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Respect through farming

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Farmer Field Schools in Egypt provide young women an opportunity to discuss issues that concern them.

Photo: Hans Feijen.

The editors have taken every care to ensure that the contents of this magazine are as accurate as possible. The authors have ultimate responsibility, however, for the content of individual articles.

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6 Addressing the conditions for getting out of poverty



Silvio Gomes de Almeida, Paulo Petersen, Adriana Galvão Freire and Luciano Silveira

Worldwide, thousands of projects and programmes aim to reduce poverty. But, what does it mean to be poor? An NGO in Brazil studied this and concluded that, apart from economic poverty, the feeling of being cut off from opportunities in society makes people feel poor. Programmes were re-designed to build on farmers' own livelihood strategies and link them to government initiatives such as credit and access to land programmes. The combination appeared to provide powerful ways out of poverty.

12 Farmer Field Schools in traditional societies: From technical to social issues

Hans Feijen

Originally, Farmer Field Schools (FFSs) were meant to help farmers develop their own understanding of the complex interactions between plants, pests and natural enemies. In a traditional Islamic region in Egypt, agricultural technology is a relatively neutral starting point for male and female farmers to join extension activities. As a FFS project developed, farmers chose to deal with more and more non-agricultural subjects. Slowly, women farmers were able to discuss important issues such as women's rights, female health, as well as practicalities such as how to obtain official identity cards.



LEISA is about Low External Input and Sustainable Agriculture. It is about the technical and social options open to farmers who seek to improve productivity and income in an ecologically sound way. LEISA is about the optimal use of local resources and natural processes and, if necessary, the safe and efficient use of external inputs. It is about the empowerment of male and female farmers and the communities who seek to build their future on the basis of their own knowledge, skills, values, culture and institutions. LEISA is also about participatory methodologies to strengthen the capacity of farmers and other actors to improve agriculture and adapt it to changing needs and conditions. LEISA seeks to combine indigenous and scientific knowledge, and to influence policy formulation to create an environment conducive for its further development. LEISA is a concept, an approach and a political message.

ILEIA is the Centre for Information on Low External Input and Sustainable Agriculture. ILEIA seeks to promote the adoption of LEISA through the LEISA magazines and other publications. It also maintains a specialised information database and an informative and interactive website on LEISA (www.leisa.info). The website provides access to many other sources of information on the development of sustainable agriculture.

Readers are welcome to photocopy and circulate articles.

Please acknowledge the LEISA Magazine and send us a copy of your publication.

32 Rice production gives hope to neglected villages

Muideen Salawu

Iyowe village in Nigeria lies in a region with little hope for development. Students passing through the area found that local farmers had opportunities for producing rice. Together they formed a small group that started growing and marketing this crop. The first harvest coincided with an increase in demand and prices, so that now neighbouring farmers want to learn from the pioneers and join the group.



34 Home gardens are within reach of marginalised people

Rojee Suwal, Bimal Raj Regmi, Bhuwon Sthapit and Arjina Shrestha

People with low status in rural Nepal often have small plots of land around their houses that they can use. Such plots are particularly meaningful for women as they can cultivate them alongside their household duties. A project supported such people to turn small bare plots into rich vegetable gardens. This helped to produce additional vegetables, but also improved their status in the village, as they had seeds and vegetables to offer.

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DEAR READERS

The *LEISA Magazine* is an opportunity for people working with smallholder farmers to share lessons from development efforts. Developing this idea, in the last issue we presented two views about one topic, Effective Micro-organisms. This generated such good debate on the website that we will continue to present discussion topics in a new discussion section in the magazine. This time we present two views on a topic which has been much in the news recently: subsidised fertilizers for African farmers (see p. 16). This discussion will continue on our website. You are welcome to contribute your reactions, experiences and ideas. Please let us know what you think of this new section. You can suggest other topics, and we are also looking for a name for the section.

Smallholder farming is back on the development agenda. Three new members have been elected to the World Board of the International Federation for Organic Agriculture Movements (IFOAM), promising to defend the interests of smallholder farmers. The back page introduces you to one of these people, Roberto Ugás.

In 2009 the *LEISA Magazine* will celebrate its 25-year jubilee. To mark this occasion, we will highlight throughout the year the important role of family farming as a particular form of agriculture. We will present more details of our jubilee celebrations in the next issue.

We hope that you enjoy reading this issue and invite you to contribute valuable lessons from your own work with smallholder farming.

The Editors

Respect through farming

Editorial

“Before we started home gardening, these hands were put forward to receive vegetables from others, but now, they are put forward to offer some.” This is just one of the many quotes you will find in this issue of the *LEISA Magazine* about the potential of sustainable agriculture for “social inclusion”: how growing crops or keeping animals can help people to become more valuable and respected members of society.

What is social exclusion?

What makes you feel excluded, or left out, in your family, village or country? Gomes De Almeida *et al.* (p. 6) found that not being able to make your own living and being cut off from government or NGO services makes people feel that they have little hope to improve their lives. There are two fundamental causes. First, people may be physically disabled (e.g. blindness, or living with the effects of polio) or have mental health issues. Second, nearly everywhere in the world there are particular categories of people who get sidelined by society. There are structural inequalities that are determined by class, caste, gender and ethnicity. Immigrants have a lower status than original inhabitants, mountain people are given less attention than those who live in the plains. The effects of being sidelined often lead to other problems, like alcohol or drug addiction.

How can agricultural programmes support excluded or marginalised people to play a role in society? This is the question we asked ourselves and our readers. It is a difficult question as it is clear that social exclusion takes many different shapes. It may affect individual people and their families (as in the case of disabled people) or it may be structurally embedded in the entire society, as in the case of women’s positions.

Strategies for social inclusion will therefore be vastly different. In all situations, however, there are practical needs and interests to be addressed, as well as long-term concerns about structural improvement and removing the causes of exclusion. Many of the cases presented in this issue of the *LEISA Magazine* focus on the practical needs. However, by addressing them, we often see that something valuable gets unleashed: people who have been sidelined for so long are finding (or getting back) their strength and dignity. Such an empowerment process, once started, cannot be stopped any more. In due course the empowered people, be they a women’s Farmer Field School or a group of blind students, start addressing the more structural long term aspects of their position. Social inclusion is a collective process: it involves not only the individual disabled person but also his/her family and community. It requires that marginalised people get organised – whether in informal groups or in more formalised structures. Only when taking up the challenges collectively, can exclusion be overcome.

Disabled people grow crops and take part

We received some articles showing how social workers support mentally and physically challenged people to better their lives through farming. Van Dijk (p. 26) describes how a network of care farms in Europe helps physically disabled or mentally ill people to focus on their capabilities rather than on their problems. In Africa and Asia, schools or institutions for disabled people often have a horticulture or livestock component. These can supplement subsidies for schooling. On p. 28 and 29, Ngalim and Nkonde respectively show how troubled youths and visually impaired people successfully

grow crops in a formalised programme. For both groups such schooling can result in a return to society as a smallholder farmer. Other people, however, cannot become independent farmers and will need care the rest of their lives. In some parts of Africa, the number of orphans is growing so fast that only local communities can help them. Yet these communities also need support to raise the extra income this needs. Raising small livestock, like chickens, is an option, as Mukwaya demonstrates (p. 25). Agriculture thus can be a bridge between excluded people and society as a whole, on the condition that you closely study their limitations and capabilities, and help them develop the latter.

Insiders and outsiders

From the outside it may seem that traditional rural communities are close-knit entities wherein everybody has a role to play, and where the sick and weak are looked after; however this is often not the case. Rural life can be tough and survival strategies harsh. There are strict norms about what is right and wrong, clean and dirty, sane and insane. People can be blamed for witchcraft, households can be branded as “poisoned” or “dirty”, and roles are fixed rigorously across male/female lines. Traditional social bonds also mean that social punishment for doing things differently can be harsh.

The most common form of discrimination is that experienced by women. Several articles here describe how men eat first and women get what is left over. Older men marry young women who then become young widows, who often have no legal access to land. Women’s movement may be restricted, or women are not allowed to discuss their problems in public, and access to (health and) extension services is problematic. How can agricultural programmes help in addressing this? Feijen (p. 12) describes how, in a traditional region in Egypt, Farmer Field Schools focused on discussing pest management, a safe starter. With time, however, women facilitators successfully got young women participants to discuss issues such as citizenship rights and reproductive health. This was quite an achievement in the given context.

Poverty reduction

Several authors point out the opportunity of low-capital, labour-intensive livestock raising (chickens, goats, pigs) that poor people can take up with some support in the form of training, access to micro-credit and marketing channels. For example, Suwal *et al.* (p. 34) describe an initiative to upgrade homestead gardens, so that people can offer vegetables to their neighbours, instead of always being on the receiving end. Khanal (p. 30) shows how an agroforestry programme in Nepal successfully targeted women and poor groups. Such activities are options for local governance to contribute to poverty reduction, provided that distribution of such resources is done according to fair rules.

At the same time we should not be naïve in thinking that local governments can just pick up good practices and multiply them. The agroforestry example from Nepal showed that a project with good economic, social and ecological outcomes in a sizable project proved difficult to scale up. We would like to hear of more hands-on experiences with scaling up such good practices: what expertise do we need to make expansion a success?

External support for empowerment

While “social inclusion” has the connotation of external initiatives actively targeting particular groups (and is therefore top-down), “empowerment” is more about farmers forming groups and claiming their rights (and is therefore bottom-up,



In rural Nepal, people may not only be poor, but also belong to a low caste group. Home gardens offer them food, a greater sense of dignity and respect from others.

or through own initiatives). Policies might put farmers into poverty: liberalisation policies have had devastating effects on the poorest farmers. Syukur and Ngadiyono from Indonesia talk about farmers organising themselves to prevent the navy –a powerful force– from taking their land. They built a network and got help from the university and lawyers to claim their rights. Such examples show that farmers' groups, with some focused support from external actors, can achieve many goals. Volume 23.1 of the *LEISA Magazine* (March 2007) concluded that external specialised support can help farmers' organisations to overcome specific problems.

Markets for marginalised farmers

It is widely believed that free trade can help small farmers to get returns for their hard work. Production and marketing groups provide farmers with access to markets that they never could access alone. Yet, markets are places of competition between strong companies and small farmers. They tend to exclude those who cannot produce the right products of the right quality, in the right quantities and at the right time.

A new development is the emergence of large scale corporate agriculture. In some regions these agribusiness firms take control over local water resources, market channels and credit facilities. They force farmers to restructure their production. Both in developing and developed countries, they overtake free markets and create dependency. Smallholder farmers have a natural suspicion of such dependency and often manage their farm to reduce dependence on loan givers or landlords. Marketing can also help reduce such dependence (providing more income channels). Local market chains are manageable by farmers, as Abbey and Albert (p. 20) and Kirwan (p. 22) show.

The same observation is made in several articles in the *LEISA Magazine* 24.1 (March 2008), which focused on the question of how markets could become fairer and more accessible to small-scale producers.

Adjusting for social inclusion

All the articles in this issue came from practitioners who make an explicit effort to understand the potential strengths of marginalised people whose lives they aim to enrich. In care farming, the opportunity for disabled people to do routine work is emphasised while recognising the healing effect of caring for plants and animals. NGOs in Nepal found a niche opportunity for women in poor households to engage in homestead gardening. In Egypt, a step-by-step expansion of the curriculum made discussing women's issues possible. All articles show how careful and detailed analysis influenced almost every step of project implementation.

This micro-aspect of social inclusion is difficult to multiply. Each marginalised group needs a different type of support to engage in agriculture and gain (self-) respect as farmers. Explicit efforts, good listening skills and a true belief in the power of the marginalised are crucial. Creativity is required to overcome obstacles, whether physical or social. Social inclusion, lastly, is not an act of charity. All people have the right to live in dignity, and agriculture can provide many marginalised and disabled people food, income and a respectful life.

Addressing the

With access to land, people can start growing crops for home consumption or for selling on the local market.

Starting with a few communities in three municipalities, by 2002 the programme covered 16 municipalities and included approximately 5000 families. Although this increase in the programme's geographic and social coverage was striking, it raised questions for AS-PTA about whether it was adequately reaching the most impoverished families. To address this concern, a study was conducted in three communities of Solânea, a municipality with a large number of families living in extreme poverty.

Studying poverty

The first objective was to arrive at a shared understanding of the concept of poverty. Discussions between agricultural leaders and community representatives revealed that poverty takes many forms: precarious access to land, water and biodiversity; hunger and food insecurity; marginalisation in terms of access to markets; poor access to basic services and to the benefits of public policies; and exclusion from local development processes. It became clear that poverty needs to be regarded as a combination of complex and interdependent elements. Poverty cannot only be seen as the lack of material goods – there is also a political and cultural dimension. In addition, poverty changes over space and time. For example, in dry periods, poverty worsens, and the number of poor rises. Moreover, although we usually take “poor families” as a reference point, we cannot disregard the existence of different levels of poverty within each family.

The initial data showed that not owning or not having access to land was a key element in defining the category of the “poorest” families. These are the ones who face the most barriers to joining activities related to agricultural development. This category is composed of the landless, families with very little land, and those who live on their parents' land. And within families, it is the women and the young (particularly young women) who have the most difficulties. They face serious cultural barriers to participating in decision-making, and are unlikely to get the same benefits from their family-based work compared to male adults.

Different expressions of poverty

The study found that extreme poverty is expressed in four main fields, each of which hinders local people's access to innovations and maintains their exclusion from social development processes: access to basic material resources, access to the benefits of public policies, access to markets, and access to civil society organisations. Along with restricted access to land, the main material needs come from problems in accessing water, food and income. Among the poorest families, 64 per cent had no land, or had to work within very restricted conditions for its use. Historically, this adverse situation led to relations of economic and political dependency on the use of third-party lands. This discouraged the uptake of innovations which could improve the infrastructure of local agricultural systems – for example, 70 per cent of the families had no facilities for collecting or storing water. Food insecurity was also found to be another permanent part of life for these families. Virtually all family members had to look for any kind of work.

Poor access to markets is another way in which the poorest families are excluded. As they lack access to transport, they



Photo: AS-PTA

To what extent do rural development programmes allow for diversity in the social situations where they work? In particular, how can they take this diversity into account when seeking to involve and empower the poorest families? How can an agroecological focus and a gender approach help these families overcome poverty? These questions formed a central part of a study undertaken in Brazil's semi-arid region to improve the local development programme run by the non-governmental organisation AS-PTA.

Sílvio Gomes de Almeida, Paulo Petersen, Adriana Galvão Freire and Luciano Silveira

The Agreste region of the state of Paraíba, in Brazil's northeast, is known for its erratic climate, and often experiences long periods of drought. The environment influences the variety and composition of local agricultural systems, resulting in low yields and low production levels. Family farms make up 95 percent of rural establishments (or approximately 14 000 units), yet occupy only 52 percent of the land area. With little land available, the families have to intensify their land and soil use, making it difficult to maintain or regenerate the ecosystem's fertility. This creates a vicious circle of environmental, economic and social unsustainability.

Since 1993, a Brazilian NGO, Assessoria e Serviços a Projetos em Agricultura Alternativa (AS-PTA), has been implementing a rural development programme in this region, aiming to promote agricultural innovation and thereby encourage the agroecological conversion of local production systems. The programme is based on the hypothesis that the vicious circle of poverty can be overcome through making a transition to agroecological family farming systems, increasing incomes while also conserving the physical and biological base of the agroecosystems.

conditions for getting out of poverty

can rarely participate in markets or fairs, and thus have to buy and sell their goods in unfavourable conditions. The poorest families are also penalised when it comes to benefiting from public services. Access to formal education, public health and transport were found to be precarious. Although government social programmes provided an important part of household income for quite a number of families (e.g. providing gas for cooking and a basic allowance), implementation of such programmes was frequently irregular. In addition, these funds were often misused by local authorities for their own political benefit, and therefore did not reach their target public.

Finally, the weak participation of the poorest families in local organisations was also identified as a contributing factor to social exclusion. Families could not afford transport, or good clothes to wear to the meetings. And many social organisations lacked policies or programmes designed to tackle the specific conditions and questions concerning this sector.

Empowering the poorest

Having looked at poverty in detail, this study helped to define specific strategies to deal with the persistence of sociocultural and economic exclusion. The first and most significant finding was that the poorest families have their own survival strategies, which focus on ensuring the minimum conditions for the family to get by in the short-term. They are not enough to break out of poverty, while they do reveal the creative capacity of such families to manage their limited options. Among these, we could identify different social mechanisms which help lessen the most extreme hardships. For example, the tradition of voluntary working groups, or the borrowing or lending of seed, food and water. Individual strategies have also evolved, although these most frequently work through various types of “unequal partnerships” (including, for example, informal loans for buying food). In most cases, these strategies help maintain economic and political dependence on landowners, traders or local politicians. They also show how difficult it is for the poorest sector of society to escape the situation they find themselves caught in. The study therefore showed the need to redirect the programme towards building on the potential capacities of the poorest communities. Analysing the impacts of the programme’s earlier initiatives in the three studied communities showed that many of the innovations being adopted by less impoverished families were not adapted to suit the situations of the poorest, even though they very often matched their needs. These innovations included reforestation, improvement of the livestock farming system, or the construction of water supply infrastructures.

Five years after the study was conducted, and after its results were fed into AS-PTA’s strategy, some significant changes have taken place in the living conditions of the poorest families. These changes mark the beginning of breaking the vicious circle of poverty, and have been made possible by the combination of two factors. Firstly, activities were adjusted to encourage the poorest families to participate in local processes of agroecological innovation, providing better conditions for them to take up, or feel part of, innovative ideas that had been developed locally. Secondly, greater involvement of these families in community processes made it possible for them to take advantage of government policies, especially those related to guaranteeing access to and use of land. Some specific changes to the programme deserve highlighting:

1. *Diversifying financial options, and modifying the revolving loan funds (RLFs).* Until 2002, RLFs were mainly meant to provide funds to build cisterns to store water for domestic use. Since then, the creation of a community savings scheme has allowed the collective generation of funds in a way which is more sensitive to individual situations and needs. The funds can now also be used to buy other items such as organic manure, or materials for fencing and infrastructure.

2. *Improving kitchen gardens.* This initiative aimed to intensify production from domestic gardens. As well as having positive impacts on food security in the poorest families, this activity has helped to empower women, who now see their work in the gardens acknowledged by the wider community.

3. *Establishing local markets.* The agroecological fair in Solânea provided better conditions for the poorest families to bring their products to market. As well as enabling them to display their products, the fair has become a useful place for families who only produce small quantities, to sell their goods.

