Mongolian Association of Private Herder coops. Full details on: www.coop, as simple as that.
Yearioing to earn, organically

Three hundred years ago, an English fairy tale about a rural emigré played with the myth that the streets of London were paved with gold. Now it seems that people want to believe that the streets of London were paved with gold. Now it seems that the streets of London were paved with gold too. They have a point, to some extent.

A demand in the West for organic fruits and vegetables is enticing producers throughout the ACP regions and elsewhere to get organised and establish their foothold in the market of opportunity. More than 170 traders, producers, researchers and support agencies converged on Port-of-Spain, Trinidad and Tobago, in early October 2001 to do just that at a conference on diversifying regional exports through developing organic horticulture. They came from Cameroon, Malaya, 17 Caribbean nations and departments, 11 countries of Central and South America, and eight countries of North America and Europe.

The conference launched a new study on World Markets for Organic Fruit and Vegetables (see Publications) by FAO, the International Trade Centre of UNCTAD and WTO, and CTA. These bodies, together with the Centre for the Development of Enterprise, the International Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture, CAB International and Trinidad Ministry of Food Production and Marine Resources co-organised the event.

Lively debates led to concrete proposals for national standards, regional certification, information services and special measures for smallholders wanting to switch to organic production. And what did they seem to miss out? Empirical studies in several Western cities at the end of 2001 indicated that the retail shelf space for organic produce is shrinking; maybe the market’s growth is slowing down now. But a market it is, so catch it if you can.

Err, is this the frontline?

Growing demand for meat products from a burgeoning urban market is pushing a new force through West Africa, as in other parts of the world: the livestock revolution. The pressure this puts on scarce land resources is raising by similar pressures for increasing crop production.

The ingenious way for local farmers to tackle this is to hold both demands at once, in what are called ‘integrated crop-livestock systems’. Among the features of these systems are better appreciation and use of crop residues for animal feeds, more use of animal traction, and setting of pastoral/transhumant producers to engage in agro-pastoral production. Steering these systems towards sustainable production for improved livelihoods and natural resource management in West Africa was the topic of a co-seminar held in Ibadan, Nigeria, in November 2001. The co-organising partners were CIRDES of Burkina Faso, CTA and the international research centres ILRI, IITA, ICRI SAT and WARD.

More than 70 participants from throughout Africa and support agencies looked at how these systems would adapt to urbanisation, population growth and globalisation. Their predictions at the frontline of the revolution: farms will get smaller, and then amalgamate as people migrate to urban centres, and there will be a need to intensify animal feeds and the technologies which enhance land productivity. This thrust will be driven by marketing forces, said the meeting, even though none were in their midst: one participant regretted the absence of traders from the group. Real repositories of knowledge, he called them. Indeed.

A bit of statistics: Just one in millions

Amid all the flurry about organic agriculture, just how much land is dedicated to this version of sound farming? Well, it depends on the definition but according to an extensive survey by the German-based Ecology and Agriculture Foundation, Australia leads with 7.6 million hectares, followed by Argentina (3 million) and Italy (1 million). Big areas may be, but when expressed as a percentage of the total arable land they are far from stunning – often mere pin-pricks on the map. The highest levels – although still tiny – are in Europe where organic methods are well organised, and registered. Papua New Guinea and Suriname head the list of ACP countries in that respect.
Ecotourism

Fields with a view

To become an equal player in the new business of ecotourism takes a lot of preparation and perseverance to provide a satisfactory service, without taking your sights off other important agricultural tasks.

