Scaling up and sustaining the gains

The future of family farming

> The Sahel gets green > Seducing the scientist
During the recent World Summit on Food Security in Rome and the Conference on Climate Change in Copenhagen, delegates from all over the world tackled the most crucial problems the world is facing today. Agriculture is at the heart of it all: Farming Matters!

For twenty-five years, ILEIA has been facilitating the exchange of knowledge about low external input and sustainable agriculture (LEISA). This was motivated by the realisation that Green Revolution technologies, even though successful in high potential areas, had increased disparities between farmers and bypassed huge numbers of farmers in ecologically diverse and often fragile areas.

This year we celebrate the 25th anniversary of LEISA Magazine. The world has changed, agriculture is changing and so is our magazine. But is there reason to celebrate? There are more hungry people in the world than ever before: agriculture has not become the “motor of development” that it should have. Yet, we see signs of hope. The experiences shared in 25 volumes of LEISA Magazine bear testimony to millions of farm families who show that it is possible to live a decent life from sustainable farming. The word sustainability, in this context, means not just a substitution of chemical, external inputs with natural, local inputs. It means much more. It is about re-humanising farming, about creating more equitable relations between producers and consumers, about respecting diversity and living with nature, not in a romantic but in a factual way. It is about redressing power imbalances and giving small farmers a chance to be productive.

Our conclusion is that our magazine has a role to play in the years to come. This goes beyond LEISA because the rights of small-scale farmers to a decent life, and the future of planet earth, are at stake. Therefore, dear readers, welcome to this new magazine, Farming Matters: small-scale agriculture for a sustainable society.

Edith van Walsum, director ILEIA
EDITORIAL

THE FUTURE OF FAMILY FARMING

...Emy Grace I. Wallares, who took this simple yet effective photo to capture what families, farming and change means to her. Pictured are her parents, Mr Graciano Wallares and Mrs Emiliana Wallares, on their 3 hectare rice farm in Muñoz, Nueva Ecija, the Philippines. Mr Wallares is contacting their rice buyer. Emy says: “The mobile phone can make a big difference. Now, my father can contact buyers prior to harvesting, and he has much better ‘bargaining power’.”

While this increased bargaining power is helpful, Emy told us that the “battle cry” of many farmer-entrepreneurs in the region is about the low buying prices of rice, and high prices of farm inputs. Despite this, the family still “definitely” sees a future in farming. Emy says: “We make a living through farming. It was with this livelihood and my parents’ persistence in farming, that I am very proud that I was able to finish my college degree.”

She goes on to tell us: “Farming is like a tradition, passed on by our ancestors to every generation. We are in a good position in terms of sustainability since we own the land that we are tilling. We not only focus on the profit, but also on the conservation of natural resources upon which life depends. We don’t abuse the soil, but instead add organic matter to improve its condition.”

Emy is now a licensed agriculturist, working with a seed company promoting year-round cultivation of high value crops in a sustainable way. This shows that, as she says, “farming is really in our blood.”
“The glass is half full”
Parviz Koohafkan, head of the Land and Water Division at FAO, shared his views on small scale farming and sustainable agriculture during an interview held at the organisation’s headquarters, in Rome. His is a positive view: the important role of family farmers is now widely acknowledged, and this recognition is growing, opening many interesting opportunities. “Maybe I am idealistic, but I think that there has been good progress.”

More from less, from less to more
Is SRI (System of Rice Intensification) really “more from less” or just some “unconfirmed field observations”? This set of techniques leads to higher yields, but the scientific controversy about the physiological explanation continues till today. How important is the scientific basis of practices that work well for farmers in their fields? Farming Matters tries to understand this ongoing debate surrounding this success story.

Moving pictures
Just as many other organisations, the Africa Rice Center is interested in reaching a larger number of farmers and extension agents, in a larger number of districts, provinces and countries. They are currently doing this by using videos. Making these videos helps explore a given issue or technology in detail; sharing them with other organisations helps reach thousands of viewers – all of whom are encouraged to try out different ideas, and to continue innovating.