Additional advantages came from the initiative of thirty landless families, who organised themselves in order to benefit from a government land-access programme. A settlement area was located which assures 17 hectares for each family and five hectares for the community as a whole. With this, the families now find themselves able to take advantage of the innovations promoted by AS-PTA’s programme, and are no longer marginalised. Being able to manage their own production systems to generate income, and provide food and water security, these families are now freed from political and economic subjugation. At the same time, they have begun to take part in the programme’s training events.

Two main challenges

This study and its consequences have drawn attention to two main recurring challenges for rural development programmes:

1. It is important to recognise community survival strategies which are based on mutual exchange and local resources. This should lead to programme activities which strengthen these strategies. The agroecological perspective on which the programme was based was able to enhance the social processes, enabling survival strategies to be transformed and built into a collective local development project.

2. Only when the poorest family farmers are able to develop their own social inclusion projects will they benefit from policies which aim to assist them to escape from the mechanisms that perpetuate poverty. Social policies alone cannot overcome poverty, but they remain necessary as a response to social emergencies. Economic development policies are equally unable to break the cycle of poverty since they are based on technical and economic ideas that do not match the experiences and expectations of the most impoverished families. In order to include extremely poor rural populations in development programmes and ensure their empowerment, public policies must reflect the sociocultural and economic dimensions of marginalised and socially excluded people. ■

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Small farmers in the hills of Nepal keep goats and sell them before important religious ceremonies every autumn.

Social inclusion as a precondition of development in Nepal

In Nepal, certain groups such as ethnic minorities or *dalits* face discrimination or exclusion. A local NGO has been organising communities into groups, purposefully mixing discriminated with non-discriminated people. Through training programmes and by encouraging discriminated people to take on higher positions, the organisation has allowed for many barriers to be broken down within the communities. This has created more opportunities for previously excluded people.

Petra Shakya

Social inclusion has been a guiding principle for many non-governmental organisations in Nepal, long before it became a justified demand from many marginalised groups. The country was run for centuries by a few elites, who excluded large parts of the population on the basis of class, ethnicity, caste, religion, language, and gender. The system was replaced by a multi-party democracy in 1990. But political parties competed for power and did not fulfil people's needs and aspirations. The frustration led to an armed conflict, which, over a period of ten years, cost more than 13 000 lives, caused the displacement of hundreds of thousands and brought great human and economic loss. New elections in 2008 helped to declare Nepal a republic.

In this context, SAHAS Nepal, a local NGO, has for the last decade been engaged in rural community development. It works in Okhaldhunga, a hilly district in the Eastern Region of Nepal. Only recently the district's headquarters became accessible by road, though most of its villages can only be reached by walking for many hours. In Okhaldhunga the majority of people depend on agriculture as their only means of income. Land distribution has always been a matter of great inequality: the rare fertile lands

in the valleys usually belong to high-caste Hindus, whereas the less fertile land (which is very difficult to cultivate) belongs to ethnic minorities and *dalits*. This is the reason why a majority of the population depend on daily labour to earn an income, either "on-farm" or "off-farm". Many people have to migrate seasonally to be able to make a living for themselves and their families.

The exclusion of ethnic minorities, *dalits* and women in general, applies to most areas of life in Nepal. For example, *dalit* women are not allowed to fetch water from public wells, as people fear they would pollute the water. Therefore they have to walk for hours every day to reach a well for them only. Girls and women in rural areas are still deprived of equal access to education. They have to work in the household from an early age, and after marriage they are expected to do the same in

Raising pigs enables a father to send his children to school

Dil Bahadur Rai is one of the beneficiaries of the small farmers support scheme. He has been an active member of his community group since 2005. At that time, he was a poor man, who could feed his family only by migrating to India seasonally. Back in his village, he was involved in various group-related development activities, although that meant less time available for earning money as a wage labourer. Because he was a hard working member of his group, he was selected as beneficiary of the small farmer support scheme. The scheme supports farmers by giving them animals to raise, in order to increase their income. Dil Bahadur received a local black pig from SAHAS Nepal. SAHAS taught him how to raise the animal, and provided support in building appropriate shelter for it.

So far, this pig has had three litters. Dil Bahadur raised them successfully. According to group's rule he gave one piglet as "gift" to a poor member. He sold the remaining piglets for between 600 Nepalese rupees and 1000 rupees each, which is more than a wage labourer earns in a month. His annual income increased to around 5000 rupees. With this money he sends his children to school, and is able to feed his family of seven without having to go to India anymore.

their husband's household. Consequently, many parents still consider it worthless to invest in their daughters' education. *Dalits* and ethnic minorities have lesser access to income sources, for example, *dalits* are not employed in the hospitality sector, because nobody would accept food from their hands. In contrast, political power (at all levels) is almost exclusively distributed among Hindu men, as are the fields of public administration, education, and private enterprise.

Breaking down the barriers

SAHAS' mission is to empower these excluded communities by enabling their access to knowledge, skills and resources. The entry-point into development activities is the social mobilisation of target groups.

Social mobilisation in this sense has two dimensions. The first dimension is organising the communities into groups. In Nepal there is a saying: "We are born alone, we die alone, and in life we have to fight alone." Communities sometimes have to be convinced that forming a group is much more effective for social change than struggling alone. Indeed, people sometimes join groups only when they see other groups' successes. The second dimension of social mobilisation is to weaken the existing exclusive social structure in order to include everybody in decision making. Group members are poor *dalits*, poor people from different ethnic groups, as well as poor people from so-called high castes. Only a few groups exist that are for *dalits* only. Experience has proved that in mixed groups people learn from each other. For example, often *dalits* hesitate to take over positions like chairperson or treasurer of a group. Due to life-long discrimination, they feel themselves incapable of filling such a position. In such a case, SAHAS may suggest to fill the position of the chairperson with a person from a more educated background, but fill the position of the vice-chairperson with a *dalit*. The mutual benefit of working together like this is supervised closely.

Group members receive capacity building in the areas of leadership development, organisational development and group management. They learn that they have to call for meetings regularly in order to keep their groups functioning. They learn how to analyse and prioritise their communities' problems and how to create strategic action plans to solve them. Interestingly, the focus on groups' own action plans contributes to social inclusion, too: as soon as a problem which concerns everybody is identified (like insufficient irrigation systems, or child malnutrition), the whole group joins in to address it, regardless of caste or ethnic group. As soon as a group runs smoothly, it gets self-responsibility. Thus group members get first-hand experience in what it means to be responsible for their own development process.

Non-formal education classes contribute greatly to the process of empowerment. SAHAS conducts classes for children who dropped out of school, and for adults. Group members learn reading and writing, and their awareness is raised about issues like gender equality, social inclusion and human rights. Moreover, group members take part in skill trainings like kitchen gardening, goat and pig rearing, the construction of improved smokeless stoves and nutritional issues, among others. The groups select the neediest among their members to be the beneficiaries of any external help. A small farmer support scheme and a porters' support scheme, among others, have been started up. Both serve as examples of best practice regarding social inclusion.

Being inclusive as an organisation

Following an inclusive approach in programmes and projects is only credible if the organisation is internally inclusive, too. Consequently, SAHAS Nepal's members belong to different

From wage labourer to entrepreneur

Until recently porters had to carry goods to Okhaldhunga on their backs. Most of the porters are *dalits* or belong to ethnic groups. Other community members regard their work as that of mules, and do not pay them any respect. After a road was constructed to southern Nepal, trucks began to transport goods to Okhaldhunga Bazaar – and the porters' families faced a severe crisis.

Sujana Rai is one of the women who earned her family's living by carrying goods. She is a member of the 'porters group'. The group received an initiating fund of 5000 rupees and started a saving and credit scheme among group members to match this fund. Group members could apply for a loan from the generated fund. Several of them used the money to buy local products, which they started to sell from place to place and from market to market.

For Sujana and the others it makes a great difference to carry their own goods instead of being contracted. Her self-confidence has increased. She invested the earned money into her own shop. "My village is remote and we do not have many shops. That is why I thought it would be a good opportunity to open one. All village people come to my shop. It runs well and I was able to pay back the loan of 5000 rupees to the group already!" she tells us proudly. Usually men are sceptical about their wives being entrepreneurs. Not so Sujana's husband. Perceiving the difference his wife's earnings made to family life, he started supporting her by carrying goods from far away places to be sold in her shop. Locals of all castes treat Sujana with respect now – and that is even more important for her than the fact that she earns enough to make a living.

ethnic groups, come from different regions (from the Far Western Region to the Eastern Region, urban and remote areas) and belong to different castes. SAHAS works with local staff at the field level. Whenever possible, people from ethnic minorities or *dalit* are selected to work within their village communities and in cooperation with Village Development Committees (VDCs). This in itself causes confrontations from time to time. The owner of one of SAHAS' local offices refused to give the rooms for rent if a *dalit* staff would work in them. Unable to reject a proper income from renting out the rooms, he finally agreed, nonetheless disapproving of the presence of the staff member. In the course of time, he became impressed by the impacts of SAHAS' work made in his community. Today the man joins in activities and takes food in the same room as SAHAS' staff. Says Nirmala, a SAHAS' staff member: "Earlier I would not have dared to facilitate development projects in my community, not even to speak to other people in public. And nobody would have listened to me, either, because I am *dalit*. Being a staff member of SAHAS has boosted my self-esteem, and it changed people's attitude towards me. They now respect me and listen to what I have to tell them."

Stories of small successes like this show that social inclusion can happen. At the local level, it needs awareness-raising activities to open up people's minds about the dignity of every human being. It also needs some external support to enable the poor and socially excluded people to participate in development processes.

National stakeholders are already very much aware and listen to the issues being raised by women, ethnic groups, and *dalits*. Let's hope that this time the participation of all excluded groups in the process of building a "new Nepal" will lead to a national success story, too.

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Targeting women pays when

In Nebbi district, Uganda, women and girls eat after men have filled their stomachs. A local NGO targets women to discuss nutritional values and cultural norms. Surprisingly, when approached with respect, both men and women are willing to review traditional practices and make sure all get enough food.

Alfred Lakwo

Social exclusion is a fact of life that also concerns the political, economic and religious domains. The people most affected are often those stereotyped as being “weak” – among whom are women. It is now common knowledge that gender inequalities slow development, and cannot be solved by adopting the correct gender jargon. Simply “adding-and-stirring” gender within traditional development programmes is questionable. This is why the Agency For Accelerated Regional Development (AFARD) a local NGO working in Nebbi district, West Nile region of Uganda, primarily targets women in its food security promotion.

The effects of exclusion

Nebbi district was formerly known as the food basket of the region. However, during the last six years food insecurity has become an issue in every household. In 2004, AFARD undertook a participatory food security analysis, looking at four dimensions of food security: a) food availability throughout the farming season, b) food adequacy in terms of all household members eating enough and at least three meals a day, c) food affordability as being able to purchase what is needed from the market, and d) food acceptability that focuses on eating not only traditional food but also other food types, as well as equal sharing of food in a household.

Mrs. Florence Thona, aged 52, Dwong pa Mungu Nen Group:

“Even though I was in the group for a long time, I lacked knowledge on proper food preparation and good feeding. For instance, I never used to give tea to my children in the morning, but now I give it to them. We never used to eat *muziri* (silver fish) thinking that it is not nutritious. But now it is our main meal. I share with my husband liver, kidney, and spleen that initially I would fear as only meant for men. The nutrition education has really caused a lot of changes in our lives.”

From this study, it became clear that food (in)security is enmeshed with gender relations. This is because government extension services excluded women. The “contact farmer approach” favoured men who owned and controlled land, livestock and cash crops. The government’s commercialisation of farming considers women as unable to revolutionise farming for poverty reduction. It denies access to improved technologies to women who farm food crops. Men who focus on producing cash crops are supported. Less attention is paid to food production for domestic consumption, which then drops.

Further, women noted that they are restricted from being able to diversify their household livelihood activities. Although it is now acceptable for women to engage in petty trade, such trade must be confined within their marital village boundaries. Should a woman attempt to trade in distant places, she is



Training women farmers on the production of crops for the market may have more impact than training their male counterparts.

considered “a man woman” and the husband is ridiculed for allowing her. Thus, it is difficult to effectively support the development of women’s entrepreneurship skills, which could act as a buffer against declining food production.

Finally, it was noted that despite low production, eating non-traditional foods and equal sharing of foods within the household were biased against women and girls. Women are solely charged with the task of food preparation, serving and storage, but traditional culture requires that men eat first and often the choicest parts of the meals. Their sons follow and women and girls eat last. In cases of food scarcity, such practices mean that women always eat small quantities of food or even go hungry. Worse still, women and their daughters are prohibited from eating certain protein-rich foods like chicken, eggs and some fish species that are enjoyed by men and their sons.

Targeting women in food security

Realising that food insecurity affects women more, AFARD piloted a community multiplication approach of improved and marketable crops and livestock in its various projects. AFARD worked with more than 53 Community Based Organisations (CBOs), many of which were women’s groups, to reach the member households.

Multiplication strategies involved identifying food and income security crops, and procuring the start-up stock from either a research centre or a recommended stockist. Then half of the initial stock was planted on CBO farmland. The other half was distributed to the CBO members, on the agreement that they would provide the group with some portion of their harvest for on-lending to other members. This is done in order to buffer any losses, as well as to encourage further multiplication and adoption. High value crop varieties traditionally grown by

promoting food security

women, but modified by research centres, are promoted. As a result, staple food crops are now highly marketable. Cassava, Irish potatoes, sesame, vegetables and maize are grown by women in their farmer groups. The men continue to specialise in cotton and coffee production. Small ruminants like goats and chicken are also promoted among women.

These inputs are accompanied by agronomic and livestock management extension services. These services are offered at the time women can immediately apply the skills on their group and individual farms. All members must attend such trainings. Their gardens are visited to check adoption rates and to provide on-the-spot advice. AFARD also conducts entrepreneurship skills development, and seed selection and preservation with the groups. Nutritional education is provided jointly for both women and their spouses. This process includes a critical analysis of household food insecurity from a gender perspective. In the training, participants explore causes and effects of food insecurity, identify who should do what within their household setting, and look at how to move forward.

The pay-offs

A “Beneficiary Strategic Impact Inquiry” and partners review workshop held in 2007 revealed that, in the last five years, we have been able to empower women and include them within a socially just food security approach. There have been changes in traditional practice, for example:

- The number of women adopting high-value crops, improved practices and agro-processing technology has increased. With this, crop yields have increased and the “frequent cries from kids are no more”, confessed a beneficiary. Women can also now make strategic choices of what crops to grow. They look not only at food production, but are shifting to growing crops that yield high returns, aware of the importance of the market. As a result, producer and marketing associations are emerging with higher collective yields, bargaining power, and greater incomes for women.
- Increasingly, men are confessing their shame for being family heads who could not protect their household food inequalities. They now realise that following traditional values made them greedy within their own families. An old man noted: “It did not occur to me why my wife continued to remain small bodied. I now know that I was underfeeding her”. As such, many spouses now eat together as a family unit. Parents are now allowing girl children to eat traditionally “forbidden” foods which are healthy for human growth and development.

Mrs. Cwinyaai Joa, aged 49, Bedober Ogonjo Group:

“I have been farming both before and after joining our group. But I had little knowledge and skills on best practices and improved seeds. This gave me routinely low yields and a low income of only US\$ 10 000 (approximately US\$ 6.50). But AFARD provided various trainings, like agri-business skills training that made me know that even from farming, once planned well, I can make a good income. I, therefore, tried to put the knowledge and skills gained in to use by planting tomatoes. The yield was very good and I earned US\$ 50 000 in just two months. I used US\$ 40 000 to rent two acres of land and US\$ 10 000 for supporting my husband to plant one acre of Irish potatoes. I never thought I could in any way acquire two acres of land and now all this has been possible because of AFARD. Our income has increased and I am very grateful for being a group member. The future looks so bright for my family now.”

- Through the groups and group incomes, women have started buying and owning land as well as engaging in businesses outside their village.

Lessons and plans

Lessons learnt during the last seven years shape our strategies for expansion. We are currently working with 30 new CBOs and church-based partners with more than 7000 beneficiaries (80 percent women) over the next 3-7 years. Targeting women in our projects is a key policy direction as specifically targeting women yields more food and income security in rural households.

The activities we have been engaged in were not without their challenges, and we are still working with some of these. For example, the linkages with local government extension staff are weak. We have encountered difficulty with supply of inputs – potato vines have dried up in transit, and it has been difficult to source healthy goats for example. Low literacy levels hamper effective record keeping, and it has been a struggle to tackle value addition and marketing. While we have successfully targeted women, there has been little land available for women to use for extensive production.

Meanwhile there have been some valuable lessons:

- Household food security cannot be attained only from what a household produces. It is necessary to have different income sources;
- Gender relations within the household affect food security – some household members are more vulnerable. Gender analysis and programming are needed to ensure that the vulnerable are reached and the benefits are attained;
- While CBOs provide a good entry point into communities, their members tend to take more care of their individual enterprises. As such, groups are better channels for a wider community outreach, but it is individual households who benefit most;
- When exposed to improved practices through input supplies, training, and regular support supervision, people are willing to change their subsistence and gendered practices.

To avoid strategic exclusion by targeting only those women who suffer from gender norms, it is important to promote sustainable agriculture using mixed-gender farmer groups. In groups where there are only women members, it is important to engage with their spouses too (for those who have one). In this way, increasing access to improved practices and viewing farming as a business becomes a household affair. This thereby dispels the myths and norms of social exclusion. But more important is the fact that capacity-building initiatives should be designed to counter gender biases rather than reinforcing them.

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In a traditional region in Egypt, farmers started participating in Farmer Field Schools (FFS) to receive training on pest management. When women facilitators were recruited, some women-only field schools started, while later even mixed schools emerged. The topics discussed slowly moved beyond agriculture to health and reproductive issues, rights and literacy. "My husband never listened to me. Now he wants to hear what I learned during the training sessions."



Farmer Field Schools in traditional societies: From technical to social issues

Hans Feijen

The Fayoum is an oasis 90 km south of Cairo, with some 1500 km² of farmland and a total population of roughly 2.5 million. Between 2001 and 2008, an Integrated Pest Management (IPM) Project was implemented there, supported by the Egyptian Ministry of Agriculture and the Netherlands Embassy in Cairo. It originally focused on promoting IPM and cutting down on pesticide use. Specific objectives included increasing farmers' decision-making capacity, improving the flow of information and contributing to a better environment and health awareness.