One of the services to properly include the host community’s perspective is the Community Tourism Guide which provides some of the answers, and points you towards community initiatives in Africa, the Caribbean, the Pacific, Asia and Latin America. It describes their experiences in setting up their businesses and staying on top of the market. Community Tourism Guide: Exciting Holidays for Responsible Travelers, by M. Mann, published by Tourism Concern/Earthscan, 2000, 208 pp. ISBN 185386818. GBP 7.99 ± 12.90 plus postage. Earthscan, 120 Pentonville Road, London N1 6H N, England. Fax: +44 20 72 78 11 42; email: orders@earthscan.co.uk; Website: www.earthscan.co.uk

Tourism Concern can also advise you where to address specific enquiries and – if you have email – link you to the Fair Trade and Tourism network’s members of host communities, sensitive operators and other practitioners world-wide. Contact: Tourism Concern, Staple House, 277-281 Holloway Road, London N7 8H N, England. Fax: +44 20 77 533 331; email: info@tourismconcern.org.uk; Website: www.tourismconcern.org.uk

The regional programme for the conservation and rational use of forest ecosystems in Central Africa has a good number of clear case studies in seven countries in both French and English. ECOFAC, Regional coordination service, BP 15115, Libreville, Gabon; fax: +241 73 23 45; email: coordination@ecofac.org; Website: www.ecofac.org

All these networks can help you trace local initiatives near you. Two typical local organisations of note, who can tell you more of the growth path for community organisations are: the Namibia Community Based Tourism Association (NACOBTA), created in 1995; the work of its 45 members includes a joint venture between operators and the community on a revenue sharing basis. NACOBTA, PO Box 86099, Windhoek, Namibia. Fax: +264 61 222 647; email: info@nacoba.com.na; Website: www.nacoba.com.na and: the Gambian Association of Small Scale Enterprises in Tourism (ASSET) is a splendid example of grassroots initiatives seeking to maximise the benefits for local communities, and their experiences could serve as solid examples for others. ASSET, PO Box 4587, Serrekunda, Gambia. Fax +220 466 180; email: asset@qanet.gm

ASSET is represented on the Ecotourism task force of the UN Environment Programme which, together with the World Tourism Organisation (WTO), is coordinating the International Year of Ecotourism under the mandate of the United Nations. UNEP DTIE Tourism Programme, 39-43, Quai André Citroën, 75739 Paris Cedex 15, France. Fax: +33 144 371 474; email: unep.tie@unep.fr; Website: www.unep.ei.org/pc/tourism/ecotourism/home.htm


A forum that moves mountains

2002 might be the International Year of the Mountain (see also Spore 97), mountains have been in the spotlight much longer. The Mountain Forum, a global network for anyone working, living or interested in mountain areas, was established in 1995 to collect and exchange knowledge and information on mountain areas: different cultures, farming systems and natural resources. The Forum links more than 3,000 individuals and organisations, such as the Mountain Institute in the USA, the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) in Nepal, the International Potato Center (CIP) in Peru, and the International Centre for Research in Agroforestry (ICRAF) in Kenya.

Much of the output of the network is available in printed form, even if most communication is electronic. The forum hosts moderated email discussion lists and email conferences, on topics such as natural resources management, tourism, mountain laws and renewable energies. Some lists have a regional focus, for among others Africa. Others are thematic: on gender, geography and in situ conservation of germplasm.

Questions and news can be posted, for instance on plant uses, on specific mountain areas, on scholarships and courses, job openings, conference announcements, case studies and new publications (Note: no attachments allowed and messages not larger than 25 k).

Becoming a member and subscribing to lists is easy and for free. Just send a blank email message to the list in which you want to participate (for instance subscribe-mtn-forum@lyris.bellanet.org; subscribe-mf-women@lyris.bellanet.org; subscribe-mf-africa@lyris.bellanet.org; subscribe-mf-asia@lyris.bellanet.org)

All discussion lists are shown on the Mountain Forum’s website: www.mountainforum.org The website hosts a full overview of members, including contact details and fields of interest. You can also consult the mountain atlas and MF library of more than 7,000 publications. 2,000 in full text, the rest in bibliographic details.

The Mountain Forum’s print output includes three MF news bulletins annually and concise thematic papers, based on the email conferences, such as Mountain Laws & Peoples, Mountain People, Forests & Trees, and Mountains Energy & Transport (US$ 5 or € 5.70 each for ACP countries).