Regreening the Sahel
Governments, the United Nations, agro-industry and aid organisations massively invest in market infrastructure and Green Revolution technology to improve farming productivity. In the meantime, another – silent – “green revolution” is taking place. In Niger, a few million farmers revived the soil’s seed stock and nurtured 200 million trees. Elsewhere farmers also contributed to the biggest ecological transformation of our time in Africa. The African Regreening Initiatives supports their work.
Farming Matters informs readers about sustainable, small-scale farming. It offers discussions, background to the news, opinions, research findings, and practical examples of how sustainable, small-scale farming contributes to providing food security, social justice, a healthy environment and development. Farming Matters is for policy makers, researchers, practitioners, educators, farmers, and everybody else interested in agriculture and development.

Farming Matters is published four times a year and has subscribers in more than 150 countries. It is the global edition of the worldwide AgriCultures Network, a network of eight organisations, of which the other seven members publish regional editions, in six languages. Together, the magazines reach more than 50,000 subscribers. For more information, see www.agriculturesnetwork.org.
Building
Imagine the year 2011 as the International Year of Family Farming: a few years ago this would have been a utopian idea, but these days the possibility is being seriously discussed at high levels in FAO and the United Nations. It is illustrative of the way family farming has found its place in the world, as we have seen over the 25 years that LEISA Magazine – now Farming Matters – has been published. The first issue of the magazine referred to some new and alternative projects working on sustainable agriculture – then a new concept. Today, our magazine has evolved into a set of eight different editions, published throughout the world, reaching tens of thousands of subscribers. And they report not on just a few projects, but on the work of millions of people. After 25 years, there is a growing recognition of the role small-scale farmers play in terms of food production, but also in terms of ecosystem services and rural development. How can we build on the results achieved so far and achieve much more?

What is scaling up? Scaling up refers to the process of reaching larger numbers of people. In 2001, we defined it as: “Scaling up leads to...”

Types of scaling up

There are various types of scaling up. An expansion in size, budget or geographic coverage, frequently described as scaling out, is part of a quantitative process. A functional process is where an organisation increases the scope of its activities or adds sectoral activities to existing programmes. In contrast, organisational scaling up refers to the process of strengthening an organisation’s internal capacities, allowing them to take new responsibilities. Political scaling up refers to an increase in influence on policy makers, or of advocating for policy changes.
more quality benefits to more people, over a wider geographic area more quickly, more equitably and more lastingly” (LEISA Magazine 17.3). This condensed definition covers several ideas and serves as a good starting point. We are not only talking about reaching more people, but also referring to sustainable benefits: benefits which continue over time. The link with sustainable agriculture was made clear by Jules Pretty, who wrote, in *Facilitating Sustainable Agriculture*, a publication from 1998: “Sustainability ought to mean more than just agricultural activities that are environmentally neutral or positive: it implies the capacity for activities to spread beyond a project, in both space and time”.

The World Bank’s report on sustaining the successes of rural development (*Scaling up for Increased Impact of Development Practice, 2003*) defined scaling up both as a means – referring to the replication, spread or adaptation of techniques, ideas, approaches and concepts – and as an end: increased impact. This difference helps us sharpen our view: in the last twenty-five years, not only are more people working with small-scale farmers or sustainable agriculture projects, but we also see more impact and more people who have benefited from knowledge about small-scale family farming. But what do we expect to see or achieve? The World Bank pointed to the importance of having a common or agreed reference point, such as the Millennium Development Goals, because, as the report states, “Desired outcomes and impacts can be quite different from one place to another”, while “different stakeholders have different perspectives on what they consider success”.

**What do we want to scale up?**
Before considering how to scale up, it is important that we first clearly identify what it is that we intend to scale up or sustain in time. This could be an idea, an initiative or a specific technique that takes us in the right direction. Many articles published in previous issues of this magazine have shown how farming techniques, like zero tillage or cover crops, have been taken up by farmers, and then have been copied, adopted and adapted by many more. The replication of some of these ideas often had the active support of an organisation, but many of them have scaled up as a result of their intrinsic advantages – and in spite of all sorts of barriers. The System of Rice Intensification (SRI) is a clear example (see page 22).