The project followed the Farmer Field School (FFS) approach as the main tool for non-formal, participatory farmer education. Covering many different topics, schools ran for a full year with weekly sessions. Parallel to the extensive FFS programme, the project also looked at the capacities and skills of the facilitators. This included basic training, on-the-job courses, continuous weekly activities and more specific technical trainings. Besides the training of the regular facilitators, there was a large programme for training farmer facilitators.

FFSs for women farmers

In seven years we carried out more than 2000 schools. Most of them were set up for male farmers and around field crops, but 423 schools were also organised for women farmers, and 83 for mixed groups. The project was especially interested in FFSs for women and girls as, in general, they have less opportunities (in educational, social or economic terms). Another important consideration was that, in practice, many small farms are permanently or temporarily headed by women, as many men work abroad or in Cairo. The number of FFSs for women, however, was not large, basically because female facilitators could not be recruited in sufficient numbers. These schools also required more logistical arrangements, like transport for facilitators. Mixed schools developed spontaneously from 2003 onward, and many were formed after 2006.

Each school had around 25 participants, meaning that more than 48 000 farmers were directly involved in the project for a year or more. Schools had different focuses: orchard crops, aromatic crops, or organic agriculture. Other schools developed a special curriculum for the so-called "newlands". Apart from the curriculum, most schools were very similar. There were definitely also cultural differences between the various regions of the Fayoum. This can be clearly seen from the distribution of the "mixed" schools. In some regions these mixed schools were quite common, while in other regions they simply did not occur.

In total, there were 47 female and 200 male facilitators. They received several weeks basic training, followed by on-the-job training. One day was set aside each week for additional training, often given by one of the senior facilitators, but also by outside specialists. Specific trainings (of up to two weeks) were given on a broad range of topics, including women's rights, reproductive health, crop marketing, prevention of bird flu, post-harvest practices, bee keeping, and even English and computer sciences. In addition, up to 150 farmer facilitators were trained each year. In principle, the farmer facilitators functioned for one year as assistants of the facilitators in their own FFS. However, the best farmer facilitators went on to other functions like literacy trainer or full facilitator. Quite a number also remained active in NGOs or other community organisations.

Ms. Naglaa Houssein, farmer facilitator and literacy trainer

Ms. Naglaa was selected to be a farmer facilitator because of her academic qualifications and her active attitude. Through discussions, she tried to create a co-operative spirit between the female farmers, who had confidence in her. She started to practice being a farmer facilitator under the supervision of a facilitator. She was also chosen to be trained as a literacy trainer. Naglaa states: "Illiteracy is spreading in my village. In order to be able to help, I attended a 12-day training course on literacy, where we studied Arabic grammar and arithmetic. Other subjects were communication skills and dealing with adult students. My literacy class runs for five days a week from 2.30 pm till 5.00 pm.

Broadening the curriculum

Although originally an IPM-oriented project, we took a broad approach from the start. Plant protection was put in the context of integrated crop management and a low external input agriculture. The same requirements for a successful IPM programme (improved decision-making capacity and two-way information flow) were gradually used for many other relevant issues. In the early years of the women's schools, up to 40 percent of the sessions were devoted to topics like legal rights, credit options, obtaining ID cards, and literacy. Special attention was also given to "cottage industries", activities that can be done in or around the house (pottery, basket work, cheese or yoghurt making). After 2005 the FFS curricula diversified even more, also in the men's schools, to include major rural issues and challenges. The project changed from being IPM and agriculture oriented, towards focusing on information and awareness-raising activities. Working towards the new goal, the training activities also had to be adapted.

Networking formed a crucial element of the FFS approach: collaboration with GOs and NGOs in various topics was emphasised. Networking with local stakeholders helped increase the feeling that it was "their" project and not an outside effort. Culturally it was also very important that families knew that they could entrust their women and girls to our schools. The project explored a number of options to sustain the approach and to link up with and promote farmer's associations. Staff were well-trained in collecting, processing and sharing information relevant to rural communities, using all modern digital means. Having reserved ample time for non-agricultural topics, two special issues became important components of the project: environmental awareness and gender issues.

Environmental awareness and gender issues

We had to consider the fact that farmers invest one morning per week for a whole year in the FFS, and that they do this only if there is a (direct) return on their investment. This means that you can deal with a number of issues of no direct economical relevance, but there should always be a certain emphasis on economic issues. Otherwise, attendance figures would certainly drop. This was especially important in our case, as we categorically refused to pay "attendance money", as happens in a number of other projects.

In terms of environmental awareness, the emphasis gradually shifted from general campaigns, like on the dangers of agricultural chemicals, to a much broader approach, including topics like solid waste removal, nature conservation, and the negative aspects of smoking. At the same time, the emphasis shifted from creating awareness to action-oriented campaigns, such as the setting up of sustainable rubbish collecting systems. This was implemented in close co-operation with the local units and NGOs.

Based on the subjects tackled in the FFS, I discuss with the literacy students topics such as food pollution, balanced diets and female issues.

"I accept criticism without anger and lead the discussions, allowing various opinions to be heard. I greatly benefited from the training courses not only in my work but also in my personal life. I respect other points of view and use my skills to convince others. On the other hand, I noticed that literacy levels amongst boys are now lagging behind those for girls. As a result, I decided that after finishing my present class, I will open one for boys. After that, I would like to be a supervisor to help the female trainees."

A campaign style approach was also used for other topics, such as homeless children, child labour and bird flu, or even (since 2007) against the practice of female genital mutilation. These were often entwined with the "regular" FFS activities. In short, these aimed to raise female farmers' living standards and status, ensuring a greater role for women in the rural society. Health formed a main issue in the FFS agenda, especially in the women's FFS, covering topics such as reproductive health, family planning, or sexually transmitted diseases. Another topic was the relationship between health and the environment. We aimed our environmental campaigns at school children who were not involved in the FFSs, thus reaching large numbers of people in a short time.

The promotion of higher literacy levels was one of the most successful parts of our programme. In collaboration with the National Authority for Illiteracy Eradication, we developed the option of attaching literacy classes to the FFSs. Of the 2037 FFSs implemented, 333 schools had a literacy class attached, with a separate schedule and a literacy teacher. A number of farmer facilitators were trained to become literacy teachers. The literacy classes used the Concentrated Language Encounter approach, which combines literacy learning with the teaching of useful life skills, so that reading and writing is not seen in isolation from the realities and priorities of life. The National Authority was so enthusiastic about this approach to literacy classes that they decided to use it in other governorates in Egypt.

Results in the field

The FFS approach and collaboration with institutions gave the following results:

- 11 700 female farmers were directly involved in the FFS programme, resulting in improved problem-solving and decision-making skills, and increased networking, leading to better co-operation among farmers.
- 2505 female farmers obtained a national ID number and card.
- 6700 female FFS farmers participated in literacy classes.
- Greater health awareness, especially reproductive health.
- Increased environmental awareness.
- Increased production of local crafts as an additional source of family income.

Perhaps the most interesting result is the higher status which female farmers now have within their families and communities. We have repeatedly heard it said that "my husband now listens to my opinion on farming and other issues". We can definitely conclude that women and girls are more active and involved in different roles. Visitors (including government ministers) were impressed at how vocal the women in the FFSs had become. A group like unmarried young women, who often were just sitting at home, have become active, participating as literacy trainers or facilitators, and being involved in NGOs and small projects.

A common reaction of participants towards the end of the school year was that they wanted to continue. On the other hand, hamlets that had not yet been covered also made it clear that it was now "their turn". Sadly, the Dutch embassy phased out the agricultural activities, so the project came to an end. However, the embassy was so impressed by the results of the FFS project that they approved a follow-up that will place even more emphasis on gender issues and on the development of the rural communities in general.

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Women break down barriers in Mali

In the village of Zamblara, gender differences as well as caste division have long been clearly defined. Ten years ago, a group of women set up its own organisation of rice producers. Through Participatory Learning and Action Research (PLAR) activities, the group has not only managed to increase rice production, but the regular sessions have broken down traditional barriers between women and men as well as between castes.

Jonas Wanvoeke, Rosaline Maiga Dacko, Kalifa Yattara and Paul Van Mele

Surrounded by rolling hills, Zamblara looks like many of the villages found in the semi-arid region in the south west of Mali. Most inhabitants rely on agriculture. During the brief rainy season, men grow maize, sorghum, groundnuts and other crops on the higher ground, while women grow rice in low lying, seasonally-flooded areas near the villages. During the long dry season, men and women grow vegetables in the low areas after harvesting the rice.

While all farmers face many difficulties (lack of seeds, water, credit or assistance), women face additional barriers and hardships. In this part of Mali, women are rarely considered equal to men in social and economic status. There is a gender bias at all levels of society, and the agricultural sector is no exception. Women, for example, cannot inherit or own land. Furthermore, Zamblara, like most villages in this region, is also divided according to caste – some families are assigned a higher status (as “nobles”) while others are grouped as descendants of slaves. The direct implication of this division is the social separation of tasks within the village.

More than 10 years ago, a group of women decided to form an organisation of rice producers, and to help themselves increase production and incomes. Known as “*Kotognogontala*” or “mutual respect”, the group was set up as a way to exchange knowledge and good agricultural practices among the community. In 2002 its leaders approached the Africa Rice Center (WARDA), interested in the training activities carried out by the Participatory Adaptation and Diffusion of Technologies for Rice-based Systems (PADS) project. This project began in 2000 with activities in Côte d’Ivoire, The Gambia, Ghana and Guinea, and since 2002 also in Mali. Its



Women in Zamblara sing one of their compositions about new rice technology.

overall objective was to contribute to an increase in rice production, crop diversification and rural revenue generation. It would do this through the development and adaptation of appropriate innovations for improved crop management. In short, it hoped to improve the livelihoods of resource-poor farmers in western Africa. To obtain the greatest benefit from relatively small investments, PADS focused on the inland valley systems because of their great potential to become the food basket of Africa. It was also felt that water, irrigation and drainage activities can unite farmers and bring them together for bottom-up social learning processes.

Firstly on an experimental basis, and later throughout the project, PADS adopted the Participatory Learning and Action Research (or PLAR) approach (see box). PLAR follows some of the Farmer Field School ideas (such as weekly sessions supported by a facilitator, working from land preparation to harvest) while stimulating experiential learning. It combines them with different PRA (Participatory Rural Appraisal) tools that help make processes and procedures visible, helping farmers and facilitators interact to learn about local agriculture and its constraints.

Local innovations

Even before the project, the women of Zamblara used few chemical inputs, as they are expensive and not always available.

Making use of group experiences

The Participatory Learning and Action Research approach is an adult learning methodology which makes use of the experiences of the members of a group. Working with groups of about 25 people, different sessions cover the whole cropping season. Activities – in this case – follow the development of the rice crop (following a curriculum specially developed for inland valley rice cultivation). Farmers analyse their own practices, discover problems and look for ways to solve them. The curriculum teaches new practices (e.g. transplanting), but instead of transferring technologies, the facilitators encourage farmers to share and reflect on their own experiences. Through this, they can find the solutions themselves, and experiment with new ideas to find techniques which are practical and adapted to specific local solutions.

PLAR places more emphasis on local innovations and farmer experimentations than do either Farmer Field Schools or PRA.

Farmers are not considered to be potential “recipients” or “adopters” of new technologies; the idea is to create a process which stimulates the farmers into discovering and innovating themselves. Unlike the FFS approach, which focuses on a group learning plot, PLAR encourages each farmer to experiment on a small portion of his or her own land. PLAR presents farmers with new ideas every week, which each farmer is free to try (or not) at home. The team of PLAR facilitators often includes one member from extension services, research or an NGO, and one farmer. PLAR’s weekly sessions use many learning tools, such as cropping calendars, maps, diagrams, field observations and monitoring forms. These tools help make things visible so that the group and facilitators interact and learn together. In 28 sessions, the learning tools cover all aspects of integrated crop management, such as land preparation, nursery and transplanting, water management, weeds and pest management, but also harvest, post-harvest and marketing.

Most people rely on traditional practices. As well as encouraging them, the PLAR sessions worked on developing these options further, confronting the major problem related to external inputs: their affordability and availability. During the PLAR training, the women organised their own trial to compare compost vs. chemical fertilizer vs. a blend (compost plus chemical fertilizer). As a result, they now favour compost mixed with small amounts of urea and rock phosphate. They have also developed their own strategies to control pests. These include using neem (*Azadirachta indica*) powder; a mix of laundry detergent and kerosene; or simply by weeding the edges of the rice plot with hoes to eliminate the places where moths lay eggs which hatch into stem borers.

PLAR has helped increase rice production in the village, and many of their neighbours are now interested in the new techniques. The four PLAR groups that were formed in Zamblara each had a farmer-facilitator. Although the PLAR modules were written in French, they have been (verbally) translated into the local language, Bambara. The women have adapted the content, composing songs and poems about the rice-farming modules.

And while the women of Zamblara have their own small plots of rice land, the group also works one collective field of one and a half hectares. They grow rice in the rainy season and vegetables in the dry season. When the women harvest the rice from this plot they sell some of it and keep it as a group fund. They have been dividing some of the rice among themselves, and keeping the rest to use for their meals during group activities.

Breaking barriers

From an original group of 27 people, the association has grown and now is formed by four groups with 115 women and two men. In Mali most women's groups have at least some men in them. In this one, the village chief is the honorary president and another man attends to monitor the women's activities. They all feel that the group has helped improve relations between men and women. The group gives the women a place where they can talk about their problems with men, and give each other advice. Participants recognise how women are less scared to talk in village meetings, participating more actively in them, and contributing every time a decision needs to be taken. Furthermore, the association is now accepted by the men in the village, a fact seen in their willingness to leave land for the women in the association to grow a crop.

PLAR has helped minimise the difference between categories of people. In the training, people experiment together, eat together and sing together, disregarding gender or caste. The weekly PLAR sessions helped increase contact between all villagers, in particular between women of different origins. The gap between the two castes has broken down. The women are so united that they have built a small house where they can meet. It is made of adobe (mud) bricks, but has a corrugated sheet metal roof and wooden windows and a door. They built it themselves and paid for the materials with money they earned on their collective plot. The women feel less lonely and isolated. As one woman said: "Low caste and noble persons are the same since PLAR". With the PADS project and the implementation of the PLAR approach, this stigmatisation has been broken down and the unity of people was strengthened.

Furthermore, this new cohesion is not limited to agricultural practices. The PADS project helped the women conduct a "well-being analysis" (similar to "wealth ranking"). When the women realised that some of their neighbours were too poor to afford to eat three meals a day, they began to help each other with food and labour. The women's groups are strong and the men have accepted them. The women now participate more in

village activities (infrastructural development, milling machine establishment). The solid partnerships that the women have created with NGOs and government agencies, improve their power in village decision-making. Women's improved financial and material standing empowers them and erodes the cultural barriers in this region of Mali, where until recently village decisions were taken largely by men alone.

The group currently contributes to infrastructure development and is becoming a pressure group in the village. The group is viable through their own fund coming from members' contributions, collective land crop selling, or labour services payment (especially when these women work on men fields). Some are also on the waiting list to join the group.



Photo: Jeff Bentley

Social differences became unimportant after the group's successful activities. Here, women chat outside the house they all built together.

Reinforcing social relations

Most women are glad that they are growing more rice and finding low external input pest control measures. But even more important, they say, is that they have now found unity. "The future belongs to the organised people," states one Zamblara woman. The women in Zamblara say that PLAR reinforces the social relations and strengthened the human capital. Although the initiative came from the community itself, it was by adding the well-being analysis that the community was able to visualise their individual and overall well-being and that action for social inclusion received a boost. The PADS project has already ended, but the groups are still working together.

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Subsidised fertilizer:

In Malawi, the fifth poorest country in the world, the government introduced a voucher programme for small scale farmers, providing them access to subsidised fertilizer and seed. The country suddenly saw bumper harvests in both 2006 and 2007. Are fertilizer subsidies the way out of poverty for small scale farmers in Africa?



“Fertilizer vouchers are key to the empowerment of African farmers”

Eric McGaw, head of communications at the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA).

If you're after social inclusion, you can't do better than provide farmers with fertilizer, at least in sub-Saharan Africa. This region has long been characterised by poor soils – soils that continue to deteriorate as their nutrients are mined year after year. Leaving their lands fallow is not an option for farmers. Their choice is stark: either they plant or wind up begging for food.

But many farmers cannot afford fertilizers and improved seeds. The key to changing this is to improve farmers' access and purchasing power through a targeted income transfer system. Recently, the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA) has been working with various partners to facilitate access to fertilizer and seeds by developing networks of rural agro-dealers that bring these farm inputs closer to farmers, while lowering costs. Also needed are more effective ways of providing support to poor farmers who cannot afford costly inputs. Vouchers are therefore offered to them that can be used at their local agro-dealer shop, expanding both options and affordability, while building private markets.

It's working

AGRA targets the poorest farmers in Africa, and the voucher system is specifically suited to their needs. This system has already worked wonders in many African countries with seeds. Likewise, farmers, who would be excluded from access to fertilizer in any scheme involving cash, are directly benefited by the voucher system.

Our last topic, “How effective are Effective Micro-organisms”, received valuable responses on our website. In our digital newsletter, E-LEISA, this discussion is summarised for you. To subscribe to this newsletter, go to E-LEISA on the homepage of the LEISA Magazine.

The agro-dealer programme was first developed by the Rockefeller Foundation in Malawi in 2004 and AGRA has been building on this. Triggered by massive government support to provide subsidies for seeds and fertilizers, Malawi, a small land-locked country, went from being an annual recipient of food aid to a net exporter of maize within two years, bringing desperately needed income to the cash-strapped country. Not only that, but Malawi actually became a food donor to other countries in Africa. Similar voucher programmes have been extended to poor farmers in Kenya and Tanzania.

Two lessons from these national efforts are clear. One: the voucher system provides farmers with additional purchasing power to acquire seeds and fertilizer. Two: building agro-dealer networks makes it possible for farmers to obtain these inputs at their doorsteps.

Private sector partnership

The need for a consolidated approach for fertilizer procurement in Africa is especially urgent now because of the rapidly increasing prices of fertilizers on the global market and the tightening of fertilizer supply. The price for a tonne of DAP rose from US\$ 245 in January 2007 to about US\$ 1300 in mid 2008, excluding shipping and inland distribution costs to the farm gate. Many African countries are experiencing great difficulties in securing access to fertilizers and high costs have put additional pressure on government budgets. Accessing finances for importing fertilizer is also increasingly challenging because of the high prices and the need for higher levels of collateral on loans. Unless immediate measures are taken to tackle fertilizer procurement and assure lower-cost supplies, the food crisis will worsen. To this end, AGRA will work closely with the African Development Bank, the New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD), multilateral partners, the private sector and commercial banks to develop solutions to fertilizer procurement.

