December 2001. The cocoa market of Mbanga, north-west of Douala, Cameroon’s major port, is being visited by participants from a CTA seminar on farmers’ federal organisations. Half a dozen farmers are handing their sacks to the trader’s hefty hired hands loading his lorry.

“Quite soon, you won’t need to come back at all,” the farmers berate the trader. “We’re getting out of cocoa, losing too much money on it, we got families to feed. We’re getting into coffee, much safer.” An argument develops, loading halts, tension mounts, to be broken by two seminar participants who, not unhefty themselves, and uncaring of tearing their painted nails and dresses, heave another sack onto the trader’s doubting scales. Hilarity all around. Loading resumes, and the farmers resume their futile attempts to wangle a better price.

The switch to coffee is confirmed later by some younger farmers, their tongues freed by the departure of elders and the seminar participants. To a man, they’re going to switch to coffee, or move to the city.

Later the local extension agent talks excitedly of the need for market information services to nurture price awareness and sound decisions amongst farmers, such as the wish to move to coffee. In his office, Spore 95, with an article about how 20 million coffee producers are desperate to move out of coffee because of falling prices. “After a two-year free fall that has not yet stopped, farmers cannot afford to produce at these prices.”

This sort of confusion, jumping from worse to worst, does not make for an easy

Commodities in crisis

The dice have no dots

Never genteel, making a living from commodities has now become a hopeless, hurting game. There are three ways out: horizontally, jump, or sit on a hedge.

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analysis of the latest ‘commodity crisis’. Go to any market; open any financial newspaper; listen to any campaigning NGO; chat with any minister of finance and within minutes you will hear the words “commodity crisis”. H as it ever been otherwise?

These crises in fact come in cycles often with good years, or decades, as well as bad ones. That, though, is of little comfort when you are a farmer deep in debt, and faced only with more debt. The niceties of the “commodity price cycle” reported by economic historians mean little when the going is rough and getting rougher.

Coffee has witnessed the most dramatic fall in agricultural commodity prices of late, tumbling on average by 70% since 1997. Ah, the deadly average. The average price is based on a ‘basket’ of all the world’s different coffees – robustas, natural arabicas, mild arabicas and others – and they range greatly in price, depending on where they are grown. Similarly, no farmer is an average, as demonstrated by figures circulated by the Make Trade Fair campaign in April 2002. Quoting a family farm in Kituntu, Uganda, they describe the 83% fall from 1997 prices of 600 Ugandan Shillings (about 40 dollar cents) per kilo to 100 Shillings by the end of 2001. The family’s children have dropped out of school, to grow vegetables among the coffee bushes. With 5 million smallholders and households, comprising about one-quarter of Uganda’s population, used to earning their living from growing coffee, the dramatic nature of price fluctuations hits home hard.

How will I know?

To want to jump into a depressed coffee market, as did some of the cocoa farmers in M bangla, you have to be pretty desperate. And so you would be, with world prices in 2001 almost 40% lower than in 1998, even though they were still above the record low levels of 2000. Would it help if you knew that the International Cocoa Organization expects cocoa prices to surge upwards by 25% from the 2000 level by the end of 2002, and by 56% by the end of 2003? And that by the end of 2005, they may have fallen again by about one-tenth, to be 40% higher than in 2000? Probably, but who will tell you?

These price projections, focusing as they may be, are only tentative and depend on a great many factors. Similar uncertainties hold true for any other agricultural commodity prices, be they for sorghum (relatively steady for the last two years), cotton or groundnuts (steadily downwards). They apply to many an ACP country heavily dependent on primary products for export earnings. A change in price has a direct impact on people’s lives, whether they produce cash crops or not: in many parts of West Africa, for example, between one-third and one-half of private household expenditure is on basic necessities.

Hope is a decimal place

These price differences – a mere decimal in an equation for some – spell drastic consequences for others, individually and in terms of a nation’s economy, even though, as Make Trade Fair claim, “a Ghanaian cocoa farmer only gets 1.2% of the price paid by a consumer for a bar of chocolate”. It is a bumpy road, and the way ahead is cluttered with the normal risks familiar to a farmer, plus the price risk. Poor weather or lack of inputs may reduce one country’s harvest but bumper harvests elsewhere could bring down the average price. Or commodity brokers may push the price up to reap a quick profit. Or consumers, or health regulators, may develop an aversion to a certain product – West African groundnuts and the Pacific’s kava roots are two such recent victims – and force prices down. Or scientists may perfect artificial products and damage the chances for natural ones – as seems to be happening with vanilla at present.

Call your insurance agent

The risks of being a commodity producer are now unacceptable, as prices dive below any person’s survival line and the world’s various experiments, both national and international, to stabilise prices have been largely abandoned.

Which way is out? The handful of standard responses is too little, too late and too unimaginative. Schemes to withhold production and thus force up prices are pushed aside either by competing producers (such as Vietnam with coffee) or by technology which allows processors to stockpile stores longer. Others see hope in niche markets for gourmet organic chocolate from Ghana or exquisite coffees from new producers in Vanuatu, who have to compete uphill with Jamaican and Ethiopia’s specialist brands. Unfortunately, not everyone can niche.

No, the missing link, as Spore has said before, is in insurance. For centuries, commodity traders have protected themselves against excessive price fluctuations with insurance schemes. Why not producers? The simplest method is ‘to hedge’, minimising losses by counterbalancing one risk with another. Translated literally to field and silo, a producer (group) strikes a deal with a buyer for a minimum price to be paid even if the price market falls further. In exchange for that, they agree on a ceiling price to be paid even if the actual market price goes higher. The deal can be enhanced with bridging credit at reasonable interest, instead from moneylenders.

As a concept, it is not at all alien to the canny farmer who knows about spreading risk. In practice, it requires a willingness to pay a premium for such insurance, and financial savvy and ample, sound information. Here there is a key role, perhaps the most challenging of an overflowing portfolio of tasks, for farmers’ organisations. They should be, proposed the economist Olivier Combe in the mid-1990’s, the link between the farmer and the financial world.

The World Bank, often criticised for fumbling self-consciously to keep up with new thinking in development, has launched a novel programme for smallholders and their organisations to have adequate access to instruments for managing their risks in a volatile market. A great many livelihoods and more depend on it. It will take time for the institutions and professions – farmer, banker, actuary – to get used to being partners, but that is surely a risk worth taking.

For more information:

International Task Force for Commodity Risk Management

c/o CRM Group, Rural Development Department
World Bank, 1818 H Street, N.W.
Washington, DC 20433, USA
Fax: +1 202 477 6391
Email: feedback@itf-commrisk.org
Website: www.itf-commrisk.org
The lean years ahead

Is the concept of aid on the way out? It could be smarter for agriculture to encourage ‘inward investment’.

Like a customer checking a bag of beans for the merchant’s added stones, many diplomats have a tool for checking the sincerity of policy statements at world conferences. It’s called the “Any new funds?” test, and is being used a lot at present.

In the current series of world summits to eliminate poverty or halve hunger or boost agricultural research, there is usually a set of governmental and partnership promises to devote more resources to the target in question. Often such funds are neither new nor additional but are re-allocated or re-named existing funds.

One frustrated ACP negotiator at a meeting in March 2002, held perhaps symbolically in an ill-lit and airyless cellar room in New York, to set the agenda for the August 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) told Spore: “Sometimes it’s not even the old question of old wine in a new bottle. Sometimes they just change the label.” The image of holding promises up to the scent light to see if they contain “Any new funds?” is a sad reflection on the current state of international solidarity and self-interest.