Apart from looking at ideas, initiatives or techniques, we can also look at projects. Thousands of them are currently being implemented by public or private organisations all over the world. All of them, by definition, are relatively small and are only supposed to last for a relatively short period of time. But they expect to have a wide and long-lasting impact. The major criticism these projects receive is that, in spite of the positive results they achieve, they are drops in the ocean, small islands of success. The benefits of these projects reach only a limited number of villages or farmers. This only strengthens the case for scaling up, and shows the need for specific measures. A clear definition of roles, for example, together with adequate preparation and training of those who are to carry out specific tasks, can ensure that certain activities continue once a project finishes.

**Continuously in motion**
Steve Sherwood, when asked what he considers to be most important when looking at how to scale up, says the thing to keep in mind is that the practice of small-scale farming is continuously in motion. Any attempt at increasing the impact of sustainable agriculture,
or at sustaining the positive results, needs to take this continuous motion as its point of departure. “When it comes to growth and diversification of an activity, essential social processes are involved”, says Sherwood. “Growth hinges on social interaction, emerging relationships, networks, co-option, collusion and co-operation.” All of this leads to a continuous learning and innovation process. It is therefore not surprising to see the importance given to supporting the sharing of ideas, such as communication networks and the exchange of information between farmers, extension agents, policy makers and other practitioners. As the earlier mentioned World Bank report states: “The ways in which information and learning are managed are critical to scaling up efforts”. The 2008 World Resources report, *Roots of Resilience*, puts it equally clearly: “Scaling up will not occur without good communication of success stories”. This is what ILEIA has been trying to do for the past 25 years; not just publish articles, but also identify ideas, promote material for discussion and analysis, and facilitate the “social interaction” mentioned above. The fact that we have been able to play this role for the past 25 years makes us feel very proud – and determined to keep on fulfilling it.

**More than money** All too often, the possibilities for broader and lasting results are linked to resources. Projects can only continue if they have sufficient funds; ideas can be replicated and processes set in motion if the necessary resources are available. But this is not the only thing. The System of Rice Intensification, for example, was not adopted by thousands of farmers because they were paid to do so, but because of its intrinsic qualities. SRI is very relevant to thousands of farmers: it is well suited to their conditions and at the same time leads to higher yields. These positive factors become even

---

**One of many “champions”**

Although many people fit in this category, few do so as well as Narayana Reddy. Starting as a Green Revolution farmer (and even earning the “best farmer” award for his high yields), he later switched to organic farming after noticing the serious environmental and economic problems he was contributing to. For more than three decades now, he has been running a small-scale organic farm in Doddaballapur, in the southern Indian state of Karnataka. His work is a permanent demonstration that small-scale farming is feasible and viable, in economic, social and ecological terms. But apart from farming, and from regularly receiving hundreds of visitors, Mr Reddy travels extensively throughout the state, meeting “at least one thousand farmers per month” and advocating for family farming and small-scale agriculture. A regular contributor to LEISA India, he was also appointed to the Karnataka State Organic Farming Mission of the state government, set up in August 2008 to formulate a programme and operational guidelines for the promotion of organic farming. Directly and indirectly, he is clearly the person behind much of the thinking and practice seen in southern India.
Many ideas have scaled up as a result of their intrinsic advantages, and in spite of all sorts of barriers. The System of Rice Intensification (SRI) is a clear example clear when we compare SRI to many “modern agriculture” packages, which only have positive results if implemented under specific conditions (topography, climate) or have the correct inputs (fertilizers and pesticides).

But the internal characteristics of an idea, technique or principle must be carefully nourished and guided. The widespread adoption of the Farmer Field School approach owes much to its innovative character – especially when compared to the traditional “transfer of technology” approaches to extension. But in LEISA Magazine 17.1, Eric Holt-Gimenez looked at the Movimiento Campesino a Campesino, the farmer-led sustainable agriculture movement in Latin America, and asked: “If it works so well, why hasn’t it spread more?” His analysis points to elements like insufficient preparation or training, an inability to influence decision makers, and unfavourable settings because of certain economic interests (like agrochemical companies). Equally relevant are the unfavourable institutional or policy contexts to which Parviz Koohafkan also makes reference (see page 12).