Investments

Clearly, the current fertilizer supply and pricing situation on the global market and impacts on African countries must be reviewed. Additional investments in infrastructure will be required to support bulk procurement systems. These investments entail a high level of commitment from both the fertilizer industry and the countries with access ports. Above all, a comprehensive fertilizer policy framework must be developed that will ensure that fertilizer reaches farmers. This framework needs to include the development of downstream fertilizer distribution systems as well as safeguards to ensure efficient and environmentally sound use of fertilizers. We at AGRA believe that the voucher system, when coupled with rapid development of rural agro-dealer networks and targeted public subsidies, is the best way for farmers to increase their food production and secure their food security.

AGRA is a platform that emerged in 2006, to develop programmes that boost farm productivity and incomes for the poor, while safeguarding the environment. Contact: Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA), P.O. Box 66773, Westlands 00800, Nairobi, Kenya. E-mail: emcgaw@agra-alliance.org ; www.agra-alliance.org.

Two views



“Fertilizer subsidies are a mirage for solving hunger”

Rachel Bezner Kerr, assistant professor at University of Western Ontario (Canada), works with the Soils, Food and Healthy Communities (SFHC) Project in Northern Malawi.

Over the past year Malawi’s fertilizer subsidy programme has been highlighted as a “success story” for improving food security and agricultural productivity for smallholder farmers. Fertilizer subsidies, which were made available to 1.8 million households in 2007, reduced the market price of this volatile commodity by about two-thirds. Many experts point to the government of Malawi’s decision to export maize this year, and the high estimates of production as evidence of reduced hunger. International news articles trumpeted that Malawi had “ended famine” by ignoring the advice of the World Bank and the IMF, in providing subsidies to farmers.

Price increases

However, simply exporting food does not mean that hunger has ended in Malawi. In fact, it is the large scale farmers who exported a surplus. In northern Malawi many families experienced food shortages this year. Families who didn’t produce enough maize from their own farms had to rely on purchased maize, which increased dramatically in price this year, in keeping with global trends. Current prices are 126-139 percent above the five year average. Many poorer farmers with low food supplies resorted to harvesting their maize early in order to compensate for this price rise. The high crop production predicted in late 2007 was overestimated, and late distribution of fertilizer was one reason for lower than anticipated yields. The Famine Early Warning Systems network predicted that food access will deteriorate for the poor in the coming months. The financial cost for fertilizer has skyrocketed in the last year, following rising fossil fuel prices. The United States Department of Agriculture indicates that costs for fertilizer have increased by 65 percent from 2007 to 2008.

Even with a timely arrival of fertilizers, simply increasing yields does not translate into a decrease in hunger for poor farming families. Beyond the household, poor farming families in Malawi face a host of problems that cause or worsen hunger, including high medical costs, rising prices and low incomes.

Voucher politics

Farmers in Northern Malawi note that many families only received one coupon for 50 kg of fertilizer, which was not enough to produce adequate yields. Some farmers pointed out that the distribution within villages often marginalised poorer families, privileging those with ties to local leadership. “I got one coupon this year, which is not enough for my maize production,” said Rodgers Msachi, community leader and farmer in Ekwendeni region. He added “You should not mix politics with someone’s life. Even if you get a coupon, it may only be this year. Next year, a new president might say I won’t give you fertilizer but flour.”

Stockard Nyirenda, head of the farmer research team leading the SFHC project, explains: “Fertilizer on its own doesn’t add fertility in the soil. Food for the soil is residues, manure. The farmers themselves know that if they apply fertilizer this year, they get high yields, but next year there may not be any fertilizer and yields will be down. Indeed, depending on fertilizer subsidies means relying on the vagaries of politics and the market for your food.

Legumes more sustainable

Over the past eight years, farmers involved in the SFHC project have taken a different road to improving their food security. They grow different legume intercroops like pigeonpea and peanut, and incorporate crop residues into their soils, growing maize the following year and saving legume seeds in community seed banks. This agroecological approach addresses both soil fertility and dietary diversity, with peanuts, pigeonpeas and soyabean. Between 2000 and 2008, 5000 farmers in over 100 villages received legume seeds and training on these intercrop systems. While judicious use of subsidised fertilizer may contribute to improving food security in the short term, the medium and long term costs of this option will be paid by poor farmers in Africa. Fertilizer is a highly carbon-intensive nutrient source. Reliance on fertilizer rather than organic material degrades the soil and increases carbon emissions, harming marginalised farmers the most. Creating dependencies on commodities like fertilizer through subsidies exposes national governments to increased risk from price volatility and availability – this risk is necessarily passed on to farmers.

In Malawi since 2000, the SFHC project (www.soilandfood.org) joins Canadian and Malawian researchers focusing on agroecological strategies to improve farmer productivity and health. Contact: Soils, Food and Healthy Communities Project, Ekwendeni Hospital, PO Box 19, Ekwendeni, Malawi.

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Some members of the Free Farmers Union believe in lobbying as a way to bring about change. Others prefer a more visible approach, like here in Jakarta, where farmers demonstrate for agrarian reform.

Photo: SPM

The Free Farmers Union and their fight for land

What can a small farmer do if his or her land gets grabbed by a powerful state organisation such as the Indonesian navy? Forming a group and fighting for your rights is a first step. Moreover, you need expertise from NGOs or universities, legal advice and perseverance.

Abdul Syukur and Ngadiyono

After Indonesian independence in 1945, more than 2000 families started growing crops on land that had previously belonged to the Dutch coffee and rubber plantations. In the districts of Pagak and Batur, in Malang, East Java, the plantations' foremen distributed the land to the local farmers. However, the tranquillity of farming life did not last long. In 1958 the Indonesian navy took over 400 hectares of the land in this area for training facilities. They later took another 50 hectares. To legitimate the navy's one-sided control over the land, the Ministry of Agrarian Affairs issued a special decree in July 1965.

Throughout the years, the farmers in these two districts tried to ensure their right to live on and cultivate the land, but were largely unsuccessful. There were many reasons for this. First, they were all unfamiliar with the legal status of their land. Most local farmers found it difficult to understand the rules and regulations governing agricultural land, especially those related to the land they were working on. Many of them took part in demonstrations against the navy and tried to contact the local authorities, but these actions proved useless. It was later clear that they were unsuccessful because they were only acting at a local level.

Then, in 1998, big signs were placed around the farming plots, stating "Property of the navy. Whoever plants or builds in this land must report to the navy". The signs were put up after the navy had previously announced a long set of rules: according to the first ruling, only local farmers holding land utilisation

permits (*petok*) could plant the kapuk tree (*Ceiba pentandra*), teak (*Tectona grandis*) and lamtoro trees (*Leucaena glauca*). Without the permit, farmers had no right to cultivate in the area. It was later agreed that sugar cane farmers had to pay a contribution of Rp 20 000 per hectare every year. Thirdly, farmers were requested to get a written permit, and to pay a fee, if they wanted to build a house or a mosque. On top of it all, they were told that if the navy needed the land the local farmers could not demand any compensation. All these regulations made it increasingly difficult to continue cultivating the land. Realising that a local struggle was fruitless, the farmers decided to demand legal ownership at a higher level.

The struggle continues

Things started to look brighter in 1999 when the Research Institute of Social Development (LPKP) offered assistance. This is a local NGO, working with different programmes in the East Java province, such as advocating for agrarian reform or carrying out an organic agriculture programme. LPKP wanted to develop an agricultural production programme, but soon realised it was necessary to first look into farmers' land rights in this area. A series of meetings with the farmers helped the LPKP field officers understand the many anxieties and uncertainties which the farmers faced. Farmers felt unsafe and were uneasy about the soil and water conservation activities, as they wondered who would benefit from them in the future. How could they be sure that the navy would not force them to leave?

LPKP organised a series of training workshops on legal issues, to help farmers build their arguments as part of their struggle, and also to help them identify actions which can be categorised as a crime. As a result, local farmers began to see the advantages of working together to fight for their rights. The political changes in 1998-99 opened up the possibility to form farmer organisations throughout the country. This opportunity was taken up by the farmers in Pagak and Batur, who set up the Free Farmers Union (*Serikat Petani Merdeka* or SPM) in May 2000. The specific objective was to build a sense of

togetherness among all the farmers who lived and worked in the former Dutch plantations. The SPM was to serve as a vehicle in their struggle for land rights. It was also founded to help fight the climate of fear and intimidation, and to help farmers enhance their quality of life, both in a moral and an economic sense.

Building capacities

In order to achieve its goals, SPM has been trying to strengthen itself as an organisation, looking both at its internal policies and capacities, and at its relationships with external partners. Their perspective is that if an organisation is weak, then it can be easily influenced by external factors. It has therefore worked hard in defining strategic plans for the next five years, conducting routine internal meetings, and co-ordinating meetings with policy makers at different levels. Internally, SPM also strengthened its human resources through trainings, seminars and workshops, with programmes that intensively involve the youth, men and women. Participative controls and evaluations have taken place every six months, assessing the organisation's activities and results, and also looking at the difficulties faced at the moment.

SPM leaders have been able to meet local and village authorities and district heads. In May 2002, LPKP arranged a meeting between SPM members and officers from the Malang Regional Administration. SPM also met with representatives of the National Land Affairs Authority and of the Regional People's Legislative Council. The discussions were meant to help gather clear and accurate information about the disputed land. Moreover, they tried to look for solutions which would please all parties involved. Although no solution was immediately found, these meetings helped build a good relationship between the farmers and the local authorities.

Later on, in order to broaden the organisation's presence, they decided to appoint a district coordinator (*korwil*) in every village. This person would be responsible for digging up information and then reporting the findings to the farmers in his or her district. *Korwils* are also in charge of communicating with the village administrative bodies, and reporting SPM's most recent activities.

Needless to say, things have not always been easy within SPM, with frictions and disagreements arising among the members. In some cases, farmers were requesting greater transparency (especially referring to the organisation's finances and administration). Members also expressed their different ideas on how to proceed – some were more in favour of a “soft” approach like lobbying, while others (especially those influenced by university students) preferred to go for the “hard way”, organising large scale demonstrations. Some of the SPM members think that the current situation is good enough, as they can work on the land without being disturbed by the navy. Others want to continue their struggle until they can get legal certification or property rights. Intimidation and threats have also continued, and one of the SPM leaders has even had to go into hiding.

These difficulties, however, have been minimal compared to the advantages of working together. The sense of togetherness increased their willingness to fight for their rights. The network that they built helped them find the information needed to support their struggle. In general, their actions became more organised. As an organisation, SPM was able to establish links with the Agrarian Development Center, Faculty of Law, Malang Brawijaya University (in East Java). Interactions between farmers and the law students gave farmers useful ideas and

information. They learned about legal terms and procedures, and about the possibilities for staging protest rallies in Jakarta, Indonesia's capital. As a result, the organisation members believe that they will soon achieve their goal.

Lessons and challenges

There are some important conclusions that can be captured from this experience. First, the fight for the legal right to land takes a lot of time and is very exhausting. Therefore, all members need to be involved in preparing and defining tactics and strategies. Second, farmers' struggles need supporters. Lack of support can increase the organisation's vulnerability. Increasing the organisation's network is therefore crucial. It is necessary to be linked to other farmer organisations that have the same vision and concerns, either at a regional or national level. This may cement strong support to the struggle. Lobbying with crucial decision makers like the National Land Affairs Authority and the Regional People's Legislative Council can put an end to the battle for legal status for their land. Moreover, the link with the media is vital. Support for these struggles can be much larger if the organisations involved are able to reach the general public and influence public opinion.



Photo: SPM

The sense of togetherness that members of the Free Farmers Union experience, has increased their willingness to fight for their rights.

Even though the problems of land ownership have not yet been settled, SPM feels that some results have been achieved. For example, the National Land Affairs Authority recognises now that the disputed land belongs to the state, and not to the navy or to the armed forces. This is a very positive step, as the land's legal status is not vague anymore. Another positive outcome is the support received from the village administrative bodies and the village legislative authorities. The number of SPM members (both men and women) is growing significantly in every village. Moreover, the second committee of People's Legislative Council of the Indonesian Republic visited the disputed land, demonstrating its support for the struggles. This also confirmed the undisputed lobbying and negotiation abilities of SPM's members towards high level authorities and decision makers. Most importantly, the local farmers have demonstrated the courage to persist with the fight for their standpoint.

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Ugandan farmers grab marketing opportunities after conflict

Civil unrest in northern Uganda, lasting many years, has hampered development of smallholder farming. With peace in the region, farmers can once again engage in local marketing.

Government and NGOs support the formation of farmers' groups for bulk marketing and access to market information.

Anyanzo Thomas Abbey and Azu Albert

While Uganda's economy has been growing steadily since the early 1990s, the northern part of the country is lagging behind because of the past civil conflict in this area. Found in this area, Moyo is one of the poorest districts in Uganda. Agricultural production is limited: farmers grow groundnuts, onions, cassava, beans, sorghum and vegetables, and keep a few chickens, goats, pigs and cattle. Farmers are hardly able to grow enough to meet household needs. There are few surpluses to sell, and few people who are interested in buying. This discourages farmers from increasing their production, keeping farmers in the vicious circle of subsistence production.

Within the country's Poverty Eradication Action Plan, the National Agriculture Advisory Services (NAADS) was mandated to strengthen farmer institutions, advise farmers, introduce technologies and develop market linkages. The NAADS programme started in Moyo in 2004. It collaborates closely with NGOs such as the Danish Refugee Council and Environmental Alert in supporting farmers. During the first three years, NAADS emphasised increasing production through advisory services and introducing appropriate technologies. In 2007, farmers asked to be linked to the markets and started working with NAADS co-ordinators and technical staff for a plan. They agreed to assess groundnut and onion yields to establish the quantity produced, develop an inventory and profile of produce buyers, gather and disseminate market information, and organise and facilitate negotiation meetings between farmers and produce buyers. This plan, aimed at supporting farmers to market their products, was implemented between November and December 2007. Farmers sold more than 20 tonnes of groundnut and 2 tonnes of onion. Two approaches were used, with and without middlemen.

Marketing groundnuts in Moyo and Lefori

One of the first activities was to hold meetings with groundnut farmers – both those supported by NAADS or other NGOs, and with those who were not. Community Based Facilitators (CBFs, see box) based at parish level identified farmers who wished to sell their produce. The CBFs compiled their names, as well as the location, quantity and variety of groundnut grown.

Community Based Facilitators

This is one of the farmer institutions under NAADS. CBFs are progressive farmers who are easily approachable, literate, honest and willing to share knowledge with other farmers. They are volunteers. Their role is to assist fellow farmers in technical issues like agronomy, community mobilisation for group formation, facilitating marketing and monitoring and evaluation. They get short trainings to prepare them for the tasks. They get a bicycle so they can easily move around. They report monthly to NAADS.

At the same time, SNV (Netherlands Development Organisation) was promoting the commercialisation of oil seeds, so we established links. We were thus able to access a list of potential buyers in the West Nile region, most of whom had middlemen working in the villages during the harvest seasons. NAADS contacted these potential buyers, but the price they were willing to pay was not attractive: we suspected that they did not want to deal directly with small scale farmers. Farmers were offered 600 shillings (US\$) per kilo of unshelled groundnuts (about US\$ 0.40), when these were being sold at US\$ 800 or more in the nearby town of Arua.

We held weekly meetings with farmers. During these meetings we looked at the total quantities of groundnut available by variety. We listed the names of the middlemen who had been buying local produce before, and invited them to meet the farmers. Sadly, the majority of them never came. And those who came justified the price they were offering: middlemen spend a lot of time and money travelling around the villages looking for and gathering the groundnuts, which increases operational costs. They mentioned that if farmers organised themselves, they could increase prices slightly.

It was then agreed that the CBFs would help farmers get together. The middlemen and farmers agreed on a price of US\$ 700 per kilo of unshelled groundnut. The farmers agreed on a central point in every parish, where all registered farmers should bring their groundnuts for sale. The middlemen also agreed to picking up production from the farmer's home if his or her production exceeded 50 sacks of groundnuts.

In less than two weeks all the groundnuts in the two sub-counties were gathered. On the designated day and location, the middlemen bought the groundnuts, preferring the red varieties for the local market. More than 20 tonnes of groundnuts were sold in a short time, and at a better price than before.

Marketing onions in Metu

As with groundnuts, most farmers who grow onion on larger areas (of about 0.2 hectares) are supported by NAADS or by other organisations. These farmers were targeted for group marketing, but individuals who grow without any external support were also invited to bring their harvest and join the group. Those farmers who harvested early were able to sell a kilo of onions for at least US\$ 1100. When the group was ready, however, the price had fallen to US\$ 900. With no middlemen interested in the commercialisation of onions at that time, NAADS decided to play a leading role in the marketing processes.

Five members of the Subcounty Farmers' Forum formed a "marketing committee" to co-ordinate the whole process, with the support of the NAADS co-ordinators and the District Marketing Officer. This committee held two meetings every week, where they discussed and analysed the information available (prices and demand). Some of them travelled to different places to get more information, even crossing the border into Southern Sudan. Information was also gathered via mobile phones and the internet (e.g. via Foodnet). This provided information on prices of foodstuffs in major towns in Uganda, which was helpful as comparison. The CBFs reported to the committee members which farmers had onions for sale, and



Thanks to being able to sell their products again, farmers like Mrs. Betty Jurugo have gained more than just money.

they also told farmers about prices and demand. After about three weeks of meetings, the committee finally decided to take the onions to Nimule, in Southern Sudan – although the price there was not the highest, the demand was big.

During a three week period, all farmers brought their onions to the bulking store which the sub-county authorities provided for free. Farmers with as little as 5 kg also brought their produce. All names and quantities were registered, and all production was cleaned and sorted (removing debris and rotten onions) before weighing. About two tonnes of onion was collected at the end of the three weeks. The district NAADS office cleared the onion with the Uganda Revenue Authority/Immigrations office and it was then possible to take it across the border to Nimule.

In Sudan, it took only two days to sell all the onions at US\$1200 per kg. This was the first time since the unrest started that farmers had marketed their produce in groups. It was also the first time that farmers in the border district of Moyo entered the Sudan market as a group. On their return, all farmers who had participated were called and paid according to the quantity of onions they had registered at the store.

Farmers appreciated the initiative. They said that by selling as a group they received all the money at once, made more profit, learnt from each other, and saved time. They promised to grow more onions the following season and have now formed themselves into an onion marketing group.