Everything is relative

It’s sad, but not fatal, this devaluation of international cooperation. Less than one-fifth of investment in most developing countries comes from outside. Contrary to many impressions, most investment comes from local financial and human capital. This is especially the case in agriculture and rural development which, if not fighting a losing battle, are witnessing an erosion of external funding.

Recent World Bank figures show that expenditure on agriculture has shrunk from a quarter of the institution’s budget to less than one-tenth. National inputs are barely more significant: few developing countries devote more than 10% of their frail budgets to agriculture.

In fact, as the FAO has recognised, that “most investments are primarily mobilised by the farmers themselves”. Yet the sustained inability of the West to meet agreed aid targets is seen as a dire message for most ACP countries. They are used to outsourcing a small but determinant slice of their current expenditure and investment from foreign aid. That may need to change.

Aid expenditure by the West has seldom done anything but shrink. In 2001, it sank to US$ 51.4 billion (€ 56.8 billion). This represents 0.22% of the gross national income (GNI) of the West; ten years ago, it was 0.33%. The original 1970s targets of 0.7% were, except for some northern European nations, truly fantastic.

New promises were made at the UN Conference on Financing for Development in Monterrey, Mexico, in March 2002. The United States pledged to jack up its aid budget by US$ 5 billion a year, of new funds, by the year 2006. European Union members made similar public promises. The net result: aid flows will rise to 0.24% of GNI. A pretty penny, but no more than that.

The donors’ dilemma

For donor nations, however, it is not just a question of bumping up aid budgets in the face of pressing domestic priorities and growing public resistance. If truth be told, and it is a truth any minister for finance or development will tell you in private, it is hard to properly disburse all aid funds. This leads to so-called underspends. There are organisational constraints in the way; hence the recent fads for ‘capacity building’. The donor’s dilemma is to be accused either of apparently low aid pledges, or lack of focus in actual programmes: in brief, underwhelm or underspend.

As it is, the aid community, official and non-governmental, is often accused of creating a parallel sector in a developing country’s economy. It has its own infrastructures of education, transport, housing, priorities, grants, communications, personnel and human resource development strategies, all operating with scant regard for the sovereign state. This may, just may, buy quick results, but it scarcely enhances local development.

Against this flaw-rich background, the classical practice of throwing money at a problem is not a real option to solve the needs of any sector, not even the neediest, such as agriculture. Recent talk of a Second Marshall Plan, for Africa, does not take account of the realities of insincere pledges from abroad and inadequate absorption capacity at home. The New Economic Partnership for African Development, with its emphasis on internal funding, is more realistic.

Invest, invest

Would development be better with less aid? Could well be so. Certainly, the alternatives seem to work better, if the playing field is level. Trade, not aid, as the 1964 slogan once said, can be more rewarding and enduring, on some tough conditions: fair trade, decent prices, realism about not exporting too much biomass too far, and abolition of insane subsidies to Western agriculture.

The second alternative is direct foreign investment, already greater than all aid flows, public and private. Agriculture, however, is not rated as a sound investment, partly because income from volatile trading prices is uncertain. There are ample opportunities, nonetheless, to invest profitably in key points on the food chain: processing, packaging, distribution and marketing to name but a few.

The smart farmer, farmers’ organisation, and research agency would all do well to target external investment, and not just aid funds, as a supplement to their own Herculean efforts. Existing experiences in micro-finance, savings, loans and insurance, can provide the basic financial skills which enable investment approaches. Making money work, instead of chasing money to make ends meet, is the next step for development finance. All it takes, really, is a new attitude.

See Links, page 10
Weeds and weed management

If you can’t face them, replace them

Weeds just will not lie down and take “No!” for an answer. After the umpteenth round of weeding, they shoot up again, ruining harvests and elbowing out crops altogether. If we understood better why weeds appear and re-appear we could work on better control measures instead of simply trying to eradicate them. If we don’t want them, we need to be ahead of them.

Despite their pretty, pretty, esoteric names such as ‘the devil’s horse whip’ or ‘prickly pigweed’, weeds generally wreak more havoc than their fellow pests of insects, bacteria and viruses. They cause phenomenal losses in agriculture, especially in tropical areas where one-quarter of a crop’s harvest is lost to weeds. Fighting them also accounts for huge amounts of time and energy. Weeding by hand or hoe is one of the most time-consuming tasks in agriculture, and a task performed mostly by women and children.

But when exactly is a weed a weed? A couple of maize stalks in a field of tomatoes can be considered weeds but real weeds are plants that grow in places where they are really unwanted, either because they compete with crops for nutrients, water and sunlight, or because they are poisonous. Most farmers therefore make a distinction between useful and harmful weeds.

The “useful weeds” – it takes some time to get that over your tongue, maybe - are the ones that are used for medicines, as fodder for animals and herbs in cooking. Or they may be the plants that keep vermin out of crops, fix nitrogen in the soil or provide protection against erosion. As long as they do not compete too much with the actual crops, they are left to grow.

The world’s worst weeds

Of terrestrial weeds, 69% are broad-leaved weeds, 23% are grasses, 6% are sedges (leaved grasslike stems with small flowers), and 2% are ferns. The weeds below occur without exception in the subtropics and the tropics and are all found in upland crops. The most notorious aquatic weed is the water hyacinth (Eichhornia crassipes).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>botanical name</th>
<th>common name</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cyperus rotundus</td>
<td>nut grass, purple nutsedge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cynodon dactylon</td>
<td>star grass, Bermuda grass</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Echinocloa crus-galli</td>
<td>barnyard grass</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Echinocloa colonum</td>
<td>jungle rice (also in lowland &amp; flooded rice)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eleusine indica</td>
<td>goose grass, wild finger millet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sorghum halepense</td>
<td>Johnson grass, Aleppo grass</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imperata cylindrica</td>
<td>alang-alang, spear- or sword grass (especially in tree crops)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portulaca oleracea</td>
<td>pigweed, purslane</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chenopodium album</td>
<td>goose feet, fat hen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Digitaria sanguinalis</td>
<td>hairy or large crab grass</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Convolvulus arvensis</td>
<td>bindweed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amaranthus hybridus</td>
<td>smooth amaranthus, pigweed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amaranthus spinosus</td>
<td>spiny or prickly pigweed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cyperus esculentus</td>
<td>yellow nutsedge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paspalum conjugatum</td>
<td>sour paspalum, sour grass (especially in tree crops)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rottboelia cochinensis</td>
<td>guinea-fowl grass, itch grass</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Derived from: Weed management in the humid and sub-humid tropics.

War of the Weeds

In eastern Africa, farmers plant napier grass (Pennisetum purpureum) or Sudan grass (Sorghum vulgare sudanense) as a trap weed in maize. The stem borer, accountable for up to 30% yield losses in maize, prefers these grasses to maize. Two other weeds are planted that repel stem borers: molasses grass (Melinis minutifolia) or the silver-leaved desmodium (Desmodium uncinatum).

The trick is to plant repellent weeds in the maize field to chase out the stem borers, and to plant the trap weed on the edges of the field. The stem borers are caught in the sticky substance that these trap weeds produce.

Both napier and Sudan grass are also used as fodder. Molasses grass not only repels stem borers but also ticks. Nonetheless, desmodium seems to excel its colleagues in usefulness. It fixes nitrogen in the soil, is an important source of fodder, repels stem borers and most surprisingly: it turns out to repel the noxious weed striga too (see other box). During trials, as much as 40 times less striga was found in the desmodium – maize fields, compared to mono-cropped maize.

The International Centre for Insect Physiology and Ecology, based in Nairobi, developed, tested and disseminated the combined intercropping system. It has caught on extremely well. Farmers – both smallholder and large commercial – from Ethiopia to Tanzania are now planting desmodium in their maize. One spin-off effect of this popularity is that selling desmodium seed has become an emerging income-generating opportunity.