Ingredients and ideas So what can we do to scale up all the good ideas, projects and processes? We can for instance try motivating others, and get them interested in following our example. This role is best played by “champions”, people who convince neighbours, friends and colleagues by setting an example. They advocate directly and actively for a cause and get their message effectively heard, resulting in massive dissemination and greater impacts (see: One of many “champions”). Equally important are things like having a clear definition of roles, an emphasis on capacity building, the availability of money as seed capital, strong local organisations, and ownership of the process. As the 2008 World Resources report states: “Capacity building is pointless without a real devolution of resource authority to local stakeholders”.

All these are internal factors. More difficult to tackle, but equally important, are the external factors. These range from land rights (as perhaps the most important condition a farmer requires before deciding to go for long term investments) to outside factors like petrol...
prices, which might lead to increased production of bio-fuel crops, for example. Also crucial is the presence of a supporting organisation (committed to long time support) and the existence of market mechanisms that motivate farmers to produce and earn more. These factors determine the enabling environment for scaling up. Naturally, governments play a very important role. Whether it is through subsidies or taxation, or simply through the approval of norms and regulations, policy makers have the power to shape this environment.

Even negative circumstances can play an enabling role, and lead to unexpected developments, says Norman Uphoff, SRI expert from Cornell University: “You could say that the financial and environmental crisis has come twenty years too late. Only recently big institutions have started to take SRI benefits seriously, because now we have to find a solution to water scarcity, expensive input costs and price spikes for rice and other food crops. This crisis is the perfect enabling environment for a technique like SRI.”

This brings us back to the question we started with. How can we achieve more innovations and improvements in farming life? The challenges lie in strengthening farmers’ organisations, replicating successful experiences and influencing governmental policies and actions. Naturally, there is not one solution, nor one universal approach – apart from recognising that we need to help create the conditions for scaling up and for sustaining the gains. Especially if we look at our own role, we agree with Sherwood, who says that “if we accept that development operates in a complex world, we need to ask a more precise question than ‘how to scale up’. We should ask ourselves how to continually support and manage the endless process of knowledge generation, facilitation and networking involved in what is essentially a spontaneous activity of socio-technical change.”

Helping to identify constraints and opportunities, promoting the exchange of information, documenting and generating knowledge, this is precisely what we as ILEIA plan to continue doing.

Jorge Chavez-Tafur. ILEIA. P.O. Box 2067, 3800 CB Amersfoort, the Netherlands. E-mail j.chavez-tafur@ileia.nl
You have been supporting small-scale farmers for a very long time. But many people say that small-scale farming is disappearing, and that it has to disappear if we are to feed a growing population. What is your view on this? I don’t agree. Even though there has been a lot of migration, the number of small-scale farmers remains the same over time: we are talking about one billion people. And small-scale farmers, particularly in developing countries, not only work for their own food security and that of their region and nation, they also contribute extensively to rural development. The problem is that these farmers have not benefited from governmental policies. Most developing countries have put a lot of emphasis on the urban sector and on the development of services, and they have neglected agriculture and the rural sector. Any support to agriculture has gone to high potential areas, favouring large-scale infrastructures. Rural communities working on fragile lands in mountainous areas or drylands have not received much attention.

Are small-scale farmers less efficient and less productive than large enterprises or “modern” farmers? No, this is not true. There are some areas, of course, where small-scale farming is inefficient, just as some big enterprises are inefficient... When we think of efficiency, we have to consider the lack of investment. Governments tax small-scale farmers, but farmers see very little return in terms of investment. Without specific investments, and without access to markets or additional support,
many farmers end up in a vicious circle: they don’t have resources to invest, they mine the soil, the soil becomes poorer, and so do they.

But as you say, in spite of all these difficulties, there is still a large number of small-scale farmers, they continue producing, and they continue contributing… If we take a broader look at their production system, we see that small-scale farmers are often much more efficient, and much more sustainable than larger farmers. As the only resource base they have is their natural resources and their human capital, they do all they can to maintain it. Therefore they diversify their genetic resources, they diversify their production systems and their sources of income, and all this builds resilience. This contributes to food production, but also to envi-

Parviz Koohafkan. Photo: FAO
environmental health, to the sustainability of the natural resource base and thus to the sustainability of their livelihoods. If you look at the total productivity and compare a family farm with a business community, you have to include all externalities resulting from intensification, such as the emission of greenhouse gases and the contamination of soils and water. The whole picture shows that most family farmers and traditional farmers perform much better. And don’t forget that maintaining the very large production systems, particularly in developed countries, costs an estimated 365 billion dollars per year in subsidies. One billion dollars per day of subsidies! How can any small-scale farmers compete within this system? This is a totally distorted system.