Seeing the benefits

Groundnut farmers had similar comments as the onion farmers; they were happy since they sold groundnut within a short time, and at a better price. Among the factors that contributed to such success included the opening up of markets in Southern Sudan, NGO support promoting the commercialisation of local production. Equally important were the higher production levels, resulting from the improved extension services and the availability of high yielding varieties.

In future, apart from onion and groundnut, sesame farmers in four sub-counties will also be invited to participate. The targets

for this year are to market 30 tonnes of sesame, 40 tonnes of groundnut and 5 tonnes of onion. Furthermore, NAADS wishes to involve farmers more so that they learn and pick up activities fully in the near future, besides involving more stakeholders.

This experience has shown that markets can motivate farmers, making them grow more. It has also shown how even those with limited area or resources, with low yields, or who produce under difficult conditions, can benefit from commercialisation. One of the members of the farmer committee argued that farmers already have basic agronomic knowledge: the authorities and other extension agents need do more to facilitate the marketing of their produce “instead of giving out handouts or inputs like seedlings”.

Future potential

Due to the civil war that has rocked northern Uganda for more than two decades, the region has remained behind in development. As more than 90 percent of the active labour force is involved in agriculture, and given that land is not a limiting factor for production in this region, agriculture can play a central role in reducing poverty. While it is good to introduce and promote use of improved technologies to increase agricultural production, making access to markets easier and enhancing the commercialisation of local production may help even more.

In areas where agriculture is mainly oriented at the household level, and where middlemen are active, they can play an important role in linking smallholders to the market. Farmers, however, need to be empowered with market information and with the necessary skills for group commercialisation in order to succeed. At the initial stages, both the government and NGOs can play an active role, but both need to withdraw gradually so as to make farmers market on their own.

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Building an urban-rural platform

In Ecuador, the benefits of a healthy food system are becoming luxuries beyond the reach of the urban and rural poor. The modern market has come between urban-based consumers and rural-based producers. Intermediaries control distribution and prices while charging a lot for their services. These transactions affect both the grower and the consumer, who continue to suffer unfair prices, poor product quality and harmful consequences to the environment.

Emma Kirwan

Since 1987, a movement known as the *canastas comunitarias* has countered the harmful consequences of modern markets. “*Canasta*” means “basket,” and represents the basic food share that all citizens should have the right to access. The most impressive aspect of this movement is its grassroots-based origin: a movement born from necessity. In a country where national and local governments consistently fail to deliver food security measures, the *canastas comunitarias* provide a social safety net for marginalised populations. This is especially true for those facing acute risks of reduced food availability and limited income generating opportunities. The movement strives to make healthy food affordable for low-income city dwellers through community-based processes and direct relationships between consumers and agroecological producers (see Box 1).

Essentially, the *canastas comunitarias* are urban consumer groups formed by neighbourhood ties or linked through churches, clubs or universities. For example, in Guayaquil, a group of university students formed a *canasta* to contribute to their families’ sustenance, while Machala’s *canasta* was started by a religious association. Their objective for affordable, healthy food is achieved through a basic process: participants pool funds together to make bulk purchases in the public marketplace, which are then divided among the families in the group and results in substantial savings.

In 1987, a church group of 25 families founded the first *canasta comunitaria* in Riobamba. However, in 1999, the group disbanded for unspecified reasons. This coincided with a severe economic crisis and dramatic inflation. The *canasta* model was urgently reinstated in response to aggravated poverty and limited access to healthy food. In 2000, seven families in Riobamba formed the *Canasta Comunitaria Utopía*. Over the next two years, word of their experience had spread and stirred interest on a national scale. An array of visitors, ranging from non-profit organisations to extended family members and local government representatives, visited Utopía to learn how to replicate the model in their respective regions.

Since 2000, the movement has steadily gained momentum. It has been reconstructed and adapted to geographically and demographically distinct cities, including Otavalo, Guayaquil, Cuenca, Machala, Santo Domingo and Ibarra. It includes groups composed of nearly 1500 consumers, 600 agro-ecological farming families and several supporting organisations. Quito’s *Canasta Comunitaria El Carmen* demonstrates the movement’s



Photo: Emma Kirwan

Producers displaying their goods at the *Primer Encuentro de las Canastas Comunitarias de Quito*, a fair held by Quito’s consumer network in November 2007.

dramatic growth: through word of mouth and a radio programme, the *canasta* increased from 25 families in 2002 to 640 families in 2005. It was then forced to divide into several smaller groups. The national network was formalised as the *Red Tierra y Canasta* at a convention in April 2008.

With heightened success, the movement has attracted attention from political entities and the media, who are interested in the model as a viable means against food insecurity. Local governments have recently launched their own *canasta* groups or channeled funds through local organisations to do so. Likewise, international non-profit organisations such as Heifer, SwissAid, and World Neighbors are intrigued with the movement’s implications for rural-based development and are increasingly willing to commit financial and personal support.

How do consumers benefit?

Members of a *canasta comunitaria* can gain access to healthier food at lower costs through their community organisations. Financial transparency ensures that participating families are confident in the organisation and management of the communal fund. Members are responsible for all transactions, including purchases, sales and market analyses, which are

for food security

often published for *canasta* members. While credit options are still rare, certain groups reserve a percentage of the communal fund for provisional credit if a family cannot pay. Due to careful and deliberate co-operation, consumers have managed to reduce food costs. The price of a *canasta* share varies between groups depending on several factors: the number of people per group, number of products per share, financial capacity of the participants, administrative and logistical costs and local market prices (reflecting transportation costs and intermediary chains). Despite these distinctions, participants throughout the country have generally concluded that since becoming a member, the greatest change and gain that they have experienced is economic security. In this case, affordable prices directly affect food security and nutrition.

Ecuador is the seventeenth most biodiverse country in the world, home to over 80 native potato varieties. Despite this, the diet of the local population is based on rice, one potato variety ('Superchola'), wheat, corn, and is supplemented with processed foods. Through wholesale buying, the *canasta comunitaria* affords poor urban families with more nutritious options; the basket includes a range of fresh fruits, vegetables, and legumes that has become increasingly varied over time. As a result, consumers introduce new food products into their home and are encouraged to learn new recipes through workshops and trials. Consequently, consumers have the power to recover culinary traditions and local plant varieties that are being lost.

The quality of food reflects the quality of community

A national study conducted in May 2008 by the *Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Censo* estimated that the "basic

monthly food share" for an urban family of four is US\$ 170.44. The average income, however, only permits US\$ 104.65 to be spent on food. This suggests that consumers must buy cheap, processed foods that offer little nutritional value. However, as a collective unit, urban consumers present themselves and poor farmers with a unique opportunity for reclaiming basic rights to food security and economic stability. Based on food spending estimates, the total urban population has US\$ 8.7 million in spending power. This could have a great impact on the national consumption trends, and influence agricultural production (of which at least 80 per cent is in the hands of small-scale growers).

As the *canastas comunitarias* increasingly save on their food purchases, consumers are beginning to wonder where their food comes from. Questions arise, such as: "What is the point of saving if we are eating food produced with chemicals?", "Where are we currently spending our food dollars, and who should be receiving our money?" Over time, the groups have sought more direct relationships with small-scale growers interested in "healthier" on-farm production. Through farm visits, group members learn about the realities of agro-ecological farming. They gradually accept that natural products differ from commercial varieties in size and appearance, are often smaller or scarred by insects, but usually richer in flavour. When *Canasta Comunitaria Utopía* received its first order of rainbow chard from a local farmer, consumers were thrilled by its radical colours. Farmers were equally excited by this newfound interest. One grower admitted that, "at 60 years old, this is the first time I have delivered my product into the hands of the person who will eat it, the first time that I have looked into their eyes, that I have met them in person". The majority

Box 1. How the process works: The *Canasta Comunitaria Utopía*

The *Canasta Comunitaria Utopía* is made up of about 80 families from the city of Riobamba, in central Ecuador. The process is organised once every two weeks. Products are sourced from the local market and about a half dozen farming families. To enter, families must pay a US\$ 1.00 inscription fee. Here is how the *canasta* works:

- **Thursday:** Every other Thursday, participants pay for their basket in advance (US\$ 7.50, which includes US\$ 0.20 for administrative activities and complimentary events) and drop off a large sack or basket to be filled with their products.
- **Friday:** A rotating team studies prices in the local markets to work out the budget and finalise the shopping list for Saturday's purchases.
- **Saturday:** A selected group of purchasers, ranging between 25 to 30 family representatives, carry out the work under the guidance of one of 6 rotating leaders. If volunteers fail to arrive on their assigned day, they must pay a fine.

A typical Saturday looks like this:

6.30am Volunteers (men, women, and children alike) arrive at the *canasta* site, a street the town council has granted them permission to occupy. The leader divides the volunteers into two groups. One group will manage the funds and make the purchases specified in Friday's study, while the second group prepares the site for receiving, dividing, and packing the products.

7 am Equipment is set up for the *canasta* activities. Weighing scales, tents, tarps, stools, containers, and plastic shopping bags are necessary

for protecting products and accurately sorting, weighing, dividing, and packing the products.

8 am The purchasing group returns in a rented pick-up truck with wholesale purchases. The products are unloaded and a brief refreshment is provided. At the same time, agro-ecological producers arrive to directly deliver their goods.

8.30 am – 11 am A whirlwind of activity begins. Volunteers split into three groups organised around the dividing the products: sorting, weighing, and packing. First, the total weight of each product is divided by the number of family shares, after which each group carries out its respective responsibilities. Though this continues in assembly line fashion for 2-3 hours, the work is hardly tedious. Laughter and conversation flow easily among the members, and every five minutes a new vegetable or fruit takes the stage.

11 am – 12 pm The sacks are packed, nearly toppling over with fresh food. A second refreshment is offered before the equipment is cleared, leaving only the sacks and baskets lining the street in neat rows.

12 pm – 1 pm Consumers arrive to collect their pre-paid food shares.

The *Canasta Comunitaria Utopía* is carefully run by a rotating group. This group manages a series of simple tables to record contact information, volunteer schedules, payments, bills, total and specific spending, and bi-weekly financial analyses and comparisons. Because the members of *Utopía* actively participate, individuals are only required to volunteer two to three times per year. This means they save significant time that they would otherwise have to spend in the marketplace.

of groups will continue to prioritise economy over quality. However, the experiences of the groups that are moving towards responsible food systems will serve as a learning process for forming direct markets between *canastas* and producers.

Where direct relationships exist, the *canastas comunitarias* seek to ensure that producers receive fair prices (see Box 2). By purchasing directly from local farms, transportation costs are decreased and often assumed by the group. Frequently, producers and consumers meet to agree upon prices, and farmers benefit from arrangements that provide a rare degree of stability.

In addition, *canastas* work with producers to improve product quality and manage competition. For example, the *Canasta Comunitaria Utopía*, in Riobamba, received an order of poor quality grains from a long-standing producer group. At the same time, they were offered better quality grains from a new group. Contrary to market rationale where ties would be severed with the former supplier, the *canasta* decided to alternate their suppliers while giving feedback and support to help the original provider improve the quality of its products. As a result, the producer group eventually raised its standards and has since

Box 2. Potato producers in Carchi

Farmer Field School graduates from Ecuador's northernmost province of Carchi have been working to decrease pesticide use on their potato crops, in particular the use of highly toxic insecticides. Through their research, they have identified a number of promising alternatives. These include new, precocious potato varieties that are resistant to disease and can be harvested before major insect pests complete their lifecycle. While resembling popular varieties and offering higher nutritional content, these new varieties are not yet popular. Consumers continue to demand 'Superchola', a slow growing variety that requires heavy pesticide applications.

The *Canasta Comunitaria El Carmen* in Quito invited Euler Fuentala, a FFS leader from Carchi, to visit and present evidence showing that pesticides were causing serious health problems for farmer and their families in Carchi. Euler explained that his group had devised alternatives, but they needed help in creating markets for their new potatoes. He told the group that the prices in the Quito market (about US\$ 12 per 50 kg sack) were double the price paid to farmers in their fields. He said that provided a secure market, his group could deliver a truckload of potatoes every two weeks for US\$ 10 per sack, allowing farmers to earn US\$ 8 per sack, a 30 per cent increase over what they were presently paid. Moreover, he could guarantee that the potatoes would be free of highly toxic pesticides and that no middle person would intervene to take profits away from his group of smallholder farmers. After negotiation, the *Canasta* and Euler agreed to a contract: a truckload of potatoes every two weeks for a price of US\$ 10 per sack. This was a win-win situation for both growers and consumers!



Photo: Emma Kirwan

A member of Cuenca's *Canasta Comunitaria* collects her biweekly *canasta*. Behind her, products are divided into shares and ready to be loaded into the sacks.

succeeded in entering organic niche markets on a domestic and international scale. Other consumer groups, such as the *Canasta Comunitaria Zapallo Verde*, alternate their suppliers in order to maintain variety and involve several producers at a time. The *canastas comunitarias* offer a creative social learning space where consumers and producers can build more responsible relationships that lead to reciprocal and stable economies, more nutritious food and a healthier environment.

Plans for the future

As the *canastas comunitarias* gain momentum, diverse projects have been proposed for building local economies around environmentally sound production. A priority of this movement is to increase consumer awareness about the origin of food in order to create a mutually beneficial farm-to-city market system. Consumer-based proposals include nutrition workshops and cooking classes, farm visits and exchange programmes, and educational fairs. Equally, small-scale producers must identify strategies for organised production and commercialisation in order to meet new demands, in both quantity of production and quality. Nationally, the *canastas comunitarias* subscribe to wider social and political networks, such as the *Colectivo Agroecológico*. They have also become active in nationwide campaigns to promote affordable and healthy food systems. A unique opportunity for including the urban and rural poor in an otherwise exclusive market has been created by the *canastas comunitarias*, and over time their effort has become articulated as part of an international "food sovereignty" movement.

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Caring for the caregivers in Mozambique

In an HIV-stricken district in Mozambique the number of orphans is growing. Committed women want to take care of them, but they are very poor themselves.

A relief organisation supports caregivers and orphans to rear chickens for the local market. "Now we can provide children with school uniforms and some food."

Simon Mukwaya

Irene Tivane lives in Ndonga, in the Guijá District in Mozambique. In recent years, she has seen the number of orphans in her community increase. She has been doing her best to provide care for some of them, but with little means of support herself, is finding it increasingly difficult. This is only one of the many communities in Africa which have been witnessing a growing number of orphans since the advent of HIV and AIDS. Local women identified more than 1200 orphans for whom they want to care.

Once either parent falls ill due to HIV and AIDS or related illnesses, the children's lives begin to change. In fact they start a long journey of deprivation. Access to education, shelter, clothes and health, among other things, becomes difficult for them. In view of this situation, Samaritan's Purse (SP), an international relief organisation working in the district, initiated training for local caregivers like Irene. Commonly known as *educadores*, or educators, they visit the children and provide for their short term needs. After a year of working in the community, the educators' efforts were well recognised. Their influence was growing. So was the demand for their services. This soon became overwhelming for them as they started to face many requests to assist the orphans, but they too are poor, with no means of support. They needed some extra income to help them continue to assist orphans in their community. To meet this need, in May 2007, SP started a broiler chicken business with 25 women in the district, divided into groups of five.

Learning to raise chickens

The educators had eight-weeks training in chicken rearing. This covered all the topics needed when starting such activities, including how to construct a shelter, the need for ventilation, diseases and their control, and record keeping and basic finance. In addition to this, participants also went to visit other chicken rearing projects in the neighbouring district of Chokwe. This helped them to appreciate the practical issues involved in running the business. After the visit, SP assisted the participants to construct the shelters, providing materials and a trained builder. Labour and other non-financial costs were met by the participants. Site selection for the shelter took various factors into consideration, including proximity to clean water, feeds, beneficiaries and market.

Prior to receiving the chicks, some conditions had to be in place, such as bedding, a lantern for light, a charcoal stove to raise the room temperature when needed, and feeders and drinkers. Upon receiving the chicks, the participants conducted a bird count with SP staff, and recorded the number of birds received and their condition. A total of 1300 one-day old chicks were distributed. This marks the beginning of a cycle which spans thirty-five days. During the growth phase, the

project veterinarian assisted the educators to conduct regular monitoring to check on the management of the chicks. Feeding, quantities consumed, sanitation, vaccines, sicknesses and deaths are followed up.

The chickens are ready for sale after the thirty-five days. The chickens are sold within the community through word of mouth, and through scouting trips in nearby markets. After selling, the project staff hold a meeting with the participants to review the previous cycle's income, to put aside funds for the next cycle and also to share profits amongst the participants. To date, the results have been encouraging. The 25 women have managed to raise US\$ 4940 per cycle. Sixty percent of this is reinvested into the business whilst the remaining 40 percent is shared as profit. The short term impact on the lives of more than 114 orphans they care for has been significant, and lives have been changing. The caregivers can now meet the children's financial needs without difficulty. Things like uniforms for school, exercise books, pens, food and health care are now being provided to the once deprived families.



Photo: Simon Mukwaya

Angelica Mundlovo, one of the community educators who has become proficient in raising chickens to assist with the costs involved in caring for orphans.

As good as a husband

After three cycles, the experience so far shows that small livestock are a viable source of livelihood for the resource poor, such as families with orphans. A key lesson learnt is that the community groups can run the broiler chicken projects with minimum support from SP. Caregivers can earn an income in a short space of time and can meet the immediate needs of the children under their care. The proceeds are not only useful for the orphans but also their caregivers, all of whom were already struggling to make ends meet prior to starting this micro-enterprise. According to Irene, "I no longer have a husband to provide for me and my needs. He died a long time ago. But thanks to this business it's like having a husband again. We are excited with this opportunity. We are now making some savings so that we can expand the business."

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People with learning difficulties develop

“Care farms” combine care of the land with care of vulnerable people. Such farms exist in many European countries. In the Netherlands, the *Kiem* care farm has sixty years’ experience in involving mentally disabled people in agricultural activities. The farm sells a wide range of horticultural products, while the participants have found a worthwhile function in society.

Natasha van Dijk

In the south-east of the Netherlands, where patches of forest border on idyllic meadows, lies a small farm called the *Kiem* (meaning “germination”). The *Kiem* is the oldest biodynamic farm in the Netherlands, and is home and workplace for a community called Bronlaak. About 200 adults with learning difficulties, mental health problems and other special needs live, learn and work together with a staff of twelve families. It was founded in 1948 when parents of children with learning difficulties sought a place for them to live and work once they became adults. Life in the community is based around two ideas: biodynamic agriculture and anthroposophy. The latter is a philosophy which teaches that all people, no matter what their learning difficulties, have a healthy core element in them, giving rise to special abilities and talents. Biodynamics is a method of organic farming based on a holistic approach that regards soil, plants, animals and people as interrelated. Biodynamic agriculture has always been at the heart of the community, because it sees healthy food and care of the earth as important to people’s health and well-being.