In Togo and Benin, Mucuna spp. have been brought into action as cover crops to restore the fertility of arable land and reduce weed infestation. It has caught on especially in areas of high rural population density, where land pressure is high and periods of fallow are not long enough. Growing mucuna during the improved fallowing suppresses speargrass infestation (Imperata cylindrica) but it is also grown intercropped with maize. The technique is spreading fast and mucuna seed sales are a booming business.
for the purpose they serve. Alongside this approach is that of "relaxed weeding" which means pulling out those weeds that are harmful, toxic and really have no purpose nor any use, not even as compost or fuel. In smallholder farms, weeds are regarded in a different way to on large commercial farms or plantations where any plant other than the cash crop is called a weed, whether useful or not.

**Weeds make haste**

About 8,000 plants worldwide are currently considered as real weeds and out of these, a small elite of 250 are considered as the "world's major noxious, or harmful, weeds. Now you won't find them all together in your field. Obviously not. After all, one "Sweet flowers are slow and weeds make haste", as Shakespeare once wrote. Annual weeds produce large amounts of seeds which often retain their germination power for years and years. For example, Amaranthus spp produces up to 235,000 seeds per plant cycle, and is regarded as a pesky weed by many farmers, whereas it has also been a staple food for more than 4,000 years in central America. Perennial weed species propagate vegetatively - through rootstocks, tubers, rhizomes (stems) or through "running" across the soil surface. Another thing weeds have in common is their reason to exist and why they shoot up so fast and in such large numbers on barren land. When we clear native vegetation is cleared, plough the soil and establish annual or perennial crops, we are in fact defying the ecological succession of the course of nature. We are thus holding back the process of natural plant succession, which really aims at changing the environment back into its previous state as a forest. Weeds are pioneer crops and thrive on soils with low fertility and low plant diversity. In that respect weeds are also telling us that things are none too bright in the soil. For shifting cultivators, for instance, the start of excessive weed growth has always been the signal to pack up and move on.

**The wicked witchweed**

Striga or witchweed (Striga hermonthica) is well on its way to joining the list of the world’s worst weeds, and is already top of list of many an African farmer. It is a parasitic weed that penetrates the roots of other plants, diverting nutrients and water from the host plant and thus stunt- ing their growth. Striga occurs mainly in cereal crops, such as maize, sorghum, fonio and millet, but Striga spp. also affects cowpeas and groundnuts. It has infested mainly the savanna areas in Africa and accounts for an estimated loss of 40 million tonnes of cereal annually continent-wide. Striga especially hits Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Mali, Nigeria, Sudan and Togo, but it is also present in the eastern and southern parts of the continent.

In Kenya, striga is being fought off by planting desmodium (see box). The International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (IITA) in Nigeria has devoted years to developing resistance in cereals against striga. By combining resistance in certain maize races with varieties that have a good productivity, several researchers have managed to breed striga tolerance in maize. Calliandra calothyrsus and Croton mega- localpus, both popular agroforestry tree species, release allelopathic (growth inhibiting) compounds into the environment which reduces striga infestation.

The most straightforward method of weed control, after all is said and done, is probably through a combination of mea- sures such as intercropping with N-fixing and Striga repelling plants, and maintain- ing or increasing soil fertility.

Weed may be harmful or hostile to another. And, as any other plant, they all have their preferences for temperature, soils, fertility and humidity. Small wonder that weeds occur between and around crops with similar preferences.

Weeds have things in common too. One classical farmer’s saying explains how to tell weeds from vegetables: ‘If you see anything growing, pull it out. If it starts to grow again, it was a weed.’ One trait of weeds is that they grow and propagate fast.

A third way is through the genetic alteration of crops, using conventional breeding techniques or genetic engineering, to increase the crop’s resistance or tolerance to weeds.

The commonest way to get rid of weeds is through tillage and weeding. Other cultural techniques, such as burning vegetation and ploughing the soil can be counter-productive since they create an ideal environment - or, to call a spade a spade, an ecological desert - for weeds to pop up and start their first phase of succession.

And the fifth way? Well, as with many things in life, a combination of approach- es can often yield the best result. If a good farmland is the reflection of a healthy natural ecosystem, where soil fertility is kept up in order and plant diversity mimics nature, then there is no need for noxious weeds to emerge in such large numbers. Where there’s a will, there’s a way. Where there’s a will, there’s no weed.
Methodology put to work

- After extensive preparation, the methodology for national stakeholders to establish their priority agricultural information themes is now nearing the application phase.

The methodology, which aims at strengthening capacities in the formulation, implementation and evaluation of agricultural policies, will be promoted through national bodies, national and regional workshops plus a wide range of customised information tools aimed at specific stakeholders such as decision makers, farmers’ groups, agricultural services, and the media. Many of the materials are summarised in a special CD-ROM.

These plans were drawn up at a regional workshop, with concrete activities already planned for Benin, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Côte d’Ivoire, Guinea Bissau, Niger, Senegal and Togo. The meeting was held in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso from 17 to 21 December 2001, under CTA auspices.

In line with the oft-prevailing practice of subsidiarity, whereby responsibility for an activity is held by the nearest competent body to its stakeholders, the national contact organisations committed themselves to drawing up their concrete plans of action during the first quarter of 2002. Similarly, the Workshop featuring the workshop’s Declaration of Ouagadougou and its report is hosted in Burkina Faso.

A follow-up regional workshop is slated for end-2002, to review progress in the promotion of the methodology at national level.

Website: www.cta.lipi.info.bf

For healthy animals

- The Department of Veterinary Medicine of the Prince Leopold Institute of Tropical Medicine (ITM) in Antwerp, Belgium is offering a diploma course on tropical animal health and production (CIPSAT) for veterinarians, biologists and agronomists. The course is offered annually from September to June.

The 2002-2003 course will be in French, and, in a new departure, the 2003-2004 course will be in English instead.

Photo S. Sprague © Panos Pictures

Vanilla

Vanilla fragrans is regarded to yield the best or ‘Bourbon’ quality, which is preferred for food-stuffs, like ice, cakes, chocolate and drinks. Vanilla tahitensis (South Pacific), V. java (Indonesia) and V. pompona (West Indies), yield vanillas that are used for flavouring tobacco, soaps, perfumes and medicines.

The average price for green vanilla in 2001 has been around €20/kg, which in 2000 was €13/kg and in 1999 only €4/kg. Prices for cured vanilla amount to approximately €160/kg for 2002, so eight times more than green beans fetch.

The steep price increase is also driving importers and processors to look for alternatives, both for the product as for the producers. Bioprocessing methods have been developed to harvest more fragrance per unit of cured vanilla and synthetic vanilla is being mixed with, or replacing natural vanilla. Nothing beats the real thing, though, and importers are actively looking for new producers. India and China have taken up vanilla production, but their first vanilla will not reach the market before 2003. Small wonder that last season vanilla growers in Tonga were surprised by incomes being hit hard by the process of liberalisation. How can micro-finance be used to greater effect in small family farming enterprises, without becoming the equivalent of income support? These were the issues examined in an international conference on the situation of micro-finance co-organised in Dakar, Senegal, in late January 2002 by Cirad, Endagraf, Cerise, CTA, IFAD, French cooperation and AFRA-CA. The 100 participating practitioners and policy-makers came from all points of the continent. Among their major concerns: the issue of so-called fungibility of loans, which melt into household incomes and are used for more purposes than intended before being repaid, and the rising importance of creating loan capital through savings and protecting it through insurance programmes. The clouds on their horizon - the eternal problem of combined excessive size, high costs and inadequate rates of interest - were not blown away.