**But apart from investments, is access to land not the real problem?** Sure! This is one of the biggest messages currently being conveyed: access to resources and rural development are the two faces of the same coin. You cannot have rural development without land reform. But it is the same in terms of genetic resources, that is why I think it is important to talk about farmers’ rights. Farmers have been custodians of the multiplication, production and maintenance of so many varieties. They, and not an outside company, should have the right to continue doing so.

**If these ideas are so clear, what can an organisation like FAO do?** Well, an intergovernmental organisation like FAO reflects its constituency. We are an intergovernmental organisation made up of many sovereign governments. When we try to take decisions, there are sometimes confrontations and disagreements, or we only get a minimum common denominator. Besides, FAO has many tracks of work. It is not easy to prioritise, because priorities are different in different countries and in different locations. This is one of the greatest problems, but also the strength of the UN system: the plurality and the diversity found within it.

**But when we talk about a paradigm shift, we refer to one global problem, and countries should not follow different paths ...** Of course there are compromises to be made, because industrial farming is there. It is part of the agricultural production system and it has to be accommodated. But we aim to have at least the same attention and the same amount of resources for small-scale farmers as for big farmers. And we will succeed: many governments and scientists are already changing their
opinion on the possibilities of small-scale farming. In some cases a compromise is not possible, as we saw with the IAASTD report. But even this had some positive outcomes: we are using all the materials and all the ideas coming from those discussions, and we are also trying to create new avenues for using this material and these ideas in other places.

Have you seen changes in recent years? Is there more recognition for the importance of small-scale farming? Absolutely! I think there are changes, definitely. The biggest shift was the recognition by the world community, back in 1992, of the fact that the Green Revolution recipes were creating a lot of problems, both in social and in environmental terms. The thirty years of Green Revolution were helpful to feed a lot of people at a very difficult time. But at the same time, we’ve depleted resources and polluted soils and water. The problem is that the mechanisms, the institutions and the policies taking advantage of the Green Revolution thinking, are still dominant. Fortunately, now those ideas are changing. To some extent, the financial crisis has been good for the agriculture sector: there is less money, but more reflection about the path to follow.

What are the main difficulties you face within FAO? Perhaps one of the main difficulties is that “western” and “productivist” values dominate. Most of our managers have been educated in Western universities, and do not recognise the importance of safety nets, social values and diversity. And there seems to be a bias to put more resources on the type of agriculture systems found in developed countries. So we are replicating them and we want to transfer the technologies that have proved to be good in the west to the south. We continue thinking that if this is good here, then it should be good there. Fortunately, things are gradually changing, even if these changes are very slow.

What would make these changes go a little bit faster? We need to recognise that the bottlenecks and the problems are still there, that there is food insecurity, that poverty is increasing, that there are more conflicts… So understanding that something is not working, this is the first thing. The second thing is increasing the exchange of information, and the way we interact with the rural population. The development of communication means, such as mobile phones, has been great in this sense. And the third thing is, again, working at the policy level, realising that we need to do things differently. And we are starting to do so. Maybe I am idealistic, but I think that there has been good progress. Of course, we have weaknesses and the resources are fewer and fewer, the UN system has been questioned, but nevertheless there has been progress.

Things are difficult, but is the glass half full or half empty? I think it is half full. We are moving forward. Not only is there a wider recognition of the role of small-scale farmers, there is also a growing participation of the civil society. We have programmes, for example, on indigenous peoples or rural women. We also have the Globally Important Agricultural Heritage Systems (GIAHS) initiative, which I believe is extremely important for flagging the importance of these indigenous systems [see Box]. In collaboration with the World Rural Forum, we are even trying to get a year declared as “international year for family farming”. This will help us highlight the role of family farming even more. If we would have talked about this three or four years ago, probably you would have perceived it as a utopia; now it is becoming a reality. So there are many positive changes, the glass is definitely half full.