Sixty years on, Bronlaak is now financed by the government as well as gaining income from sales of farm and artisan products. All residents join in at least one of the many work areas. These include a horticulture garden, a livestock farm with a cheese-making unit, and a managed forest. In addition, artisan activities include pottery making, wooden utensil carving, weaving, candle making, and growing flowers and perennial plants. A laundry unit and central kitchen are the other two work areas.

Daily routine at the *Kiem* horticultural garden

The *Kiem* garden (at 1.6 hectares) includes over 40 varieties of vegetable crops, seven types of fruits, and over 60 types of herbs. Honey is also produced. The day starts at 8.30 with a group planning meeting. The 22 adult participants sit together with four or five work supervisors in a big circle. Tasks are divided and the working day begins. At midday there is a break, and everyone continues with a different activity. Often in the early morning hours, vegetables, herbs and fruits are harvested and processed. In the late morning or afternoon, crops are weeded or hoed depending on the need. In the autumn months, compost-making is an important activity; in the wintertime, tools and infrastructure are maintained. Winter is also an excellent time to process all the dried herbs collected earlier, into herbal mixtures for teas, cooking, medicines, as well as for herbal oils and ointments. Work ends at 4.30 in the afternoon.

There are many things to consider when deciding about task division. As the garden produces a wide variety of crops as well as seedlings, there are many tasks to choose from. The levels of learning difficulties vary: some people can work rather independently while others are only able to push a wheelbarrow. Participants have various types of disabilities: there are people



Photo: Natasha van Dijk

Two participants at the *Kiem* care farm harvest a variety of lettuces.

with Down’s syndrome, different forms of autism, mental disorders such as borderline syndrome, as well as physical disabilities such as visual limitations, deafness, and epilepsy.

All the horticultural products are marketed. First, the community’s central kitchen has a contract to buy a large daily share of the garden produce. The kitchen staff (which also includes participants) prepare meals for 210 people. Products are transported by horse-cart and managed by residents. A second market outlet is a local shop run by the Bronlaak community. This sells fresh and processed products from the garden and farm, as well as handicrafts. Customers are members of the community as well as outsiders, including local restaurants. Lastly, a number of external horticulturalists buy up to 10 000 of our seedlings per year.

Care farming in the Netherlands

The *Kiem* is an example of “care farming”, which combines care of the land with care of vulnerable people. Care farms seek to empower vulnerable people by developing their possibilities, strengths and potentials rather than focusing on their limitations – by engaging them in agricultural activities.

Until the 1990s, few care farms existed in the Netherlands. The combination of agriculture and social care is a promising concept. It contributes to the diversification of agricultural production, while also providing an alternative innovation for the health care sector, which subsidises the enterprises. At present, there are 900 care farms in the Netherlands. About 8000 vulnerable people work and sometimes live on these farms. The target groups of care farms are very diverse, ranging from people with physical disabilities, psychiatric problems, suffering from mental breakdowns or Alzheimers disease, drug addicts, long-term unemployed people, or ex-prisoners undergoing

confidence through care farming

rehabilitation. The National Support Centre of Care Farms has developed a quality trademark for its members, which guarantees a minimum level of care and safety standards.

Some lessons learned about care farming from the *Kiem*:

- People need meaningful tasks in their lives. In our garden this is clear: we supply fresh food products to meet a daily demand from society. Everybody contributes in his or her own way and level. The garden provides meaningful work that empowers the participants because they are given responsibility, no matter how small. Meaningful work allows people to learn to make their own decisions, for instance being able to choose between different tasks. This is fundamentally different from so-called “day-care” activities, where people simply pass the time of day and often have few goals or little perspective.
- All workers are part of a small, but important, social network which includes the Bronlaak community, staff, vulnerable participants as well as shop customers. People meet each other, not because of their disabilities, but because as a group, they are responsible for a healthy, tasty and beautiful product. Furthermore, people with and without learning difficulties have to co-operate and interact with each other – which is not always easy. Social events are also celebrated with the larger community of Bronlaak.
- A sense of equality is key. Work supervisors at the *Kiem* have degrees in both horticulture and pedagogical care and are important role models, but they do work together with participants on common tasks. There is also a healthy level of pressure to ensure high quality standards. Working together also means communicating, chatting, singing, celebrating, quarrelling, and sometimes even fighting together.
- People are empowered by a safe environment. Working in an agricultural setting makes people more aware of the rhythms of nature, aside from daily, weekly and seasonal rhythms. Everybody needs rhythm in their lives, but people with special needs are particularly comforted by the feeling that they are in a safe and constant environment.

Finding a place for people with special needs in society

Having a small community like Bronlaak, where safety and care for vulnerable people are guaranteed, fulfills the needs of many people. This is often referred to as the “reversed integration” model. At Bronlaak, people live in a community, but others also live and work there. Outsiders are explicitly invited to visit the beautiful landscape (walking and cycling routes are found there) and to attend cultural events.

The opposite of this is the strongly promoted model of “integration”. From the 1980s onwards this called for vulnerable people to be integrated into all aspects of society. In earlier centuries in the Netherlands, the “fools” (as they were then called) of each rural community did have a special place in society, including participation in agricultural activities. But by the end of the 19th century, they were institutionalised, and in the 20th century, society took on the attitude that people with disabilities were abnormal. In the 1960s, liberty and democratic rights movements took place, resulting in the call for equal civil rights and integration of all people in all aspects of life. However, in practice, our society is not yet prepared for this idea. For example, employers lack sufficient incentives. Social isolation is very common among many of the people who live in so-called “normal” neighbourhoods. This integration model does not work for many people, particularly the most vulnerable. Looking at the model practised at Bronlaak, we see people engaged in worthwhile activities, having a job, and being respected and appreciated.

- Working in an agricultural environment has a strong therapeutic value. The workers have to face the challenges of the elements, such as bad weather, sticky soil, getting dirty hands, carrying heavy loads, and the never-ending weeds. Overcoming harsh elements helps people to develop skills and good attitudes. Although some participants are motivated from the beginning, others need to be motivated to keep working. But we all do get a sense of pride when, for instance, 70 tonnes of compost are prepared at the end of December. We celebrate this with a small ritual; adding biodynamic preparations to the heap of compost, and telling a Christmas story. Sometimes, however, it is concluded that a person would fit better in another work place, such as the pottery or weaving workshop because he or she needs a more confined space, for instance, than in the garden.

Limitations of care farms

Everyone should be rewarded for the job they do. A limitation of most, if not all, care farms in the Netherlands is that participants are not paid for the jobs offered. People with special needs, unlike the farm staff, do not receive a salary. This deserves more investigation: if you take people seriously, no matter what their level of functioning, financial reward in the form of a salary should be provided. At present, all participants do receive a social security allowance from the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sports, but this does not carry the same status as a “salary”.

In our society, individualism, a demand-driven care system, and the growing level of bureaucracy challenge the value of learning and the quality of professional supervision. Care professionals are pushed more and more into the role of administrators, because of the high level of accountability and quality certification processes demanded by government.

Participant development

It is clear from the experience of the *Kiem* that care farms can provide a means for vulnerable people with learning disabilities to grow and develop, particularly when they participate for a longer time. Those who have worked in the garden for many years become physically and mentally stronger. Shy and sensitive people, damaged by social exclusion in the past, have also become much stronger and less vulnerable as they experience respect from others. The participants in the *Kiem* garden usually have such serious learning disabilities that they need to work in a “safe” environment all their lives. However, other vulnerable groups, such as ex-prisoners or those suffering from nervous breakdowns, can go on to become integrated into society. For them, working on a care farm is more like temporary therapy.

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This article is the personal view of the author, and is not necessarily that of the Kiem farm or the Bronlaak community.

Troubled youths in Indonesia practise farming as therapy

The *Karang Widya* foundation in central Indonesia is trying to respond to rising numbers of troubled youths living on the street. It has set up a therapy programme which stimulates behaviour change through practising organic farming. This has created new opportunities for these youths, who go on to better lives.

Ngalim

Ari, Joko, and Slamet are youths with complex problems, such as drug or alcohol use, the sex trade, violent abuse, and who usually (but not always) live on the street. Ari comes from Bogor, while Joko and Slamet come from Yogyakarta, two cities located on Java, Indonesia. They have completed a therapy programme run by the *Karang Widya* foundation. Before joining this programme, all three were street children who sang and made crafts to earn money. However, at a certain time they realised they wanted to change their lives. They then joined the *Karang Widya* “learning farm” therapy programme.

Two-component therapy

The *Karang Widya* programme lasts at least four months, and has two components. Rather than psychological consultations, participants learn through activities which get them closer to nature. They develop a good attitude and change their behaviour through hard work, responsibilities and discipline. Facilitators and participants set the rules and the schedule together. Once these are set, they must be followed and cannot be changed. Also, the participants are divided into groups, to help develop greater empathy for others. If one member of the group does not follow the rules, the whole group gets penalised. From this, they learn that everything they do affects others as well. Participants are also asked to make plans for the future. For example, how will they stay away from their previous life, and what kind of work will they do, or what kind of livelihood do they want. Facilitators then guide participants to realise their plans.

The second part of the programme teaches organic farming. *Karang Widya* believes that the best way to teach people is through “learning by doing”. Participants start working on the farm at 6.00 in the morning and have activities until 10.00 at night. First they practise organic farming methods, and then they have a forum to discuss their observations with an instructor with help of games.

In other youth therapy programmes, pocket money is given to all participants. However, we find that many youths tend to join such programmes for the pocket money only. Therefore, in the *Karang Widya* programme, the only money participants get comes from the profits from product sales from the farm. The result – which is small – is then fairly divided among participants.

Impact after therapy

Karang Widya set out to work with troubled youth because it is concerned about the fact that this vulnerable group continues to



Photo: Yayasan Karang Widya

Participants in a programme for vulnerable youth read *Salam*, the Indonesian edition of *LEISA Magazine*, for their discussions on agricultural practices.

increase in size. Various therapy programmes have been started by the government and other NGOs, but many youths go back to the street afterwards, and still depend on help. Most likely these programmes either do not give the youths enough skills to start a new life and livelihood, or they do not help them to change their attitudes. *Karang Widya* chose organic agriculture as a good livelihood option as Indonesia is an agrarian country – but most farmers practise unsustainable methods. Therefore, by giving vulnerable youths organic farming skills, they can also contribute towards improving agriculture in Indonesia.

Joko explains the impact of the programme on her life: “When I joined, I realised how much I love to work on a farm. It was not enough for me to only work for half days – I also worked in the early evenings and during my day off. I started to dream about opening my own organic farm and selling products to vegetarian restaurants in Yogyakarta.” Joko and Slamet managed to start a new organic farm in April 2007, in a village close by. They get full support from *Sanggar Milas* (an organisation in Yogyakarta which had enrolled them in the therapy programme in the first place), since they show passion and responsibility as well as good organic farming skills. Ari also farmed together with Joko and Slamet for almost a year, but then decided to produce handicrafts independently for a restaurant and art shop in Yogyakarta. Since most of the time the Foundation works with other organisations that support vulnerable youths, they can make sure that the participants will continue to get support after completing the programme. The participants are then encouraged to re-enter their communities, or (which is usually the case) to seek out organic farming communities to join.

Karang Widya has now carried out five sessions of their programme. From the first group, 18 out of 30 participants (most coming from urban areas) changed their lives. In the second and third groups, consecutively 16 and 27 participants completed the course, with the majority coming from rural areas. From two evaluations, facilitators concluded that participants from the city tended to do better than rural area youths, because they were mentally stronger and had learned to struggle more for their livelihoods.

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Visually impaired students grow better maize

In Ndola, Zambia's second largest city, a special school for the visually impaired recently added agricultural production to its programme. The students learn to produce various food crops as well as pigs. Last year, they won the prize for the best maize, outcompeting all the "normal" schools in the area.

Humphrey Nkonde

The costs of running the Ndola Lions School for the Visually Impaired have increased as a result of attracting more pupils, and higher food and transport expenses. Its premises now accommodate 120 students, boys and girls aged 7 to 16. By 2006, the long-running government grant could no longer sustain the school's operational costs. The school administration then decided that the pupils should be involved in agriculture to make the institution self-sufficient in food, and to help raise some income.

Contribution to agriculture

In the early stages of crop establishment, the visually impaired cannot be involved in farming maize. This is because they

cannot tell which is the food crop and which is grass by sense of touch alone. Once the maize grows, however, blind students can feel the difference, and are therefore capable of weeding. After the maize is harvested, it is ground to produce Zambia's staple food, *nshima*, to feed the students. Sometimes the students eat meat, from the pigs that the pupils also look after with the help of support staff. The school now has a piggery for about 20 pigs. Left-over food supplements feed from millers, keeping the cost of running the piggery low.

The students also grow bananas and vegetables, which supplement their food needs and provide income for the school. It is interesting to see how organised the students are. When the bell to go to the garden rings, the partially blind pupils help keep their completely blind colleagues in a line. Upon reaching the garden, one child connects the hosepipe to the tap while others fill plastic containers and buckets to water the vegetables, tomatoes and bananas. Two years ago the school only had five banana plants, but the number has now shot up to almost 130 plants. With a borehole in place, there is abundant water for the bananas, which need a lot of water. The students' commitment can be seen from the fact that the plants are always watered. If there are problems, they are rectified by support staff.

It is commonly believed in Zambian society that the differently-abled, including the blind, cannot be involved in agriculture. Surprisingly, the school demonstrated the best agricultural practices in the 2006/2007 farming season among over 50 basic schools in Ndola. How did the pupils with partial or no sight at all produce the largest cobs of maize from the same seeds that were distributed to other schools? Clearly, people with disabilities can very well contribute to food security through small-scale agriculture. In fact, it is only lack of capital that prevents the students becoming involved in other forms of agriculture such as chicken rearing or fish farming – there is a fish pond lying idle.

Beyond basic school

After about nine years at Ndola Lions School for the Visually Impaired, pupils attain the junior secondary school level of Grade 9. Those who make it to senior secondary school go to other parts of the country, where there are extensions for special education meeting the needs of the visually impaired. There is also the Kang'onga School for the Blind in Ndola, where some former pupils go for advanced subjects such as basketry and handicrafts, though this school also suffers from lack of funding. The main job that suits the visually impaired is working in exchange rooms as telephone operators, but with the advent of mobile phones, these jobs have become scarce. Because of the agricultural knowledge they gain at the basic school, many graduates continue to garden even when they are drawn into other professions, such as personnel management or special education. Some graduates have established smallholdings in Kang'onga, where they practise farming to make a living.

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This article is based on discussions with Daniel Mwamba, Deputy Headmaster of the Ndola Lions School for the Visually Impaired, and with the boarding master, Stephen Mumba.



Photo: Humphrey Nkonde

Being visually impaired is not an impediment to cultivating tasty and beautiful bananas!

Villages join hands to combat

New legislation in India allows communities to take charge of degraded forest areas. One village claimed to have legal rights over a particular forest area. But users from neighbouring villages protested. An external NGO helped the communities to accept each other as legitimate forest users. Jointly, the villages are rehabilitating the area.

Sanjay Joshie

A majority of India's tribal communities inhabit upland and forest dominated landscapes. They have little agricultural land and are limited in livelihood options. There used to be dense forests in the areas where they lived, which fulfilled a lot of their livelihood needs. But when the colonial state took away the legal rights of tribes to use their forests in 1878, traditional protection broke down and outsiders took away valuable forest products from the area. As a result, the forest cover in India dropped to 11 percent in 1990, down from 32 percent in 1900. Now, deforestation has led to widespread damage to downstream farms.

Chitravas, in the southern Aravalli ranges in India, is one of the millions of affected villages. Chitravas means "home of the leopard", and the village has always had a dense and rich forest. When in 1988 new forest policies allowed people's participation in the protection of forest, Chitravas was quick to form a committee to protect the forest. But three nearby communities protested the fact that Chitravas inhabitants were claiming the forest this way. They had been using the plot for as long as they could remember.

Village forest committee

In 2001, the Foundation for Ecological Security (FES) started its work in Chitravas, to help the committee come up with plans to manage the plot. The FES team took advice from the Divisional Forest Conservator and organised a village general body meeting, where all the communities expressed their concerns. FES then organised repeated meetings to understand the traditional forest use patterns in the area so that the real forest users could be included. Based on the evidence gathered in these meetings, the communities jointly prepared a customary user rights list. This helped in deciding the voting rights for the Village Forest Committee.

The forest turned out to be actively used by two thirds of the families in Chitravas and the three surrounding settlements. These 325 forest users agreed to protect and manage the forest plot through joint forest management. This led to a committee of 18 members in total. While this committee was bigger than usual, the inclusive distribution of leadership ensured that representatives of all the communities supported the decisions made and would not boycott activities.

Implementing joint plans

The new committee decided on an action plan, which was approved by the forest department. First, communities rebuilt a stone wall to protect the forest land. Planting of *Jatropha curacas* along the stone-wall provided an additional vegetative barrier. The construction of loose boulder check dams, gully plugs, contour trenches and gabions ensured *in situ* conservation of soil and moisture. In addition, 50 000 saplings of various species and grasses were planted. Women's groups took up livelihood activities

such as kitchen gardening, and pasture development activities. This provided poorer families with water and healthy food.

Organising in this way led to various improvements. Local governance improved – the community has been able to establish a true form of local self governance. Now, the villagers have started accessing other programmes available with the local government, such as agricultural services. Protection has also resulted in more and better biomass: from 140 t/ha in unprotected plots to 302 t/ha in protected plots. In dense forest, soil losses are six times less than in open land. Women have been able to take part in the community decision-making process and have even assumed leadership. Lastly, the plot now provides water. The number of wells has increased from ten to forty. Flash floods used to happen regularly in the monsoon, and the banks of the stream were eroded year after year. Now the plot stores water.

Problems to overcome

Of course, not everything went smoothly. In the process of coming to a shared plan for the use of the forest, the villagers encountered many problems. For example, farmers used to encroach on the forest. One villager planted a crop of around half a hectare inside the forest. The villagers gave him time to harvest his crop, if he then agreed to close the fence. But after the harvest, he started preparing the field for another crop, defying committee orders. The committee called for village meetings on this issue. The farmer in question did not show up, and people started holding meetings in front of his house. So the matter was taken up with the local government. Finally the community pressure was so intense that he had to vacate the area. He then started to participate in the land conservation process.