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The seasonal cyclones stayed away from the Pacific Herbs Business Forum held in mid-February 2002 in Vanuatu. The winds of trade, though, blew like a gale through a sedate encounter of scientists, producers and traders of medicinal plants, blowing down quite a few illusions, and a fair number of business plans.

The problem at hand was the apparent collapse of the European market (literally on the other side of the world) for the kava plant and its by-products, and worries that the key North American market would go wobbly too. Kava consists of the dried, whole or cut rhizome (stem) or root of Piper methysticum Forster, and has been widely used throughout the Pacific for untold centuries in religious ceremonies, and as a relaxant and socialising substance.

With a surge in popularity in the West in the 1990s, and despite some health cautions, the region’s exports had risen to US$ 60 million (€ 69 million) by the end of the decade. Then came a problem of overstocking, followed by drastic allegations that some 20 deaths in northern Europe were related to kava consumption.

All it took was for a few European governments to ask their health sectors to ‘voluntarily withdraw’ kava products from shops, and the economies of several Pacific nations sagged immediately – although the smart ones had already been building up alternative exports, such as cloves, ginger, vanilla and flowers.

All this turned the three-day Forum into an non-stop 24 hours a day event: the days filled with a richly informative exchange of scientific and trading information on all sorts of medicinal plants. The nights, largely kava-free, bristled with Kava Crisis plans for lobbying the political and economic powers of the West to tone down the situation and seek a reasonable resolution.

Somewhat chastened by their vulnerability to the fickle nature of the medicinal plant market, and perhaps, some murmured, to more sinister corporate competition, the hundred-plus delegates from two dozen nations adopted plans to diversify products and avoid over-dependence on market leaders – the next one at risk seems to be noni, the juice of the fruit of the Morinda citrifolia L tree. The consensus is that strength lies in numbers and knowledge – an object well understood by co-sponsors Commonwealth Secretariat, CTA and CTA’s sister Centre for the Development of Enterprise. After a 2000 workshop in Africa, and this none-too pacific forum, plans are now being made for a Caribbean encounter.

Another blooming ACP winner

Kenya has taken over the top slot in global flower exports: exports in 2001 were up to 32 million kg of flowers by early October, compared with 38.2 million kg in the whole of 2000. Competitors countries have suffered setbacks: Latin American exporters such as Colombia have been hard-hit by economic recession, and Israeli growers, beset by their country’s clashes with the Palestinians, are tempted to switch investment to Kenya.

After a slight hiccup in growth caused by the El Nino storms of 1997-98, according to reports in The Nation newspaper, there are now about 1,000 hectares under glass. Growers employ between 40,000 to 50,000 people, and a similar number are involved in related businesses such as packaging.

The success story of this ACP country’s horticulture is relative. With foreign ownership dominant, many observers question the amount of economic gain to the country. And the world flower market is turning more and more into a “jungle” with no known cure against this disease nor its vector, which affected tomato cultivation in South Africa a few years ago is now spreading to neighbouring countries such as Botswana, Swaziland, Zambia and Zimbabwe. To date there is no known cure against this disease nor its vector, which developed resistance to insecticides. The virus can destroy an entire tomato harvest.

Kenya’s growing flowers are being sold to European dishes, with tomatoes taking the lead. The tomato yellow leaf curl disease, a viral disease transmitted by whiteflies, which affected tomato cultivation in South Africa a few years ago is now spreading to neighbouring countries such as Botswana, Swaziland, Zambia and Zimbabwe. To date there is no known cure against this disease nor its vector, which developed resistance to insecticides. The virus can destroy an entire tomato harvest.

Mali excels itself

Rice production in Mali continues to show a steady growth. The region’s largest rice producer attained 724,000 t in the 1999/2000 season; 743,000 t in the 2000/2001 season and 840,000 t in the last one. Climatic conditions have been favourable but production increase is can also be attributed to the adoption of high yielding varieties (Gambia and B9502) and a general modernisation of the country’s rice sector.
Extra income is peanuts

Dried, roasted or processed into peanut butter, peanuts mean money for millions of households. World peanut production is around 30 million tonnes, with China, USA, Argentina and India as major export producers. In Africa, the largest producers are Nigeria (2,800,000 t), Sudan (980,000 t) and Senegal (828,000 t). Peanuts are in fact grown in most ACP countries. Research on improved peanut varieties has for a long time been dormant, but the International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT), seems to be quickly making up for this (see also Spore 91).

For the past decade, research on groundnuts has focused on varieties that are suited for local conditions, such as drought, poor soils and a range of pests and diseases. In Africa, leaf spot, aflatoxin contamination, groundnut rosette and foliar disease often lead to considerable harvest losses.

In West Africa, ICRISAT has been releasing numerous disease-resistant varieties for testing among farmers. In Samanko, almost literally the back garden of the ICRISAT centre in Mali, a women's group has been successfully testing some of these varieties. In ideal conditions, a peanut harvest can amount to three tonnes per hectare but traditional varieties in Mali do not yield more than 500 kg/ha. In the tests, some new varieties are yielding more than 1 tonne/ha and are maturing in only 90 days instead of 115 days traditionally. The women determine which varieties pass the test and will be distributed to other regions. They have rejected certain lines of varieties with promising high yields, for one that has more attractive seeds or is more suitable for their goats.

It is, ICRISAT tell us, the women who are the major players. That, they say, is what participation is all about. We look forward to the women’s side of the story!

In brief

**Climate lends a hand**

Abundant and timely rainfall in Rwanda from September 2003 to January 2002 has resulted in a 30% increase in the country’s food crop production including maize and cassava. This increase does not mean a lasting improvement in the country’s agricultural sector and the food security situation remains vulnerable, especially in the provinces of Butare, Gikongoro and Gisenyi.

(IRIN, 20 February 2002)

**Zimbabwean farmers go east and west**

The Angolan government has allocated 10,000 hectares of arable land in Huambo province for Zimbabwean commercial farmers who have abandoned their land due to the political situation in Zimbabwe. These measures should create jobs and stimulate the local economy. Meanwhile, Mozambique has approved 80 requests from Zimbabwean commercial farmers to settle in Manica province.

**Sweet dreams are made of this**

With sugarcane grown in about 90 tropical countries, we nearly all know a local variety of tasty, fresh juice made from sugarcane, rich in energy, minerals and vitamins. The juice’s value, however, is seriously limited by the fact that it only keeps for a couple of hours, because of the large amounts of germs. Besides, the liquid is cloudy and contains undesirable particles (colloidal impurities).

Researchers of the Plant Product Processing Department of the French West Indies-Guyana Research Centre (INRA) addressed this problem some years ago by developing a micro filtration process, sieving out the unwanted parts without affecting its original taste.

The refined method has now been patented and a company - JUCANN'Tech - had been launched to develop sugarcane-juice based products. Their first product is a soft drink, but the research and development company foresees products such as sweet wines, ice creams and sports drinks.

**Accesssible science**

The two leading magazines Nature and Science have opened a website on scientific news related to development issues. It has regional options, book reviews, job opportunities and a very handy ‘How do I?’ section with practical tips for http://www.scidev.net/archives/writing a scientific paper, applying for grants or becoming a science journalist.