Executive Secretary of the Mountain Forum, and Asia – Pacific Node (C/o ICIMOD, G O P Box 3226, Kathmandu, Nepal fax: +977 1 524 509 email: secretariat@mfntforum.org website: www.mfntforum.org)

African Node (C/o ICRAF Headquarters, PO Box 30677, Nairobi, Kenya fax: +254 2 52 45 01 email: info@amft.mfntforum.org website: www.mfntforum.org/afmft)

Mountain Forum M o d e r a t o r (C/o The Mountain Institute, 245 Newman Avenue, Harrisonburg, VA 22801, USA – Fax: +1 540 437 01 94 – Email: mforum@mtforum.org)
Publications

Ugandan agriculture committed to writing

A book of one’s dreams for anyone involved, employed or interested in Uganda’s agricultural sector. This set of four volumes is the demonstrable result of much hard work by many people in the national agriculture research organisation. One hopes such work will one day exist for every ACP country. Volume I provides the general context of the agricultural sector in Uganda. It describes the climate, soil types and fertility, water availability and vegetation in the various regions. It continues with a presentation of socio-economic backgrounds and different agricultural production systems. Finally it presents the institutional surroundings in the fields of research, extension, education, engineering, post-harvest handling and seed production and multiplication.

Each of the other volumes focuses on an agricultural sub-sector. Volume II on crops describes the country’s plant genetic resources and continues with sections on cereals, oilcrops, roots and tubers, grains, plantains and traditional cashcrops. It briefly discusses such new areas as sericulture and mushroom cultivation.

Volume III is dedicated to Uganda’s forestry sector and forest resources: its history, current state and future potential.

Finally, volume IV offers you all there is to livestock and fisheries: the resources, current state of affairs, plus the challenges and prospects of managing and developing Uganda’s livestock and fisheries resources.

Agriculture in Uganda
CTA number 1057, 40 credit points
Volume II, Crops 594 pp. ISBN 9970 02 234 2
CTA number 1058, 40 credit points
Volume III, Forestry 124 pp. ISBN 9970 02 240 7
CTA number 1059, 40 credit points
Volume IV, Livestock and Fisheries 404 pp. ISBN 9970 02 239 3
CTA number 1060, 40 credit points
Fountain Publishers Ltd PO Box 488 Kampala, Uganda Fax: +256 41 251 160 Email: fountain@starcom.co.ug

Act forward, look backward

The best way forward in learning is by looking back and learn from your own mistakes. This was the starting point of a project started in January 2000 by the International Service for National Agricultural Research (ISNAR), in cooperation of many national and international organisations involved in agricultural research. The project focused on improving capacity Development efforts in agricultural research and development programmes through improving evaluation – a leading light in ISNAR’s current work.

The findings of the first half of the project are laid down in this concise report which presents a set of five evaluation case studies and incorporates the main conclusions of a review workshop of the project, held in July 2001 (see Spore 95).

Learning about capacity development through evaluation:
Perspectives and observations from a collaborative network of national and international organisations and donor agencies By D Horton, CTA co-publication – ISNAR, meeting report No 13. 2001. 52 pp. Freely downloadable from www.cgiar.org/isnar Or from CTA CTA number 1046, 5 credit points

Wattertight papers to float on

An interesting collection of papers addressing paradigm shifts in irrigation water management in recent decades, from agronomic, technical and institutional approaches of the irrigation perimeter to perceiving an irrigation area as a dynamic socio-technical ensemble, with its own diversity and differences between stakeholders.


Wattertight papers to skim through

The summary report of the above mentioned conference.


A wind of change

Liberalisation, globalisation, democratisation and information and communication technologies have changed the lives of agricultural and rural development stakeholders, and their information needs.


Stakeholders in – forest – concert

Grenada’s forest policies are examined in a context where the value of forests has shifted from being a source for timber to a service for agriculture and recreation.