Learning from an

With leasehold forestry, poor households are allowed to use a plot of degraded forest for a certain amount of time. In Nepal, a project showed that this helped poor households improve their living standards, while at the same time reviving degraded forests. Implementing leasehold forestry on a larger scale was a logical next step. But in doing so, the Nepalese government ran into some obstacles.

Shiva Khanal

Since 1989, authorities in Nepal can legally hand over degraded forest to poor people for agro-forestry. District forestry offices identified the poorest households, and handed over degraded forest plots to them, on a 40-year lease. From 1992 to 2003 a project funded by IFAD developed working procedures to institutionalise this leasehold forestry. Until 2003, government agencies and researchers supported almost 2000 user groups that managed some 7000 hectares in a third of the country's districts. Groups could plant annual crops and small trees. The bigger trees remained government property.

Impressive results

With the forest plots being managed, fuel and fodder production in forests improved. Women did not have to spend so much time

land degradation



This land cover change map shows that the area under community management has become greener after villages agreed to jointly care for the land. (Source: FES)

To protect the land, the committee hired guards. This did not work, and so the community devised the “stick system”: three persons from different households carry sticks as a sign that it is their duty to guard the plot. If they find any animals inside, they report this to the village committee, who imposes sanctions according to the village norms. As people from Chitravas could not participate in the stick system, they paid extra for

products harvested. In the earlier situation such concessions were unthinkable. This was because before, the inhabitants from Chitravas did not allow families from other communities to be committee members.

There are still occasional problems such as the guard on duty is not sincere or does not go to guard; cattle is found inside the plot; or families not turning up for labour contribution on the site. But now such things are resolved internally. The committee discusses such matters, refers to the byelaws, and then penalises the defaulters by fines or labour.

Incentive

Joint Forest Management has provided a degree of tenure security, and an incentive to local communities to participate in forest protection and restoration activities. They thus link up conservation with livelihoods.

The people in Chitravas, like in other villages, initially liked project benefits such as waged labour for wall construction. But now that farmers are seeing their forests regenerating, fodder growing, and streams flowing for a longer period, it has made them see other benefits. Farmers have expressed what they see as future benefits, how they would ensure equitable sharing later, and how they would ensure protection of their forests for eternity.

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effort to scale up local successes

collecting food and were able to take part in training and income-generating activities. Less time spent cattle grazing allowed children to attend school, while goat-keeping was a source of income for families. The forest became more dense, with more plant and animal species, and there was less soil erosion. All in all, at project scale, participating households became better off, and forests became greener. The fact that the groups were mobilised by female facilitators – a deliberate choice – also paid off: most lease certificates were issued in women’s names – quite an achievement in a male-dominated society.

Leasehold forestry, at the project scale, seemed a successful way to improve the livelihoods of poor families. The national government therefore commissioned its expansion in 2002. In theory, leasehold forestry could be scaled up, to cover a million hectares of degraded forest. A National Planning Commission aimed to establish 100 000 hectares of leasehold forestry in the tenth five-year plan (2002-2007).

Why scaling up did not happen

Now, after the plan, this ambition seems to have largely failed. By 2007, the area under leasehold forestry increased by only a few thousand hectares rather than the planned 100 000. The government plan failed for several reasons.

First, not everybody warmheartedly supported leasehold forestry. Officials involved with wildlife management saw it as a threat. According to them, it meant turning forest into land for agriculture, and therefore they did not like it – even if it boosted biodiversity.

Second, some NGOs regarded leasehold forestry as a threat to well-established community forestry. In community forestry, forest is handed over to mixed groups of rich and poor households, based on the community around patches of forest. A review has shown that despite many initiatives aimed at poor households, community forestry benefits rich households, with poor households often ending up being worse off. Leasehold forestry could therefore be a good complementary approach. But many NGOs did not share this view.

Third, the new, decentralised district forestry co-ordination committees still needed to develop planning procedures for land use, enabling them to allocate leasehold forestry next to community forest or parks. Last but not least, on-going insurgency and political turmoil made it very hard for the government to address all these problems.

The failed attempt to implement leasehold forestry on a large scale shows that success at the field level alone is not enough. Specific knowledge of how to link leasehold forestry with the general forestry governance would be needed. In addition, local and mid-level policy makers, NGOs and bureaucrats must be willing to support it in the longer term.

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Many rural areas do not benefit from a country's overall development. Local people get discouraged as nothing seems to work to get them out of poverty. However, an outsider may have refreshing ideas. In one remote village in Nigeria, students found that some land was suitable for rice cultivation. They sought professional support to help farmers tap this potential.

Rice production gives hope to neglected villages

Muideen Salawu

You hear the cock crow from inside a building, and see women and children returning from the stream with dark-coloured water to be used for the day's tasks. No cars are in sight, only brown and rusty roofs, and after looking around you see that at least a quarter of all buildings are deserted. This is Iwoye, a village 30 km south of Osogbo, the Osun state capital in the south-west of Nigeria. This village has a population of about 2000 people, no access to drinking water and little contact with the outside world. Iwoye is just one of the many isolated villages in Nigeria – its inhabitants live each day in a world of their own, far from electricity and good roads, unmindful of the happenings in the cities around them. Awaiting a better tomorrow that never comes, they hold to the belief that poverty is their fate.

Intervention

SIFE, Students in Free Enterprise, is an international non-profit organisation involving business leaders and students from more than 1400 universities, all over the world. One of these is the Obafemi Awolowo University (OAU) in Ile-Ife: since 2004, SIFE-OAU is a registered non-governmental organisation in Nigeria. While on a journey to Ibadan, some SIFE students stumbled upon Iwoye by chance, and we felt challenged to consider this village for one of our community outreach projects, and thus try to make a difference in the villagers' lives.

We started in June 2007 with a participatory rural appraisal session with 42 villagers, trying to identify their problems and define a strategic point of intervention. They were divided into different groups, with each group charged with identifying the resources available, the main difficulties and the most vulnerable households. We saw that most farmers cultivate cassava, but this is hardly profitable. We also discovered that this village has over 500 hectares of lowland suitable for rice cultivation, and wondered how this advantage could be tapped.

Using the SWOT analysis technique, we looked at all the internal and external factors associated with rice production. The main strength of these villagers was their passion to live a better life and the abundance of labour. Their weaknesses included little or no knowledge of rice production techniques, poor processing and packaging skills, and poor marketing skills. Interestingly, the untapped rice market, particularly in major

cities in Nigeria and neighbouring West African countries, did look like a unique business opportunity. However, birds and pest attacks, and the lack of higher yielding rice seeds and loan facilities were some of the major threats. A multi-phased strategy was then developed and carried out over a 14-month period. Each phase was tactically developed, looking in detail at previous experiences with rice production.

Organisational empowerment

The next step meant forming farmer clusters, as small groups of farmers coming together to share their resources, articulate priorities and take collective action. Those who were most interested in the project were asked to work together, as a sort of co-operative group. Overcoming personal and family differences was not easy, but when villagers realised what they could achieve by joining forces, they were willing to rise above their differences and form strong partnerships. Ten farmers, of whom three were women, formed the first group. Their interest led to an agreement with all the families who owned portions of land lying fallow, deciding to use it for rice cultivation. This was followed by a capacity building programme, where we looked at different rice production techniques.

Since we needed to know more about rice production, we attended workshops and courses provided by, for example, Nigeria's National Seeds Service. We also established contacts with the Osun State Agricultural Development Programme, and invited agricultural extension officers to run rice cultivation workshops. These took place between July and September 2007, and were conducted in the village hall and on the farm, where the villagers were exposed to different production techniques. The first group of farmers was invited to kickstart the "rice village", and they cultivated 10 acres of land. Their bountiful harvest in January 2008 encouraged other villagers to join them.

A workshop was also organised for women, covering the different aspects related to processing and packaging the produce (since these are considered to be women's jobs). The Osun state chairperson of the Rice Farmers Association of Nigeria and other experts in the rice value chain took enthusiastic women from the village through the standard techniques of threshing, parboiling, milling, packaging and marketing techniques.



Photo: Muideen Salawu

Partnerships for sustainable development

Working together with the group we carried out a detailed analysis of the turnover, which revealed that 75 percent of the production cost was spent on labour alone. The SIFE-OAU group decided then to introduce effective low-cost technologies for rice production. We are therefore working now on a soil and water conservation technology called “*sawah*” (a low cost method developed in Japan for controlling soil and water management problems), and are trying the zero-tillage farming technology called the “R-Box”, an initiative of the Nigerian government meant to reduce the cost of tilling and also reduce the effects of tilling. WITA 4, an improved high-yielding rice variety has also been introduced to boost production and standardise outputs for co-operative marketing.

To allow for the cultivation of a larger area, we decided to try a versatile low-cost tractor called the “power tiller” (otherwise known as a “walking tractor”). As we did not have funds for this equipment, we wrote a grant proposal on behalf of the Iwoye community, and sent it to different organisations. This received the attention of the Small Medium Enterprises Development Agency of Nigeria (SMEDAN), which decided to contribute with the capacity building workshops. They also granted one million Nigerian naira (approximately US\$ 8400) towards the cost of inputs.

Access to market

As we found out, marketing rice is not a problem at all, as the demand for rice has outstripped supply in the global market. With the decline in rice supply from rice exporting countries, Nigeria became one of the countries worst hit. Rice production in Iwoye therefore could not have come at a better time, as the villagers are now contributing to the local rice needs of the

country. The villagers were therefore linked with local rice buyers and, thanks to the good processing techniques employed, customer satisfaction and sales of their Iwoye rice products has increased. This demand is driving the villagers to employ more hands and cultivate more farmland, which in effect is generating sustainable employment opportunities.

At the moment, 73 farmers are now cultivating rice in Iwoye, forming 4 separate groups. The success story of this hitherto isolated village has now encouraged 5 nearby villages to ask for the assistance of SIFE-OAU in establishing rice farms in their own neighbourhoods. We guess that, in two years, no less than 850 farmers will be producing rice, and benefiting from its commercialisation.

Conclusion

With this project, SIFE-OAU has been able to show what governments and organisations can achieve by involving socially excluded communities in a nation-building process. Many of these villages abound in our nation, and most of them have many untapped potentials. If they are brought together and helped to develop appropriate technologies and to focus on a unique product, even isolated communities can contribute meaningfully to national development. This has clearly been shown by the Iwoye villagers. ■

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Call for articles

In 2009 the *LEISA Magazine* will celebrate its 25-year jubilee.

To mark this occasion, we will highlight throughout the year the important role of family farming as a particular form of agriculture.

Each issue's theme will therefore look at the ecological, economic, social and cultural dimensions of low-external input farming systems. The first theme will focus on diversity between and within smallholder farming systems. We will present more details of our jubilee celebrations in the next issue.

March 2009, Vol. 25.1

Diverse farming systems

The last 50 years has seen expansive growth of entrepreneurial and market-driven agriculture with the help of technical packages from the Green Revolution. At the same time, small scale family farmers have continued to develop and adapt their diverse agricultural systems. In harsh environments such as mountainous and dry areas, smallholder systems are still dominant, whereas in other areas they have largely been replaced by more specialised market-driven farming.

Family farming continues to be a crucial source of livelihood and food security for an estimated 600 million families. It harbours

and nurtures biodiversity, it safeguards the resilience of agro-ecological systems against natural and human-made disasters, and it serves as custodian of cultural traditions and a flexible labour force. Family farmers have found ways to hold their communities together even when others abandoned them.

Government policies often undermine agriculturally diverse systems, for example by subsidising technology that does not benefit smallholders, allowing the market to be flooded with cheap competing products, or by denying newcomers ownership and user rights. Also smallholders are often hurt by market-driven policies of large-scale international food corporations, for instance, due to loss of water or land rights.

How do family farmers maintain their knowledge and lifestyles? How are they coping with, staying independent from, or succumbing to mainstream developments such as fluctuating global markets, subsidies for inputs, or migration? How can family farmers be supported to maintain their way of life while adapting to changing circumstances? We are seeking articles about initiatives that explicitly recognise the value of diverse landscapes, diverse ways of life, diverse crops and agricultural systems and stand up against policies and developments that undermine an independent family farmers' way of life.

Articles must be submitted by December 1st, 2008 to Karen Hampson, editor, at k.hampson@ileia.nl.

Home gardens are within reach of marginalised people

In Nepal, development projects often focus on policy issues such as rights-based approaches, with less emphasis on livelihoods. The impact on the poor of such an approach is often not immediately visible. This article describes how an NGO helps rural households to start home gardening, independent from local landlords or far-away markets.

Rojee Suwal, Bimal Raj Regmi, Bhuwon Sthapit and Arjina Shrestha

Home gardening is a livelihood option for vulnerable groups. On plots of land around houses people can grow a wide variety of vegetables, fruits, fodder and medicinal plants, as well as livestock, poultry, small fish ponds and bees. People may even experiment with rare local species for domestication, and exchange seeds and planting material with each other. The size varies from 20 to 500 square metres. Local livestock is the major source of organic fertilizer, and family labour is sufficient for the home garden production system. Nearly three-quarters of the poor and excluded households have access to plots for home gardening, where they can produce some food independent from landlords or local markets. A small amount of labour, complemented with technical support, changed one woman's status from being a receiver to being a provider: "Before, these hands were put forward to receive vegetables from others, but now, they are put forward to offer some."

Targeting excluded groups

Once people see the opportunity, they are keen to develop a good home garden. In 2002, Nepali NGOs (such as Local Initiatives for Biodiversity Research and Development, LI-BIRD) along with Bioversity International, the Nepali Government and the Swiss Development Corporation, started researching the role of home gardens in rural livelihoods. They studied which groups are excluded and how. For example, groups include women, non-Sanskrit speakers, non-Hindus and low castes or untouchables (*dalits*). They have poor access to production, or have a low level of self-confidence. Women, for example, cannot leave the house because of caring tasks. This makes them reluctant to participate in development initiatives. To make things more complex, not all *dalits* in a community are economically poor, but they are not seen as valuable members of the local community and they cannot benefit from development efforts.

Earning our own income

Sumitra Nepali is a widow in the village of Hardineta, Gulmi. She has a daughter and two sons. Before the project, Sumitra earned an irregular income by working on others' land, and her sons also sent her a little money. The family owns a small piece of land around their homestead (250 m²) which was left bare for most of the periods of a year. For Sumitra, the evening meal had become occasional. She had been unable to feed pigs which were a source of income for her. After the project, Sumitra has become a nursery woman in her village. Many farmers now visit her to learn about raising vegetables in a nursery. She works with many crops, including: areca nut, guava, cauliflower, tomato, radish, carrot, winter beans, garlic and fennel. She has earned Rs. 6000 (about US \$ 80) in a season from the nursery and selling vegetables. She has started keeping pigs again, feeding them with kitchen wastes.



Photo: Rojee Suwal

Women's livelihoods in Nepal have improved greatly through intensive home gardening.

Three years of action research contributed to forming a programme designed to overcome such difficulties. In the initial phase it was difficult to involve people who usually do not participate in development efforts. The project therefore developed a "door to door" approach, in which project group members visit households and their home gardens and plant different vegetable species. Soon people could themselves see how useful such farming can be, helping them to decide to participate in the home garden project.

Women-only and mixed groups

The programme formed groups around home gardening. Some were women-only groups. The home garden is considered an extension of her domain, and is where she needs to be to manage mixing travel with child care, food processing and food preparation. In some households men migrate for long periods. As it is mostly men who sell the major cash crops, they control the resulting income. Women often control their own income from the home garden.

Mixed farmers' groups stimulate learning from each other, and sharing knowledge and experiences. Groups' programmes and norms are designed to assist the process of social inclusion: meetings are organised at appropriate times, and for poor group members they provide subsidised home garden planting materials. Establishment of a pro-poor fund enhances their confidence that they could also benefit from income generation activities. Elite groups in the community serve as knowledge and seed banks for other members in the community. The coaching they provide is strategically important. Without such coaching, higher castes discriminate against low-caste groups. Thus, at community level, home gardens become an important unit for enhancing social relations.

Home gardening alone is not enough

Vulnerable groups usually lack enough land to grow staple crops, but many of them have access to small plots which they can cultivate intensively. Home gardening can be a means for reaching excluded people, but it cannot address all their problems. More structural means such as rights-based approaches are necessary to complement more direct interventions such as support to home gardening.

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The new peasantries: Struggle for autonomy and sustainability in an era of empire and globalization by Jan Douwe van der Ploeg, 2008.

ISBN 978-1-84407-558-4. Earthscan, 8-12 Camden High Street, London NW1 0JH, U.K.

E-mail: earthinfo@earthscan.co.uk; <http://www.earthscan.co.uk>

At a time when multinationals make billions on speculation with food, Van der Ploeg writes a book that shows how they undermine the rural way of living worldwide. Smallholder farmers grow healthy produce, selling this and their labour to keep their independence. In contrast, food empires (such as Parmalat in Italy) link farms, factories and markets, producing little, but siphoning big money to banks, accountancy firms and stock markets. The good news is that the peasant way of living is far from extinct: all over the world millions of landless people are going back to independent farming. If you are ready to plough through some academic language, this book makes you see the impact of the so-called "free market" on farming and the way farmers resist.



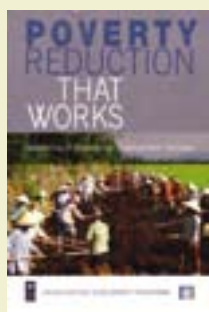
The state of food and agriculture 2007: Paying farmers for environmental services

FAO Agriculture Series no. 38. ISBN 978-92-5-105750-6.

FAO, Viale delle terme di Caracalla, 00153 Rome, Italy.

E-mail: publications-sales@fao.org

Agricultural production processes can bring environmental benefits such as improved watersheds, or less soil erosion. Policy makers and decision makers are searching for ways to encourage farmers to supply such ecosystem-based goods and services. One potential way is to pay farmers for providing these services. This report examines in detail the many issues involved in this promising and flexible approach – such as what the payments should be made for, who to, what value they have, and what the demand is. It will make interesting reading for policy-makers, farmers and all those interested in agriculture, environment and development.



Poverty reduction that works: Experience of scaling up development success by Paul Steele, Neil Fernando and Maneka Weddikara, 2008.

ISBN 978-1-84407-602-4. Earthscan,

8-12 Camden High Street, London NW1 0JH, U.K.