Cherishing the past for the future

Mr. Koohafkan was born in Iran, studied in Tehran and Montpellier, France, and has been working with FAO for 24 years. He has been director of the Rural Development Division and is currently also co-ordinating the Global Partnership on Dynamic Conservation of the Globally Important Agricultural Heritage Systems (GIAHS). This initiative is meant to showcase the best examples of traditional farming systems and communities in the field. It will make people realize how important small-scale and traditional farming is for present and future generations. The initiative works at global, at a national, and also at the local level where it strives to empower farmer communities by helping them to realise the importance of these systems. To gain recognition of the concept and sustain the impact of GIAHS, this programme works with national governments, international organisations, civil society organisations and local NGOs, and also with other partners and allies within and outside FAO.
An easy-to-use primer on one of the most discussed, debated and contested topics of the day.
From CSE.

**CLIMATE CHANGE: POLITICS AND FACTS**

Attempts to demystify the subject through a set of comprehensive and concise factsheets. Packed with illustrations, factoids, graphs, charts and tables, the book is as much a one-stop storehouse of information on climate change, as it is an aid towards understanding and appreciating the danger that stares us in the face.

**THE FACTSHEETS**
- What is climate change?
- The science of climate change
- Emissions
- Who is responsible?
- Impacts: India/South Asia
- Negotiations: Then and now
- Market mechanisms
- Low carbon economy
- Burden sharing

**PRICE:** Rs. 340/US $ 14
(Special price available for bulk orders)

Buy online at [http://csestore.cse.org.in](http://csestore.cse.org.in)

Contact: Sales & Despatch Department

CENTRE FOR SCIENCE AND ENVIRONMENT
41, Tughlakabad Institutional Area, New Delhi-110 062
Ph: 91-11 29955124/ 6110/6394/6399;
Fax: 91-11 29955879
Website: www.cseindia.org;
E-mail: cse@cseindia.org
There is worldwide indifference among formal and institutional scientists about local knowledge and people’s ability to solve problems. This indifference has only increased by the use of short cut methods of learning, like Rapid Rural Appraisals, that have gained currency worldwide. This gave an easy legitimacy to scientists that they could learn about people’s needs and knowledge in a few hours or days only, through various rituals mostly irrelevant to the real concerns of knowledge rich but economically poor people. But that is not the only reason for indifference. The criteria for technological choices, priorities and legitimacy also create problems. I am not suggesting that local communities or innovators can solve all kinds of problems on their own. But then what about the problems which have been solved by grassroots innovators, even if not always optimally? Why can these not be validated so that formal financial and other institutions support them?

Let me illustrate. One will find thousands of ideas and innovations and outstanding traditional knowledge practices at www.sristi.org and www.nifindia.org. Recently I was asked to look into the problem of farmers who had committed suicide in India. When I asked in a village whether they knew of any low cost or non-monetary technology for reducing the costs of controlling pests in cotton – since that is what pushes farmers to abandon any hope of getting out of debt – the answer was a loud and repeated “No”. Ironically, farmers from another district of Maharashtra had shared a traditional practice of planting lady’s finger (okra) as border crop, acting as trap crop. Lady’s finger belongs to the same family as cotton and flowers earlier than cotton. How many experiments have been done to prove it wrong? Another farmer, Indu Bhai Barot, read about spraying jaggery, the unrefined sugar from palm sap, on cotton. He tried it and found it very effective. The ants controlled the pest. Honey Bee wrote about this method in 1999. By now this should have been tried widely, but it hasn’t.

Innovators will have to strengthen their own networks so that they can diffuse their knowledge. Scientists can be seduced by good examples when found on a large scale. We also need to work within global platforms to spread knowledge and experiences, and shame other institutions for neglecting local technologies. But to convince the scientist to look at local innovations and give farmers the credit they deserve, may still require other seduction techniques.
In the past year, I have been involved in training farmers’ groups about organic farming techniques, with KIOF (Kenya Institute for Organic Farming). Some factors stand out, which have contributed to the adoption of these techniques. For example, when farmers see success on other farms, they then become inspired to try it out for themselves. At KIOF, we therefore take farmers for exchange visits to farms where good organic techniques are already practised.