Participation in the Caribbean. A Review of Grenada’s Forest Policy Process By S Bass, IIEF Forestry and Land Use Programme, Policy that works for forests and people series No 10. 2000. 52 pp. ISSN 1028-8228 US$ 15 + € 17 S41 distribution services PO Box 119 Steenage SG1 4TP Hertfordshire England Fax: +44 1438 74 88 44 Email: orders@earthprint.com Website: www.earthprint.com
Know your niche

A solid and soundly comprehensive guide, World markets in organic fruit and vegetables explains almost all that an interested trader, exporter or producer needs to know.

What are the requirements for producing and exporting organic products to major markets? What are the characteristics of the individual markets of Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Germany, Italy, Japan, Netherlands, Sweden, Switzerland, UK and USA? Who certifies what, which labels mean what, what is the local competition? These detailed country profiles are followed by case studies of production and exports from Argentina, Cameroon, Chile, Dominican Republic, Madagascar, Papua New Guinea and Zambia.

Based on a study commissioned by FAO, CTA and the International Trade Centre, which comprises UNCTAD and the World Trade Organisation, is full of useful facts, and references and links to more facts. No hype, no spin, no dreams: even the bare facts about how the organic market share in most countries is about 1% of total food sales is somehow reassuring. No chance of losing your way with this guide.

Veggies under cover

Vegetable cultivation under shelters is gaining popularity in the humid tropics as a sure way to achieve good quality produce. Shelters prevent damage to crops from extreme climatic conditions, such as heavy rains, storm and strong sunlight. This guide brings together valuable information on shelter cultivation, based on research on Martinique, supplemented with data from other Caribbean Islands and Africa. It is a practical and comprehensive manual, covering both sheltered cultivation on soil and sheltered soil-less cultivation on substrates (hydroponic).

It describes different types and traits of shelters rather briefly, but offers more on cultivation aspects, such as crop water and fertiliser requirements, pest control, sowing techniques and ventilation.

Individual fact sheets are included on nine common vegetables under sheltered cultivation: courgette, cucumber, French bean, lettuce, melon, onions, pepper, strawberry and tomato.

Guide to sheltered vegetable cultivation in the humid Tropics

La librairie du CIRAD Avenue Agropolis (B. 4) BP 5035 34032 Montpellier Cedex 1 France
Fax: +33 4 67 61 55 47 Email: librarie@cirad.fr

Tinker, tailor, journal maker?

Few professional tasks require as much dedication and patience as launching and running a professional or academic journal. To do so in most developing countries, on scientific or agricultural topics, requires almost superhuman reserves of faith and stubbornness. In equal portions.

All that you have to provide yourself. What a Guidebook on Journal Publishing for Agriculture and Rural Development can give you is the moral and superb professional support of some people who have been where you want to go. Their advice is given in well-organised chapters of sound text and clear diagrams, converting into journal production all you need to know about the intricate steps of being a publisher and editor. The special aspects of a journal are covered with as much clarity as diligence. The perennial issues of financial health, and the complex routines of acquiring and managing contributors, with the associated work of peer review. If you are as good as you think, and as good as this book, you have a good chance of success. It won’t be for lack of wisdom, if it doesn’t work out in the end. Good luck!

All stakeholders are equal

Our institutions are opening up, whether they are farmers’ associations or international councils. The common sense that is called participation is being applied in all, well most, of our bodies. Central and decentralised government, grassroots groups, local authorities, representative civil society groups such as trade unions, the private sector, issue-based groups, the research community, NGOs – wherever we ‘belong’ we are learning to share decisions with the others.

One courageous experiment in the search for new forms of decision-sharing is known as the multi-stakeholder dialogue or process (see: Can we all be policy-makers, in Spore 93). It has been developed largely in the new forms of consultation and decision-making around the United Nations General Assembly and its commission on sustainable development. These farmers’ organisations share the floor with governments, international agencies and other major groups.

This manual explains the logistics and psychology of these processes, which can be applied at almost any level, and indeed between levels, of decision-making. From the fundamental principles, and how to enthuse them, to the nitty-gritty of learning to be an equal, it provides a framework for you to dialogue, and more.