Website: www.scidev.net
Strike a happy medium

When you’re a smallholder farmer, it is not always easy to get your inputs since many traders only sell in bulk, charge extra for small quantities or only sell in towns and cities. Being an independent and a small rural business, making contact with giant agriculture suppliers can be equally difficult. To improve this situation, Care Zambia launched the Rural Enterprise and Agribusiness Promotion (REAP) programme in 1999. Its aim is to support local business people to supply farmers in remote rural areas with necessary inputs while reducing real and opportunity costs. It also provides farmers a channel to sell the farm outputs to urban based buyers, through the same local traders. REAP thus wants to create networks of community based agri-traders and provide a channel for dissemination of market information to smallholder farmers. The programme involves not only loans to start-up small businesses, organising transport and building up stocks of inputs, but it also includes a training programme. This covers financial management, book keeping, accounting, stock taking and doing deals with companies as their supplier and their retail outlet. The input stocks, which are allowed to be built up to a certain level, serve as collateral for the loans. So far, REAP has trained 27 agents, who serve approximately 5,400 rural families, with inputs from 8 agri-suppliers.

A general lesson from the programme is that these services, which were often provided by now-defunct marketing boards, sometimes need a good push to get off the ground, and cannot always be expected to take shape spontaneously.

A CARE-Zambia
P O Box 36238
Lusaka, Zambia
Fax: +260 1 26 50 60
Email: info@carezam.org
Website: www.carezambia.org

The wealth of a visit

In Malawi, there is a vernacular proverb that “Knowledge is wealth”. Agroforestry workers from eastern and southern Africa went to Malawi and Zambia in January looking for that wealth, and they found it. It was at the end of an intensive two-week study visit jointly organised by the Malawi Agroforestry Research Project and CTA that the workers realised that they had made a fortune in a couple of weeks. They had learned about several technologies in use in both countries to address major land-use problems affecting the productivity of small-scale farmers. Low soil fertility, soil degradation and a shortage of firewood, poles and timber. The technologies, which the participants came across in Malawi include relay-cropping of sesbania and maize, intercropping of gliricidia and maize, fodder banks, developing woodlots on steep slopes and tree planting along farm boundaries and in homesteads. The agroforestry workers found much of the wanted wealth when they visited the fields where farmers are applying the technologies, with technical advice from researchers. They witnessed at first hand what thousands of the country’s farmers are achieving by successfully testing technologies to improve their yields, and to sustainably produce other necessities like firewood. They also learned how farmers are themselves experimenting with the technologies and providing researchers with feedback on performance. This is used to redesign and fine-tune the technologies.

The agroforestry workers – 19 from eight countries – really came out of their exhilarating time together wealthier in knowledge, which they seem eager to translate into wealth in their respective countries.

September strategising

The ‘European Forum for Rural Development Cooperation’ will be held in Montpellier, France, 4-6 September 2002. Organiser: the European Commission with France’s foreign affairs ministry, donor and CTA support, and much Southern partner input. Some highlights: assessing farmers’ organisations, viable rural finance and pro-poor research. The 200 participants will come by invitation only, but work is in hand to make the event more inclusive – maybe electronically.

Fruitful networks

The Caribbean regional networking system for agriculture, science and technology (Procaribe) has launched two new sub-networks: the Caribbean Roots and Tubers Network (CAROT) launched in September 2001 in Dominican and the Caribbean Vegetable Network (CARYVEG) launched in October 2001 in Guyana.

Samoan medicine; Samoan patent

A Samoan medicine against hepatitis made from the Mamala tree (Homalanthus Nutans) is currently being investigated by the AIDS Research Alliance (ARA), a non profit research organisation based in the USA. The substance – Prostratin – is believed to have a positive effect against the AIDS virus. The first results are very promising. Already in 1990, 38 local leaders in Samoa and the US National Institutes of Health obtained a patent on Prostratin if it were to be used in the struggle against AIDS.

Gum to keep desert in place

The US Agency for International Development (USAID), the American Soft Drink Association and the Importer Services Corporation (ISC) have signed an agreement with various states in northern Nigeria to expand the production of Arabic gum (Acacia). USAID will invest $7 million US$ (€ 7,95 million) to expand the area under gum cultivation by 500,000 hectares a year. ISC agreed to buy the region’s entire gum production.
Funding strategies

Find your funds

The smart way to get funds these days is through investment. But grants are still available, so why not use those too?

Are you looking for funds for equipment to expand your production or processing or marketing capacity? Or funds to strengthen your organisation through training? This article takes a look at ways for local organisations (NGOs and community-based organisations - CBOs) to mobilise reasonable sums, in the range of €100 to €50,000, to supplement their own.

This important exercise can be as time-consuming as it can be rewarding. In the beginning, there are four fundamental principles to follow:

Know what you want. Your goal and your project must be clear to you and your colleagues, in every possible detail. What equipment or training do you need, how will it improve your work in a permanent way? How will you use the funds? How will you replace them? Sometimes you may want help in working this out, and that process may itself need funds, such as hiring an advisor or organising a stakeholder workshop. Some funders, such UNDP/GEF (see below), can assist there.

Invest in your future. You are probably looking for a grant, but look at it as an investment or a loan and not as a gift. At some time in the future, you will need to replace, maybe even upgrade, your equipment when it is depreciated, or to develop the skills learned in training. So, using some of the additional income from wise use of your grant, build up some savings to finance that replacement, just like businesses do for new equipment. Some funders do not allow their money to be used directly to build up reserves, but no wise funder will object to you expanding your income.

Choose your words well. Funders follow fashions, and they often talk a different "language" to yours. You may want more funds to improve crop yields, or storage facilities, and they may need to believe that they are financing "empowerment", or "gender equity" or "natural resource management". Here, you need to honestly and creatively translate your goals into the funders' way of seeing the world.

Work through the UN Development Programme and its national offices (or through a NGO secretariat), the SGP funds projects, maximum US$ 50,000, in many areas of work shared by Spore readers. Indeed, the SGP directory lists dozens of Spore users.

The SGP regards itself, with some justification, as embodying the very essence of sustainable development. It supports projects that conserve and restore the natural world while enhancing well-being and livelihoods. The re-use of agricultural waste, rural micro-hydro power for agricultural processing, mangrove preservation, medicinal plant cultivation, agroforestry, organic agriculture and grey water cleansing for urban farming are among their recent approvals.

The first steps to persuade the SGP to be a financial partner in your work is to explain how your project can make a positive contribution to the world environment, if replicated over time. They look at the world from three perspectives: biodiversity, climate change and international waters - all subjects regularly covered in Spore.

On biodiversity, you must promote the conservation and sustainable use of biological resources in arid-and semi-arid ecosystems, and in coastal, forest and mountain areas. The project can thus cover sensible agricultural methods as much as fencing off a national park.

The same applies in climate change: you must demonstrate how you remove local barriers to energy conservation and energy efficiency, or promote the adoption of renewable energy.

The international waters focal area is more restricted, since it addresses environmental concerns in a waterbody shared by two or more countries.

All activities should be strong in community participation, gender issues, indigenous knowledge and local institutions. Grants can be for pilot projects, training, best practice and networking. Micro-grants, typically US$ 2,000, go to community-based planning processes to design larger projects.

Each country's structure, dominated by NGOs and CBOs, has locally defined criteria. It is best to contact the SGP directly through the national UNDP office. Otherwise, use the informative Website www.undp.org/spore or contact the main office. If your country does not yet qualify, keep asking! Sixty-three countries are eligible for SGP grants, but more should join the list soon - it includes countries which have ratified the world's Conventions on Biological Diversity and Climate Change.

Plan your projects is like being a good tailor: a stitch in time saves nine.

Put a UN jewel in your crown

Dreams do come true! Here's a fund which is open, focused and responsive. It's the Small Grants Programme (SGP), set up under the Global Environment Facility in 1992, and set to expand after the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg in September 2002.