E-mail: earthinfo@earthscan.co.uk; <http://www.earthscan.co.uk>

This book reviews how innovative, targeted poverty reduction initiatives have arisen in Asia's fast changing economic and political context. It provides lessons on the nature of targeted poverty reduction initiatives and the factors that explain a successful initiative. The 20 case studies from around the world are analysed using a standard approach to identify what makes good practice for targeted poverty reduction and

how can such good practice be scaled up. The book concludes that there are inherent challenges and tensions in intervention design and implementation. However, when certain lessons are taken on board, and various challenges and tensions are resolved, scaling up is possible.

Farming like we're here to stay: The mixed farming alternative for Cuba by Fernando Funes-Monzote, 2008. 208 pp. Ph.D thesis, Wageningen University, Wageningen, the Netherlands.

This is the result of the author's Ph.D. research, which looked specifically at the transition from specialized dairy farming systems to mixed crop-livestock systems. It highlights the advantages of mixed farming systems, where, because of a more efficient use of the available resources, farmers achieve higher yields and higher energy and protein production levels. The situation that Cuban agriculture is currently going through provided a very interesting setting. The results are expected to help replace the input-substitution strategy which has dominated Cuban agricultural policies over the last fifteen years, arguing for a mixed (diversified) farming system approach as an effective step towards sustainable agriculture.

Trading up: Building cooperation between farmers and traders in Africa by KIT and IIRR, 2008. ISBN 978-90-6832-699-4. Royal Tropical Institute (KIT) Amsterdam, the Netherlands, and International Institute of Rural Reconstruction (IIRR), Nairobi, Kenya. The PDF is free to download from the KIT website:

<http://www.kit.nl/publications>

This book focuses on the role of traders in rural development, generating practical knowledge for organisations working on the development of markets and related value chains and financial services in Africa. It was produced through the "writeshop" process, bringing contributors together to develop and revise draft texts, essentially allowing for a technical peer review by the many participants. Fifteen clearly written cases are presented, looking at how traders and producers can work together to build better markets to improve their livelihoods. It can be used by extension officers, farmers and their organisations, traders and their organisations, civil servants and policy makers, micro-finance institutions as well as students, researchers and NGOs.



Small-scale mushroom cultivation 2: Agaricus and Volvariella by B. van Nieuwenhuijzen,

2008. ISBN 978-90-8573-083-5. Agrodok series

no. 41. Agromisa, P.O. Box 41, 6700 AA Wageningen,

the Netherlands. E-mail: agromisa@agromisa.org;

<http://www.agromisa.org>

This manual from Agromisa contains information on the cultivation of Button Mushroom, which is consumed worldwide, and Rice Straw Mushroom, which is much valued in Asia. The specific cultivation methods of each of these mushrooms species have been described in separate chapters.

Partnerships for empowerment: Participatory research for community-based natural resource management

by C. Wilmsen, W. Elmendorf, L. Fisher, J. Ross, B. Sarathy, G. Wells (eds), 2008. ISBN 978-1-84407-563-8.

Earthscan, 8-12 Camden High Street, London NW1 0JH,

U.K. E-mail: earthinfo@earthscan.co.uk;

<http://www.earthscan.co.uk>

This book examines participatory research, and its use specifically in community based natural resource management. It examines the background and development of participatory research, and then presents chapters which examine recent experiences. Its geographic focus is the United States. Case studies on collaborative forest management, watershed restoration in communities, environmentalism in an urban neighbourhood and other topics are described. These studies examine ideas such as community capacity building, communication across cultures and power relations in community research. The book is academic in tone, and will provide insights for students and policy-makers alike.

The resilient family farm: Supporting agricultural development and rural economic growth

by Gaye Burpee and Kim Wilson, 2004. ISBN 1-85339-592-7. ITDG Publishers, Bourton Hall, Bourton-on-Dunsmore, CV23 9QZ Rugby, Warwickshire, U.K. E-mail: marketing@itpubs.org.uk; <http://www.itdgpublishing.org.uk>

This clearly written and well-illustrated book examines the economic and ecological realities faced by millions of small scale farmers all over the world. It looks at why some farm families are more able to cope in times of hardship than others, and the role of development organisations

in supporting these farm families. It presents examples of successes and failures of development initiatives, and draws out key learning points. The authors attempt to bring the deeper understanding of the family farm which they believe is necessary to increase the successes, and prevent harmful interventions – the complexity of life on small scale farms demands complete responses, which are only possible

when the rich interconnectedness of farm life is understood. This is a practical book which looks closely at this interconnectedness and provides many insights for practitioners in all development sectors.



Roots of resilience: Growing the wealth of the poor. World Resources Report 2008

World Resources Institute, 10 G Street NE Suite 800, Washington, DC 20002, U.S.A. <http://www.wri.org>
Produced by the World Resources Institute in co-operation with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the World Bank, the World Resources Report aims to provide policymakers around the world with analysis and insight about major environmental and development issues. In its most recent volumes, this report has addressed the important linkages between development, the environment and governance. The 2002-2004 issue argued that better environmental governance, based on greater participation and access to information, leads to fairer and more sustainable use of natural resources. In *The wealth of the poor: Managing ecosystems to fight poverty*, the 2005 report argued that poverty and the environment are inextricably linked, that the world's rural poor could enhance their livelihoods by capturing greater value from ecosystems. *World Resources Report 2008, Roots of resilience: Growing the wealth of the poor* continues the focus on poverty and the environment. This issue argues that successfully scaling up environmental income for the poor requires three elements: ownership, building local capacity for development, and the establishment of adaptive networks that connect and nurture nature-based enterprises. The result is communities with increased resilience: economic, social and environmental.

Access of the poor to agricultural services: The role of farmers' organizations in social inclusion

by Bertus Wennink, Suzanne Nederlof and Willem Heemskerk (eds.), 2007. Bulletin 376, Royal Tropical Institute. KIT Publishers, P.O. Box 95001, 1090 HA Amsterdam, the Netherlands.

The aim of this book is to contribute to the development of guidelines for a proactive strategy for the social inclusion of disadvantaged groups or individuals. To do this, the authors focus on how the poorest of the poor gain access to, and benefit from, agricultural services, and on the role which farmers' organisations have or can have. The first chapters look in detail at social inclusion, exclusion and empowerment, presenting the characteristics, differences and similarities observed in five organisations in sub-Saharan Africa. The second part describes these five cases in detail. They look at the current role which each organisation has, and the conditions under which these can enhance social inclusion. The analysis of these cases provides the basis for a thorough strategy for social inclusion.



Gender and development ISSN: 1355-2074. Oxfam GB. Oxfam House, John Smith Drive, Cowley, Oxford OX4 2JY, U.K. E-mail: gadeditor@oxfam.org.uk; <http://genderanddevelopment.org>

This journal is presented as the only one "published to focus specifically on international gender and development issues, and to explore the connections between gender and development initiatives, and feminist perspectives". Published every four months since 1993, it is currently read in more than 90 countries. Each issue focuses on one particular topic, such as rural livelihoods and agriculture, or gender-based violence. Vol. 14 (July 2006) looked in detail at marginalised peoples, with articles from many different countries, all of them analysing the different factors behind marginalisation and dispossession. In addition to thematic articles, this journal contains book reviews on the latest publications relevant to this field. There are also separate sections covering news and views on current events and trends in gender equality and women's rights, and interviews and debates on cutting-edge issues.

Mysteries and myths: De Soto, property and poverty in South Africa

by Rosalie Kingwill, Ben Cousins, Tessa Cousins, Donna Hornby, Lauren Royston and Warren Smit, 2006. ISSN 1357-9258. Gatekeeper series no. 124. International Institute for Environment and Development, IIED. 3 Endleigh Street, London WC1H 0DD, U.K. E-mail: sustag@iied.org; <http://www.iied.org>

Produced by the Natural Resources Group at IIED, the Gatekeeper Series aims to highlight key topics in the field of sustainable natural resource management. This issue presents evidence against the notion that capitalism can work for the poor by formalising their property rights in houses, land and small businesses, as described by the Peruvian economist Hernando de Soto in "The mystery of capital". The authors describe two cases from South Africa (one community in Cape Town and another one in KwaZulu Natal), complementing them with evidence from other studies. Their analysis leads them to conclude that titling does not always bring the expected benefits. They recommend paying more attention to existing social practices (and not only to "western property regimes") and propose "a more nuanced, incremental and integrated development approach".

The world's most deprived: Characteristics and causes of extreme poverty and hunger

by Akhter U. Ahmed, Ruth Vargas Hill, Lisa C. Smith, Doris M. Wiesmann and Tim Frankenberger, 2007. ISBN 978-0-89629-770-8. 2020

Discussion paper 43, International Food Policy Research Institute, IFPRI. 2033 K Street, NW, Washington, DC 20006-1002, U.S.A. <http://www.ifpri.org/2020/dp/vp43/vp43.pdf>

This report was prepared as part of a policy consultation process co-ordinated by IFPRI, and was presented at an international conference held in Beijing in October 2007. It starts by looking at poverty in the world in detail: who are the poorest and the hungry, where do they live, and what are the trends seen in the different regions of the world during the last twenty years. Looking at a



country level, the poor and hungry are described in terms of education, land ownership and remoteness. Chapter 4 then analyses the main causes of poverty and hunger, including slow economic growth, education, or health. Supported by comprehensive statistical data, this analysis leads to the conclusion that “interventions to insure the poor against health shocks, address the exclusion of certain groups, prevent child malnutrition, and enable investment in education and other capital for those with few assets are essential to help the poorest move out of poverty”.

Unheard voices: The case for supporting marginal farmers by John Madeley, Karl Deering, Ra Tiedemann-Nkabinde and Ruchi Tripathi, 2007. Concern Worldwide UK, 5th Floor Alpha House, 100 Borough High Street, London SE1 0HX, U.K. http://www.concern.net/documents/514/concern_unheardvoices.pdf

This is a brief “discussion paper” prepared as part of Concern’s international campaign. It is built around the idea that marginal farmers face many constraints (erratic weather, poor soils, remoteness) and donors and national governments frequently fail to reach them. However, “they have a great deal of potential”, as is shown by case studies shown in this document. These provide the basis for the recommendations presented here: that marginal farmers need to be central to all agricultural policies. Backing their argument, the authors list a number of reasons for supporting smallholders in general, and marginal farmers in particular. They start with statistical figures: around 70% of the world’s poor depend on small farming to feed their families or earn a living, while marginal farmers make up the majority of farm holdings in many countries.



The slow race: Making technology work for the poor by Melissa Leach and Ian Scoones, 2006. ISBN 1-84180-162-3. DEMOS, Magdalen House, 136 Tooley Street, London SE1 2TU, U.K.

This booklet looks in detail at the factors which make science and technology work for the poor. In contrast to the races towards global economic success and finding a universal fix for the problems of the developing world, the authors argue for a third race – one which works so that the poor benefit from science and technology development. The neglect of poor people’s priorities, or the lack of participatory approaches, are presented as hindering factors, much like issues related to governance, access and ownership. “The core challenge is how to involve people, especially marginalised people, in decisions about innovation and technology”, for which a “new vision of citizenship” is required. The last two chapters look at ways in which citizens

have been actively engaged, and at a series of recommendations for further involving them.

Rights-based approaches: Learning project by Jude Rand and Gabrielle Watson, 2007.

ISBN 978-0-85598-607-0. Oxfam America / CARE USA. Oxfam Publishing, Oxfam House, John Smith Drive, Cowley, Oxford, OX4 2JY, U.K. Available in English, Arabic and French at the Oxfam Publishing website, <http://publications.oxfam.org.uk/oxfam/default.asp>

Rights-based approaches cover a variety of methods (such as policy analysis, advocacy, capacity-building), all of them oriented at facilitating a process of empowerment for poor and marginalised peoples and communities. As the organisation behind this document put it, these approaches are “aimed at creating the conditions under which people can live in dignity and peace and develop their full potential”. This report presents the Rights Based Approaches Learning Project, which developed and analysed a series of case studies, leading to lessons for the organisations involved. Specifically, this project sought to identify the main differences between “traditional” development projects and those using rights-based approaches, and identify how these approaches can change the impact of development projects and interventions.

The cases analysed include projects run by Oxfam and CARE in Bangladesh, Ethiopia and

Guatemala. These help identify the “essential” elements, as well as the type of impact these approaches are likely to have.



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www.iied.org



National Care Farming Initiative (UK)

<http://www.ncfi.org.uk>

c/o Harper Adams University College, Newport, Shropshire, TF10 8NB, U.K.

E-mail: enquiries@ncfi.org.uk

The idea behind "care farming" is that farming can be used to provide significant benefits for people with mental health problems or learning difficulties, or those who are or have been addicted to drugs or alcohol. On the website there are case studies, a newsletter and links to research and related websites, where you can learn more. This approach is gaining popularity in Europe. In Britain, the NCFI (UK) works in different ways: promoting the approach, bringing organisations and individuals together, and advocating for further policy development. It also provides specialised training.

The International HIV/AIDS Alliance

<http://www.aidsalliance.org>

Queensberry House, 104-106 Queens Road, Brighton, BN1 3XF, U.K.

The International HIV/AIDS Alliance is a global partnership of nationally-based organisations working to support community action on AIDS in developing countries. It emphasises the importance of working with people who are most likely to affect or be affected by the spread of HIV – often the hardest to reach. The Alliance focuses on integrated responses to HIV that combine preventing HIV infection, facilitating access to treatment, care and support, and lessening the impact of AIDS. The website has online toolkits, a CD-ROM is available on request, and you can also sign up to receive their e-bulletin.

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CBM – Christian Blind Mission

<http://www.cbm.org>

Nibelungenstraße 124, 64625 Bensheim, Germany

The aim of the Christian Blind Mission is to serve persons with visual impairment, as well as people with other disabilities in developing countries – regardless of their nationality, sex, or religion. A 100-year old organisation, CBM currently works in 113 countries, supporting more than one thousand projects. CBM implements its programmes through local partners, and co-operates with global institutions. The website describes many of these projects, and also relates them to current debates such as the food crisis. News items are presented, along with background and policy papers, covering disability and development.

Right to Food unit, FAO

<http://www.fao.org/righttofood>

Viale delle Terme di Caracalla, 00153 Rome, Italy

E-mail: righttofood@fao.org

The Right to Food unit develops methods and approaches to assist stakeholders in the implementation of the human right to adequate food using FAO's Right to Food Guidelines. It provides information and training materials to raise awareness and understanding by civil society and the general public, much of which can be downloaded. Among its activities, this unit has set up the "Right to Food Information and Knowledge System", to support the realisation of the Right to Adequate Food in the context of national food security. The internet portal is meant to increase awareness, provide guidance, methods and instruments, and to develop capacity at national and international levels. It is made up of an Information and Communication Module, an Implementation Module and a Community Module. The unit also prepares and disseminates a six-monthly newsletter, available for free on their website.

IIED Drylands Programme

<http://www.iied.org/NR/drylands/haramata.html>

3 Endsleigh Street, London WC1H 0DD, U.K.

E-mail: drylands@iied.org

The International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) is an international policy research institute and non governmental body working for more sustainable and equitable global development. The Drylands Programme, part of IIED's Natural Resources Group, carries out research aiming to build the capacities of poor people and other groups to act on the results of this knowledge. Since 1998, this programme has been publishing *Haramata* every six months, both in English and French. *Haramata* "has established itself as a valuable information and networking channel for people working for the sustainable development of dryland areas, mainly but not exclusively in Africa". Subscriptions are free of charge.



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For more information: www.vanhall-larenstein.com

Smallholder farmers' interests and the international organic movement

Roberto Ugás, lecturer at the La Molina University in Lima, Peru, was recently elected as IFOAM's Vice President for the period 2008-2011. As an old friend of ILEIA and collaborator of the LEISA Magazine, we asked him about the federation's future plans, especially in the context of this issue's theme of social inclusion.



The General Assembly of the International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements, IFOAM, took place between the 22nd and 24th of June in Vignola, Italy. It elected IFOAM's World Board, and its president and vice-presidents. As a candidate, Roberto Ugás expressed the need to think about the relevance of IFOAM for small scale farmers around the world, and his election showed that these concerns are widely shared.

A clear sign of interest

This time, IFOAM's Assembly saw a record attendance of 192 persons, representing 344 members. This was the largest member representation of any assembly in the past 36 years. Ugás states: "These high levels of participation, as well as some of the motions approved by the Assembly, are a clear expression of the interest in increasing farmers' and southern organisations' participation within IFOAM and within the organic movement. It also shows the need to strengthen the grassroots democracy which has always characterised IFOAM. This is not always easy, of course, as IFOAM is a federation which includes many players – from large companies to small scale farmers. There has always been a strong interest in reflecting the large diversity of institutions involved, especially considering that IFOAM's mission is 'to lead and unite'. This interest is only more evident now, as a large percentage of IFOAM's member organisations come from developing countries.

"These developments, however, are not new. During the last few years, IFOAM has played an important role in promoting the participation of small scale farmers in the world's organic trade. This has basically been done through the improvement of internal control systems, and by advocating in favour of them. IFOAM has thus been able to influence world trade – the majority of the organic products now exported from southern countries are certified, following the practice which started in Latin America. This has helped several hundred thousand small scale farmers to become certified organic. The challenge now is to ensure the growth of the movement, following the principles of organic agriculture as recently defined by IFOAM, and facilitate trade. This is to help more and more organic farmers from the south benefit from international, regional and local trade."

IFOAM highlights that the new World Board, with members from all over the world, is "the best reflection of the diversity of a global network". In some cases this is complemented by the organisation of regional groups, and since the last General Assembly also by the formal organisation of the "farmers

group" within IFOAM. This group is expected to be recognised soon as part of the internal structures of the federation. For Ugás, this is a major step. "Not only will organic farmers have an official place within IFOAM, but, for the first time in IFOAM's history, such a structure will be led by a small scale farmer from a developing country."

Social inclusion

The involvement and increased participation of southern organisations and farmers comes at a time when the considerable growth of organic production and trade is widely recognised. Some influential organisations, however, see the growth of organic agriculture as negative for the poor, arguing total production drops. "These opinions are based on assumptions, misconceptions and incomplete information. They only look at certified production, when there is clearly so much more. Therefore, IFOAM's role is even more important: helping to let the world know about all that there is, and facilitating its further development. This is one way of including those who do not generally benefit from all the advantages of organic agriculture.

"IFOAM recognises that there is still a lot to do, but it sees itself as well positioned to contribute to the development of small scale organic agriculture. It therefore plans to continue advocacy work with governments and international organisations such as FAO. It also plans to continue with its capacity building programmes, especially those aimed at individuals and organisations in the south. This includes the further development and promotion of the participatory guarantee systems already being used in many places. These, along with internal control systems, are sure to help small scale farmers access local and external markets while contributing to stronger organisations and linkages at the local level."

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