These processes are, some believe, the only way forward in organising development. One step at a time, but forward. Go there. With this book.

The nature of things

There is so much ado about biodiversity and there has been so much for such a long time that it is – sadly – becoming a player in a vague and feeble story. Or so it seemed. We can get back to basics with biodiversity not adversity. It gets back to basics with the nature of things.

There farmers’ organisations might conserve the richness in biodiversity and there has been much ado about biodiversity and there has been so much for such a long time that it is – sadly – becoming a player in a vague and feeble story. Or so it seemed. We can get back to basics with biodiversity not adversity. It gets back to basics with the nature of things.

One Step Beyond. Multi-Stakeholder Processes for Governance and Sustainability
Earthscan Publications Ltd
120 Pentonville Road
London N1 9JN
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Fax: +44 20 72 78 11 42
Email: cabiinfo@cabi.org

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UK
Fax: +44 20 72 78 11 42
Email: earthinfo@earthscan.co.uk

How to obtain these publications

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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; 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 314 046. Email: triops@net-library.de; Website: www.net-library.de/triops.html

They tend to bite off more...

Insects are the major pest in tropical trees. A look at the factors influencing them: the types of insects; the kinds of damage, such as defoliation, sap-, wood-, and barkfeeding, shoot-, fruit, and seedboiling; and control measures and management techniques.

Insect Pests in Tropical Forestry
GBP 30 • £ 48.80
CABI Publishing
Wallington, Oxfordshire
OX3 9EJ, UK
Fax: +44 1491 83 35 08
Email: cabi@cabi.org

Seek and ye shall find

Useful beyond the Caribbean for its methodology, this report on agricultural R&D capacity recommends its potential contribution to agricultural development in the region.

Agricultural R&D in the Caribbean. An Institutional and Statistical Profile
ISBN 92 118 056 4
US$20 • £ 22.70
Order code: ISNAR297
SMI distribution services
For contact details see elsewhere.

A fat chance

A brief reference manual on statistical methods for researchers in agriculture. It accompanies the report of a specialist workshop on the role of statistics in planning and analysing agricultural experiments in the South Pacific. (see Spore 99).

Statistical methods for Agricultural Experiments: A reference manual for researchers in the Pacific islands countries
ISBN 982 175 148 2
US$ 20 • £ 22.30
For IRETA’s address see above.

You may have something there

A concise overview of the nutritional building blocks and their presence in the traditional staple foods in the Pacific and describing their value to livestock and humans. A sound guide, usable in any region.

Traditional staple foods and some feed stuffs of the Pacific Islands: their chemistry, biochemistry and nutrient compositions
ISBN 982 175 146 76
US$ 20 • £ 22.30
IRETA, USP, Afaufu Campus
Private Mail Bag, Apia, Samoa
Fax: +685 22347
Email: usp@ireta.samoa.usp.ac.fj
Mailbox

The Spore mailbag has been especially heavy these last few weeks, what with everyone joining in the reader survey, all your New Year greetings, and the regular queries and comments. There is always room for more, even if we can print just a small portion. Come on, write in!

Welcome to another Spore reading group!
The president, Godwin Inedia, and Secretary General, Bright Obaseki, have told us formally “of the existence of the Spore Reading Group (SRG) in Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma, Edo state, Nigeria. Its overriding objectives are to inculcate reading habits, to foster academic discipline and confidence, and to create an ideal environment for harmonising ideas and knowledge for human development. We recommend more articles on improving food processing and preservation in Spore, since up to 40% of crops are wasted due to poor or lacking appropriate technology.”

Women graduates
In his work as coordinator of the Wereda Animal Health Department in Harar, Ethiopia, Ashabir Menkir Jembere uses Spore to get new ideas. He also used it, together with publications obtained from CTA, “to provide a training session for our poorest women group on sustainable goat production in June 2001.” The photo shows their graduation ceremony.