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The ancient art of innovation

Are you an innovator or an inventor? With much talk these days about “innovation approaches” it’s important to know. An innovator introduces something new; an inventor just thinks something up. Maybe you are both. The bridge from fantasy to the field can be straightforward. In the foreword to Enabling Innovation, the Dutch social scientist Niels Röling pithily observes that scientists see themselves as sources of innovation, but it is in the transfer and application that the real creativity and hard work lies. That argument is backed up by a fascinating ride through a brilliantly written, almost novel-like, landscape of tales of innovation. They bring together cases in wind energy, computer systems and a wide range of agricultural technologies (mainly on rice) – all requiring the spark of human ingenuity. Without that, the author prods, how will the second Green Revolution ever happen?

That spark is so often found in the hands of the small farmer, as Farmer innovation in Africa explains. There are dozens of meticulously detailed cases of how women and men producers have changed methods of plant breeding, soil conservation, cultivation, communication, marketing, you name it, all across the continent. The authors’ special gift is the infectious way they comment on the strengths and weaknesses, and chances of success, of each innovation. By the end of the book, you could be doing it yourself.

Farmer Innovation in Africa
A Source of Inspiration for Agricultural Development
GBP18.95 + e 30.70
Earthscan Publications Ltd
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London, N1 9YN, England
Fax: +44 20 72 78 11 42
Email: earthinfo@earthscan.co.uk
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What if the weather holds?
A rapid qualitative assessment of the effects of the drought that has been wreaking havoc in Kenya since 1998. The book investigates the public and private structures and programmes in place to counter the negative impact of drought and recommends improved coping strategies.

Devastating drought in Kenya: Environmental impacts and responses
US$ 20 + e22.70
Stock number: 3006
Earthprint Ltd.
PO Box 119, Stevenage
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Fax: +44 1438 748 844
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With wildlife in mind
Nowadays, conservation of natural resources and wildlife can only be successful, many claim, if it goes hand in hand with rural development and is community-based. These case studies examine the success and failure of community-based approaches throughout Africa in terms of development and conservation goals. Not yet the same, a shame.

African wildlife & Livelihoods
The voices of the workshop haven’t faded away yet but the proceedings are already here (see Spore 96, News in Brief) – a fine example of sharing a message while it is still fresh.

ISBN 90 6754 609 3
A limited number of copies is available free of charge.
GTZ GmbH, OE 4556
Managing Agrobiodiversity in Rural Areas
PO Box 5180
65726 Eschborn, Germany
Fax: +49 6196 79 65 54
Email: gerlinde.quiter@gtz.de
The publication is available online at: www.agricta.org/pubs/agrobiodiversity

Mangoes are essential eating in the Caribbean. Their nutritional value – vitamin A and C, calcium, iron and thiamin – well exceeds that of other fruits. This comprehensive manual lays down the rich local knowledge about Caribbean mangoes for posterity, and to stimulate their production, processing and marketing. It focuses on Julie mango, the uncrowned queen of Caribbean varieties, with practical and technical chapters on establishing and maintaining a mango orchard, potential pests, diseases and their treatment and on the economics, marketing, processing and exporting Julie.

Although the knowledge collected originates from experiences in the Eastern Caribbean, the information provided in the manual is readily transferable to other countries in the region.

Julie mango in the Eastern Caribbean
A comprehensive manual
CTA number 1073, 10 credit points
Available from CARDI for Caribbean countries (address see page 9).

We love Julie

Endline Evaluation of the STARDROP project on smallholder mango in the Eastern Caribbean
It focuses on Julie production, processing and marketing. It discusses the significant role that producers have played in the marketing, communication, marketing, you name it, all across the continent. The authors’ special gift is the infectious way they comment on the strengths and weaknesses, and chances of success, of each innovation. By the end of the book, you could be doing it yourself.

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Julie mango in the Eastern Caribbean
A comprehensive manual
CTA number 1073, 10 credit points
Available from CARDI for Caribbean countries (address see page 9).

Fruits: the flower of commodities
Here we have an attractive and mouth-watering booklet about fruits in the Pacific. After the Leaves we eat and the Staples we eat, this manual describes well-known tropical fruits – banana, pineapple, citrus, coconut and mango – and local favourites such as kavika, nandau and wi.

The fruits we eat discuss the value of fruits, and their taste, smell, texture and nutritional qualities. Some 27 fruits are described, illustrated together with their respective uses and common preparations. Another chapter compares their composition and nutritional value, before a concluding glimpse at the future and potential of fruits in the Pacific are briefly set out.

Compiled by the Secretariat of the Pacific Community, this is a useful booklet for people working in the field of food and nutrition, health, agriculture and extension or education.

The fruits we eat
CTA number 1072, 20 credit points
An instructive and moving story

Zephaniah Phiri, a smallholder farmer in the communal area of Zvishavane, in southern Zimbabwe, is not just a smallholder farmer. He has an innovative mind and over his long years of farming, he experimented with great courage and risk, and transformed his own - once marginal - farm and those of his neighbours and countless visitors into fertile smallholdings.

He applied water harvesting and conservation techniques, got dried-up streams carrying water again and eventually established one of the first indigenous NGOs in Zimbabwe - the Zvishavane Water Project.

Nonetheless, the water harvester is not really about water harvesting nor the techniques that Phiri developed successfully. These are documented in other books and studies.

In the book he tells his own life story, in his own words, about his youth, when he discovered that being black in your own country meant something different than being white. About his first steps towards water harvesting and wetlands creation, which brought him into trouble with the colonial regime. He describes the horrific, painful and confusing years of the liberation struggle in Rhodesia, before the country gained independence in 1980 and became Zimbabwe.

It explains his survival strategies. It sheds light on his wisdom and vision, sprouting from his day-to-day real life experiences. The story is poignant and inspiring, modest and therefore impressive.

A beautiful account of the power of self-reliance.

The Water Harvester
GBP 10.95 • € 17.70
African Books Collective
The Jam Factory
27 Park End Street
Oxford OX1 1HU, England
Fax: +44 1865 793 288
Email: abc@afribookscollective.com

Local forests’ management bears fruit

More proof that management of forests works best when based on local concepts and perceptions is provided by Paul Kerkhof in Local forest management in the Sahel.

As long as management is more representative of the most important users, it will be more efficient and just than government-run forestry organisations are.

Instead of addressing forest management in compartmentalised aspects of agro-ecological and socio-economic features, Kerkhof takes reality as the starting point. He describes concrete forestry management techniques, such as the tiger system in Niger (tigerskin-like patches of forest), as well as the role of pastoralists and livestock in the management of forests. The role that trees, woods and forest by-products play in family’s and community’s survival strategies is also well covered.

Most examples are derived from projects in Mali, Niger and Sudan, and data from Burkina Faso and Chad are incorporated. The book stands out for its clarity and pithiness.

Local forest management in the Sahel
Towards a new social contract
Copies available on request.
SOS Sahel International
1 Tolpuddle Street
London N1 0XT
England
Fax: +44 20 7837 0856
Email: mail@sahel.org.uk

Published in • PAGE 12

The arena of natural resources

This collection of 14 case studies - two in French - argues that natural resources management is all about politics. National plans and policies are informed determined by donors and global discourses whilst at farm level, NRM is the object of power struggles about property rights and access to land and resources.

Politics, property and production in the West African Sahel.
Understanding natural resources management
Edited by T A Benjaminsen & C Lund, Nordic Africa Institute, Sweden, 2001. 335 pp. ISBN 91 7106 476 1
SEK 280 • €331.05
The Nordic Africa Institute
PO Box 1703
SE-751 47 Uppsala, Sweden
Fax: +46 18 56 22 90
Email: info@nai.uu.se

Maize for sale

An informative account of the changing socio-economic environment for local traders in eastern Uganda, caused by the liberalisation of food markets and the shift from trade in cash crops to food crops. The role of three markets - relief programmes, neighbouring Kenya and the domestic market – in establishing new local trade relations is extensively described.