Higher maize yields  A good example of this is found in the case of a group of women farmers (the “Baraka group”) farming in Makuyu, in the district of Thika. Here, six neighbours of one of the members all changed their practices even without training. After last year’s rain failure in an area with average yearly rainfalls of 550 mm, these neighbours had noticed one of the Baraka group members harvesting maize in spite of the fact that there was a total crop failure on other farms. They could see that this successful farmer was practising a water-saving technique on her farm. In the next rainy season (April 2009), the neighbours did not even ask what she had done, but simply went ahead and dug holes in the way they had observed her doing from afar.
When the Baraka members realised this, they called the neighbours and taught them the practice. The farmers, who then also joined the group, managed to get some yields, low rainfall notwithstanding. In other areas where I have been able to set up demonstration gardens, adoption rates have been higher than where these plots do not exist. In other words, farmers want to first see an innovation working before they introduce it into their farms, due to fear of the unknown.

Personal experiences by some farmers help change perceptions in others. I was involved in a survey where we looked at rice straw utilisation options in a rice-growing scheme. Most farmers believed that the use of straw as compost or mulch attracted pests, diseases and rodents. But when one farmer explained how he was able to reduce input costs and grow rice at a higher density after using compost, others reconsidered their stance and also started composting their rice straw.

**One rooster per household**

Another factor for group success is when farmers in a group also have something else in common – such as a “merry-go-round” as is the case with the Baraka group. All members contribute to this common fund, which then allows members to get access to a larger sum, one at a time. The dropouts are few, if any, since they use money generated from vegetable sales from their demonstration garden to be able to buy chickens and goats. As a result, this group is vibrant.

It is important to be aware of location-specific social and cultural factors when seeking changes in farming practices. For example, illiteracy, which is rampant in rural Kenya, means that most training programmes are attended by the elites – who then jump from one seminar to the next, and rarely train others, much to the peril of the illiterate. Cultural beliefs can also contribute negatively to project implementation. I witnessed a project fail simply because the farmers were given roosters to upgrade their local chicken production. In this particular region, the tradition is that a rooster owned by the head of the family, is the only one allowed to crow in the household. As a result, 78 percent of the roosters were slaughtered before dawn of the first day, to avoid a curse. In Kenya, there are cultural groups who believe that an old man cannot be taught anything of importance by someone younger than himself. This means that you, as a young extensionist, can spend a whole week training farmers in such areas, but you won’t be taken seriously by most of them. They will only attend the workshop to be eligible for training allowances, if available. These experiences stress the importance of using a participatory approach in projects to understand how farmers think. Some initiatives will be picked up and others rejected simply on the basis of cultural inclination. Also, it is important to be sure to focus on the right target group when seeking specific changes. For example, techniques which require heavy labour may only be picked up by young farmers. The old may be willing but energy may fail them, for example for practices such as double digging.

What these experiences show is that the opinions and cultural diversity of the farmer target group need to be well understood, as there are no one-size-fits-all solutions in extension.

Ismail S. Kimole. Field Officer, Kenya Institute for Organic Farming. P.O. Box 34972-00100, Nairobi, Kenya. E-mail: skimoles@yahoo.co.uk

---

Organic techniques such as composting, or making sunken beds to avoid erosion, were part of training workshops given by Ismail Kimole to farmers’ groups in Kenya. Photo: Asthon Mwatela.
What is the future of family farming?

“Agriculture has to assure food for all people on the globe, where family farmers have an important role to play. In many regions of the world, small-scale family farmers produce the food for local communities, although their land and labour productivity is often low. Promoting knowledge and innovation can improve this productivity. Green Revolution technologies, like agro-chemicals, have proven to increase small-scale farmers’ yields. Yet, family farming should not be romanticised. Weeding and ploughing for a meagre crop is not romantic, but pure poverty. In the future, family farming will lose its relevance. Farmers’ children will move to the city or find other forms of employment, and more labour will be needed for other work, urging the remaining farmers to increase the scale of their farming. Society should embrace such dynamics. Supporting existing structures and romanticising the poor life of farmers in fact consolidates poverty.