Tough livestock measures
Prompted by the special article on Epizootics and animal health; the high cost of cutting corners (Spore 94), our tireless correspondent Samuel Zelehe, of Fambella, Ethiopia, has written about the need for great caution. “Most ACP farmers may not give serious attention to the risk of BSE to their animals since they do not import meat and bone meal for feeding their livestock. But there are several ways by which BSE and other contagious diseases affect livestock and humans. All ACP States have to take some important measures like isolation of domestic fauna from wild beasts, strict quarantine procedures during the importation of live animals, periodic vaccination of domestic animals, and the prohibition of illegal and uncontrolled hunting and export of wild fauna. These measures could alleviate or reduce the threats to the health of livestock and humans, and to the economies of ACP countries.”

Let it grow
Christophe Mabiala Mvika of the NGO Action for Community Development - ADEC (BP 94, Muanza, Bas Congo, Democratic Republic of Congo) reports “we have now completed our experimental reforestation plot of 109 by 44 metres. We would like to expand into a larger project, under the name of “Green Environment for Sustainable Agriculture” and we are looking for support from forestry-minded organisations.”

Worms in millet straw
Writing from PO Box 236, Webuye, Kenya, Khaemba Simiyu is looking for advice on rearing worms. “We are using millet straw as a substrate to rear manure worms for feeding poultry and fish. A structure similar to a toilet roof is used, with a sloping panel of millet straw placed like a thatch on wooden poles. After four to five months, the straw is full of worms in all stages of development, hundreds per square metre. The problem is how to keep the process going continuously as the millet straw decomposes soon after harvest. Can anyone give advice?”

Harry potters away
Abiye Samuel Harry, who shares his Spore with more than fifteen other readers, is Principal Agricultural Officer in the River State Development Programme in Nigeria, and an avid user of Spore in his information work. “I responded to the article Colour betrays the poison (Spore 88) about the work of J H Bradbury of the Australian National University, who provided me with a free kit to determine the total cyanogens in cassava root and products. This equipment has formed part of the material and method of my post-graduate thesis work on relating total cyanogens to CBB and CMB diseases. I am now a member of the Cassava Cyanide Disease Network.”

There is an update of Dr Bradbury’s work in News in Brief.

Cheese factory
François Tron writes that the cheese factory Fromagerie Fivatsy (at BP 17, Ambatomanga, Manjakandriana 116, Madagascar) is looking for partners to help ensure their continuity: “We are a small-size cheese factory, 30 km east of Antananarivo, the capital. About 300 cow-breeders produce between 500 and 1,000 litres of milk each for processing into cheese for sale in Tana. This provides an important source of income but remains insufficient to cover all their basic needs. Since the beginning of 2001, we have been running a ‘livestock service’ to help farmers increase their output, with training, field veterinary services, trials and support with inputs.”
Donkeys and hedges

The president of the Agroforestry Association of Burkina Faso, Kinda Doriva, tells of his months-long mission to Liberia where he worked to “introduce new tree plants, and fifty donkeys, to help local communities to rebuild after seven years of war. The photo shows a group of Liberian women and their new donkey.

I would like to share my experiences in planting hedges from seeds. A lot of people have problems in enclosing their gardens, plots and pastures. Netting is very expensive, as is buying acacia seedlings from nurseries and planting them close enough to get a thick wall. A hedge is the best solution: it protects against soil erosion, and allows water to pass through.

Towards the end of the rainy season, when the soil is still damp, dig a ditch 35 cm deep and 40 cm across, and wait for the rains to stop before filling it up again. Sow acacia seeds in two lines all along the filled-in ditch, having mixed compost into the soil if it is hard. After one year, thin out the plants to every 20 cm, and seed any empty areas. In the second year, cut down any high branches, and weave the lower ones into a hedge. One word of caution: watch out for animals eating the hedge in the dry season; they just love it, despite the thorns. Goats are the worst.”