Money is the true friend. Economic practice, morality and trust among the Iganga maize traders in Uganda
By P Sarensen, Apad – Lit verlag
Lit verlag
Grevenerstr. 179
DE-48159 Münster, Germany
Fax: +49 251 23 19 72
Email: lit@lit-verlag.de
Website: www.lit-verlag.de/cgi-local/

Save the catch

The management of fishery resources would yield better results if seen as part of the entire marine ecosystem and if all stakeholders were involved in policy making and decision-making on fisheries and marine conservation.

For what it is worth, 50 million of the world’s 51 million fishers/fish are in small-scale fisheries in the developing world - catching half the world’s annual marine fish catch.

Managing small-scale fisheries. Alternative directions and methods
CAD 35 • € 25.10
IDRC
PO Box 8500
Ottawa, Ontario
Canada K1G 3H9
Email: pubs@idrc.ca

String along with researchers

The days are over when researchers and extensionists arrived in their 4-wheel drives in your village, jumped down and started to ask all kinds of imper-
Wonders never cease

Its seeds clear the muriest water. Its wood yields a blue dye and its leaves can be readily eaten by every farm animal, including the carp and tilapia in your fish ponds. We are talking about the moringa tree (Moringa spp). No less than nineteen distinctly different uses can be attributed to this ‘miracle tree’. This manual of the same name takes you round the wondrous world of this multi-purpose and increasingly multi-popular agroforestry tree.

Besides introductory chapters about the history, biology and uses of moringa, specific chapters deal with the nutritional values of the edible parts, such as seeds, flowers, leaves and leaf powder; with the quality of seed oil and with pressing techniques to obtain the moringa oil. A brief chapter provides a couple of recipes that include moringa.

For a healthy corral, run, herd or flock

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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 CTAs list from our commercial distributor: Triops, Hinterhurgerstrasse 33, D-64295 Darmstadt, Germany. Fax: +49 6151 314 048. Email: triops@net-library.de; Website: www.net-library.de/triops.html

Fix it, nitrogen!

A fully updated and up-to-date standard work on nitrogen fixation by leguminous plants. It encompasses scientific advances at both fundamental and applied levels, making it an important book for those researching in the fields of microbiology and crop and soil sciences.

Nitrogen fixation in tropical cropping systems. 2nd edition

Add fish to your dish

A well-illustrated and practical manual on how to integrate agriculture and aquaculture (IAA) in various ways. Most cases described are situated in Asia, but the manual serves as a source of inspiration and practical ideas on how to introduce and develop IAA principles.

Integrated agriculture – aquaculture. A primer

The language of agriculture

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The language of agriculture
**Strategic plan**

**Wider, deeper, higher**

This is the age of the network, where any person on earth can reach any other person by passing through no more than three intermediaries, and without even using mass media. This simple sentence and its simplicity does not always work, not least in the sharing of agricultural information and knowledge — was a networker’s mantra in the 1970s and 1980s. CTA, established in 1984, was created at the dawn of the age of the network. That, though, was in the framework and with the values of a previous age, as expressed by the Lomé Convention, itself drawn up in the first half of the 1970s. Now, as the Centre approaches its third decade, it has moved with the times and taken steps to become a genuine networking organisation. The world in which it operates, and whose agricultural sector it serves, in the ACP countries, has changed significantly of late. The Cotonou Agreement has succeeded Lomé state interventions have shrunk and civil society expanded; hierarchies have melted into ‘flat organisations’, partnerships resonate everywhere, and information and communication technologies (ICTs) have revolutionised many people’s lives and relationships.

The information needs of the CTA constituency have changed, in nature and number. So too have the responses to those needs. Both are wider, deeper and higher. No wonder then, that the Centre’s operations have been retuned and refocused, under a new Strategic Plan and Framework for Action for the period 2001 – 2005.

**Multiplication**

According to the Director of CTA, Carl B Greenidge, in an interview with Spore, the Plan marks a shift in emphasis within the core objectives of CTA. The direct delivery of information will continue, sometimes more compactly, and ever sharper, with steps to maximise its effectiveness. More emphasis will go to helping partners and beneficiaries to plug into networks and to have active interactions with other stakeholders, as well as generally raise skills in information and communication management.

The real strategic change in the Plan is the deliberate use of a ‘multiplier’ strategy. The Centre will seek to multiply the impact of its work, to work with beneficiaries who can multiply the worth of the information they use by sharing it with others, and to strengthen the multiplying capacities of its partners.

In practice, this means working, directly or indirectly, with organisations at every level, from regional to national to local, and from ministries to farmers’ organisations or women’s groups. Since an organisation is composed of individuals working together, it cannot be said that CTA will not work with individuals, but it will do so only in a collective context, where information is shared in an organised way. Which way that is will depend on each given situation, in what Greenidge calls a ‘horses for courses’ approach.

**Digital**

The second change in the Plan is the greater use of ‘modern’ ICTs to prepare, distribute and process information, alongside more traditional forms. In concrete, this means much greater use of electronic publishing, computer-based networks, plus media such as radio and, where possible, satellite. In a pilot project currently under preparation, Spore will be distributed by satellite in the near future, alongside its traditional print and Internet versions.

The Plan outlined three service-based departments which are now several months into their operations: Information Products and Services; Communication Channels and Services, and Information Communication Management (ICM) Skills and Systems. These will be supported by common services from a department of Planning and Corporate Services which includes ‘cross-cutting issues’ of ICTs, social capital and gender, common to all the Centre’s work. This is one way in which staff will be empowered through an enhanced awareness of broader issues. Another is through a series of internal seminars, in which the topics of genetically-modified organisms and gender have already been covered.

The most significant facet of the whole Plan is the recognition of the human element in networking. Most institutions have a blinkered approach here, seeing networks as only mechanistic relationships between institutions, or computers linked to each other. The CTA Strategic Plan, thankfully, goes further. Greenidge: “It’s about the use of social networks. If partnership is to mean anything, we need to make more use of the informal networks around which people cooperate in the rural sector.” This is a good example of the “being more imaginative” approach which he expects of the Centre.

Another is his expectation of Spore “it needs to challenge the readers more in terms of content and raise more questions, rather than (only) providing a non-controversial package.” We’re hearing you, Mr Greenidge, it’s music to our ears.

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**Mailbox**

The people who handle the mail at CTA have been swimming in an extra flood these last few weeks, with so many letters for the User Survey. Please do keep writing in — with your normal mail too. As well as your news, views and queries, we love the photos and drawings. It all helps us to explain our work to our colleagues, and neighbours. Even the man from the Post Office who carries the mail bag gets interested!

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**That stamps him**

- We know, from your comments, that the articles in Spore are extremely well read. But a letter sent in by Abayneh Mekonnen, from North Shoa, Ethiopia, wins the prize for attention to detail. He reads even the texts on the stamps in Mailbox and discovered his own name on one of them in Spore 96. It is similar to the local name of the Blue Nile “one of the largest rivers in the country. It starts from Lake Tana, in the northern part of Ethiopia.” Now that’s a new way to “Go with the flow”!

**From top to bottom**

- From Messa, Cameroon, Jean Marie Hermann writes in with a question, and to explain how the content of Spore is being disseminated in his company, the SEP/MH N. “As soon as the new copy arrives, the management reads it thoroughly and pulls out the major themes of importance to us. It then passes them on to the extension workers, and to the village community which is going to participate in our training seminars. We would also like to know if CTA could provide us with information about the
olive tree: how to grow it, its products and where we can get some. Does it grow in humid tropical areas?