Lifting the lid, 2

“I am an extension officer as well as a practicing farmer, writes Ama Ukoja from Aba, Abia State, Nigeria. Often, contributors to Spore have proferred solutions to my immediate problems, such as the drip irrigation technique featured in Spore of October 1999. Spore for me is a do-it-yourself manual. It is my network, my Internet, my World Wide Web, my hotmail.com, my email and my fax. Spore makes me more informed than my colleagues and fellow farmers. I do not just farm; I apply science to farming.”

No cause or reason to forget

“Think on and act, whether you are a manager in CTA or another international organisation, or a reader of Spore, exhorts Germain Agbo of the CECAB centre in Houegbo, Benin in reference to a correspondence started in Spore 83. I would like to ask CTA to revisit its policy on training activities and seminars which it organises with other bodies by decentralising or sharing its work. They should include people from rural areas who are working with real farmers. They should not just be for the same people all the time, or organisations or large NGOs who are forever receiving but not giving and who never leave their buildings or air-conditioned vehicles.”

“You’re right, Mr Agbo, decentralisation adds to one’s responsibilities, and the intention, as written in Spore 83, is still that national bodies involve more actors. We shall examine this in a forthcoming issue soon.”

Readers survey

Results in June

The survey of “How Do You Use Spore” closed on 1 February 2002. You can still send your answers to the survey questions (see Spore 95, or ask for them by email from questions-en@spore-magazine.org). However, we cannot include any answers received after 1 February in the random draw for winners of Credit Points or Spore subscriptions. We shall announce these winners in Spore 98 (April 2002).

Work started in early February to process all the replies which arrived by mail, fax, email, the Website, and even personal messenger. We shall report on the overall picture in Spore 99 (June 2002), and give details on where to get the results in full.

In Spore 100 (August 2002), there will be a special section to illustrate readers’ Uses of Spore throughout the 77 ACP States and even beyond. We can still consider you for this, if you send a note about your uses of Spore, and photo or drawing, before 1 June 2002, to Uses of Spore c/o CTA (address below) or Uses@spore-magazine.org.

And our response to your responses? Just watch your Spore!
The real engines of Africa’s economies

The engine behind Africa’s economic potential is the food processing sector, and it is of fundamental importance to strengthen it, give it breathing space and accord it its proper strategic role.

Enterprise and food processing

One of our prime concerns is to see biotechnologies being used to add value to our ‘traditional’ and ‘indigenous’ food products. In this regard, if we are indeed to believe that the goal of the consultative group on international agricultural research is really to eliminate poverty, then it is surely here that it has much to do. If not, then this slogan will remain just as a dream for a long time yet.

Surely it is essential to recognise the leading role that must be played by the private sector in Africa in the economic development of the continent, and in particular by small- and medium-scale enterprises. They have to be found a special place in decision-making bodies if they are to play their part as the motor of development to the utmost.

We may well be a network of the agri-food entrepreneur but we fully recognise our societal role. Indeed, one of the major policy thrusts of Interface is “to build beyond food security and to improve environmental management, nutritional standards, public health and the general well-being of African communities in the context of the struggle against hunger and poverty.”

Our success in this will depend on the initiatives of entrepreneurs themselves, and on their own ability to locate and obtain the resources they reckon they need. In this, there is a supportive role to be played by programmes which will help the entrepreneurs to access information, technology, markets and finance.

Finding and keeping niches on the international market, however, supposes that there is an added value to our local resources. Yet we can only really achieve this if we too can benefit from scientific progress and technology innovations in the area of biotechnologies.

“ We have to be more inventive and more creative in finding viable niches.”

We can also take firmer control over our own production, in terms of quality and quantity, if we improve our post-harvest techniques; these will enable producers in each region to fully exploit their own specific advantages. Similarly, if we are able to manage our production in response to demand, then we should be in a position to organise entire production and delivery chains by sector, to minimise post-harvest losses, to position ourselves clearly in the market and to offer consumers products and labels of quality which they will know and appreciate.

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