Sorry, Mr Hermann, but CTA does not have any publication on the cultivation of olive trees. It will not grow in most ACP climates. It is a hardy tree, not difficult to please, and it can stand high temperatures. It does need, however, a humid cold winter (average 3 °C) to produce its olive fruits, and it will not grow at altitudes higher than 600 m. It grows mainly around the Mediterranean Sea in Algeria, Tunisia, Turkey, Greece, Italy and Spain, in New Zealand, in south-western parts of the United States of America, and – the only ACP location – in South Africa. Its major product is the fruit, which is used as a food, and for pressing a cooking and eating oil.

Pass by, call in

In Spore 94 we featured a cocoa poster, published by the Farming World Services, Box 294, Ikom, Cross River State, Nigeria; email: farmingworld2000@yahoo.com. The coordinator of FWS, Henry Ogar Etta, writes in to announce that “Cross River State of Nigeria has taken the lead in sustainable agricultural development, especially in cocoa, oil palm and pineapple cultivation. In fact, she recently won a national award for her efforts. FWS would like to keep the tempo going by raising improved nursery seedlings for distribution to rural farmers and by encouraging organic cocoa farming.” The FWS runs an lively and well-filled information resource centre (see photo). Stop by and drop in, if you’re in the area. It’s well worth a visit.

User Survey
And the winners are …

By 1 February 2002, responses to the “How do you use Spore” survey had been received from 957 readers. In fact, several hundred responses have since been received, and they will be included in the analysis, to be published soon.

On 1 March, the prize draw was held at CTA headquarters. The numbers of the 957 responses were put in a bowl, and three were drawn out at random by the CTA Director, Carl B Greenidge. The lucky numbers (14, 261 and 523) relate to Mr H M Tesfaye, researcher entomologist at the Wonji Shoa Sugar Cane Research and Training Centre in Ethiopia; Mr J T M amman, zonal facilitator of the People-Oriented Development organisation of Ecwa, a holistic development programme in Kaduna State, Nigeria; and Mr Getachew Nigussie Mekonnen, assistant veterinarian at the Ministry of Agriculture in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Each receive extra CTA credit points and/or Spore subscriptions.

Congratulations to the three winners! Thanks too to everyone who has written, faxed, phoned and emailed their responses, or given them on the Website. Each of you will receive a special reward in recognition of your trouble. And all readers, responding or not, will be further rewarded with a re-focus of Spore, based on your expressed needs.

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). Publishing: Technical Centre for Agricultural and Rural Cooperation (CTA) - ACP-EC Cotonou Agreement CTA: Postbus 380, 6700 AJ Wageningen, The Netherlands Tel: +31 317 467100 Fax: +31 317 460067 Email: cta@cta.nl Website: www.cta.nl Email for readers’ letters: spore@cta.nl

Compiler: Spore is compiled by a consortium formed by Louma productions and Médiateurs. Louma productions, 3 rue Neuve, 34150 Aniane, France Fax: +33 467 570 180 Email: louma@louma.fr Médiateurs, W-Alexanderpoort 46, 1421 CH Uithoorn, The Netherlands Fax: +31 297 540 514 Email: info@spore-magazine.org

This issue was compiled by Marcel Chimwala, O’Neil Cuffe, Bernard Favre, Singy Hanyona, Erik Heijmans, Catherine Marzin, Paul Osborn, Jacques Sultan, Christine Tissot

Layout: Louma productions
Printer: Imprimerie Publice, France © CTA 2002 - ISSN 1011-0054

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A question of confidence

Jane Kyomuhendo Baitwa runs the information service of the Uganda National Farmers’ Federation (UNFFE) – formerly the UNFA association – in Kampala and is editor of their Farmers’ Voice magazine. She is a trained journalist with radio experience, and with a master’s degree in political science from Makerere University.

S
y, she has just said, intoning it three times, that “Information is power”. Why is that so important to her? “When someone has information and knowledge, they have confidence, and the skills to take informed decisions.” Is she saying that a person is only a full person when they have full confidence, that some people work with are not full people, not full farmers? In a way, she agrees. Some farmers do not have full confidence, even though they and their predecessors may have been farming for centuries. They have information about practical aspects, of course, but they do not have enough about the market. If you’re a farmer and don’t know what the market demand is, you may be producing maize very well, according to best farming practices, but there may be no market. And then you lose interest in your maize, because it has lost its value for you.

What about the power angle, we wonder? Our work, Jane reflects, is about people having the power and confidence that comes from being informed. Most times people fear to stand up and speak, because they’re not so sure whether they are going when I ask them for an article, they may feel they have other, more important work.

Do people really still think like that, we prompt her, in the 21st century, in the information age, do some people resist? Not outright, we are assured, not intentionally. The thing is that most people do not appreciate information because it is not tangible, you cannot touch and feel it.

An extension worker can tell a farmer about growing maize, about the spacing to use, and she shows the spacing; or about seeds, and she shows the seeds, and the farmer can appreciate. With information, it does not feel so immediate.

She leans forward, wanting to sound more positive. Some people do appreciate information, though. Some farmers write into the Farmers’ Voice (FV) magazine. We joke, in passing, about how readers’ letters are at the front of her magazine and at the back in Spore, and about which is better. She tells of a farmer in the central region, whom she met at a workshop on effective communication. He told her “I read an article about a farmer in another part of the country growing passion fruit and oranges, and I thought if my fellow farmer can do it, why not me?” Passion fruit is now his major source of income, and he is better able to survive. What he impressed on his fellow participants in the workshop was to appreciate knowledge, and to always seek it. For him, knowledge changed his life.

There was another farmer I wrote about, he didn’t know English, so he couldn’t read it himself. He was read about even in Denmark, where UNFFE’s major donor is. A Danish farmers’ organisation got interested, and when they sent a film crew to Uganda they visited him. Finally he was given a special course in extension work, because he was seen as a farmer who can pass on knowledge to his fellow farmers. Believe you and me, he has become very confident; when he comes to the office now, he’s not the same person I met the first time on his farm. He’s blossomed, he’s come and asked for this and that, knowing that he knows what other people want to know.

Is everyone special like that farmer, we wonder? Not everyone, some read and yet thing, appreciate it and put it into practice, others will not do anything concrete. Is information, we chip in, a lot like seeds falling on fertile or stony ground, as in the Biblical tale? Jane develops the idea: it’s not a question of stony ground. The land may well be fertile, but it may need rainfall. Some information may fall on its fertile land but it lacks rain. People’s energy can do the same to information as rainfall to a seed.

She talks proudly about her organisation’s radio shows, its cassette libraries for farmers in six languages. About how each copy of FV is read by four people, how it reaches schools, how she wants to increase circulation above the current ceiling of 2,000 and finance it with advertising.

What has disappointed her? The printed press’s scant coverage of agriculture. The attitudes of journalists wanting ‘facilitation’ and editors putting in news about growing beans, but not bigger issues which affect policy. She fires herself up and talks about holding a workshop for journalists, to win their pens.

Does she have a dream, a professional dream? Her eyes glitter more, her hand strokes the air firmly. I want to be in a network, helping get the right information to the farmers. There’s a need for a one-stop shop but it hasn’t happened yet because people – she means investors, support agencies – have not appreciated the value of information circulating. But, we all know, they haven’t met Jane – yet. Confidence personified.

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

Jane is of the new generation of information professionals: open, enthusiastic, committed, demand-responsive. Between workshops at a CTA seminar on farmers’ organisations, she spoke with Spore about her work, deeds and dreams.

Listen in to a chat under a tree.

"People’s energy can do to information what rainfall does to a seed ..."