“Family farming, in its various shapes worldwide, is more than just the application of technologies. Over millennia, family farmers have developed technologies and ensured the world’s food supply in ever-changing agricultural systems that were adapted to local environmental and cultural conditions. Over the past decades, a “scientific” research and development perspective has accelerated agricultural modernisation. This perspective led to the widespread adoption of unsustainable agriculture. For example, in Latin America, you can see large-scale mono-cropping of commodities for the world market – such as agri-fuels. The aim of such agriculture is not to feed the world’s hungry people, but instead to feed the hunger for profit of big companies. In the process, industrial agriculture does a lot of damage. It clears rich forests, it needs expensive agro-chemicals and seeds, and makes food production dependent on financial capital and dwindling fossil fuel stocks. But worse are its impacts on society: industrial agriculture reduces the flexibility of agro-ecosystems, so badly needed in times of societal and climate change. The result has been a social, economic and ecological crisis in agriculture. The prices of food and agricultural inputs fluctuate, a land area the size of Brazil is degraded, and 70 percent of the world’s poor live in rural areas. This multi-faceted crisis is linked to food insecurity, to the rising cost of food, and to climate change. At the same time, family farming remains an important activity for
Small-scale farming has an environmentally friendly reputation, but actually a lot of it badly affects the environment. Small-scale farmers are often poor and poor farmers have limited access to external inputs, so they exhaust the soil. Consequently, productivity decreases and farmers become even poorer. In my view, environmental degradation is not only a result of wealth, but also of poverty. Therefore poverty reduction should be the overarching policy objective, also for the sake of our environment.

Rudy Rabbinge can be reached at rudy.rabbinge@wur.nl

Family farming will remain important for several more generations to come. Local and regional food production will increase access to food and stimulate local economies. Governments can therefore choose to stimulate family farming, but it is an illusion to think that as a government you have a choice between family farming and industrial agriculture – especially when forces in society to support the latter are so strong. Industrial agriculture alone can realise food security – but that would undermine the social fabric of rural societies, which is not desirable. But small-scale farming badly needs public investments such as knowledge, infrastructure, inputs and marketing. There needs to be a balance between industrial agriculture and family farming.

Small-scale farming in itself does not hamper economic growth, and under the right circumstances it can even promote it. But not on its own.”

Fabio Kessler Dal Soglio can be reached at fabiods@ufrgs.br

Fabio Kessler Dal Soglio, Professor of Rural Development at the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil

Family farmers traditionally care for their farm, and grow crops for home consumption. But can family farming produce enough food for the growing world population? And can it compete with large-scale industrial agriculture? Join the debate at www.ileia.org

→ Open Forum

rural families, against all expectations and restrictive policies. LEISA Magazine (now Farming Matters) is continuously presenting experiences that show its potential, especially for vulnerable populations, respecting local cultures and local ecosystems, and ensuring food security.

In general, technologies generated by family farmers are better suited to the local socio-economic and ecological conditions, and therefore are appropriate for sustainable development. Farmers’ participation in research and development allows the development of locally adapted solutions with lower investments and reduced environmental cost. Thus, family farming, inspired by research and development, can help agriculture to contribute to the needs of planet Earth, reducing hunger, addressing climate change, and keeping the world’s land productive. In short: family farming is the key to the world’s sustainability.”

Fabio Kessler Dal Soglio can be reached at fabiods@ufrgs.br
When it comes to SRI (the System of Rice Intensification), scientists cannot seem to agree on exactly what makes it work, or even whether it works. This has not stopped farmers from widely applying the technique. Farming Matters looks at how SRI has become such a popular technique over the last 25 years, and what is stopping it from becoming an even greater success. | Text Mireille Vermeulen
from less, from less to more

Producing more from less, that is the essence of the System of Rice Intensification (SRI). What started as a small experiment by the French Jesuit priest Henri de Laulanié in Madagascar in 1980, has now grown into a technique widely adopted by farmers in 36 countries who cultivate rice on areas of between 0.5 and 20 hectares. SRI is a set of principles, like wider spacing, early transplanting, using organic fertilizer and better water management. The combination of these principles leads to a better rooting system and stronger plants, resulting in bigger yields (at least double of the world average of 3.8 tons per hectare). The inputs are low-cost, especially compared to the regular Green Revolution paddy rice, where expensive hybrid seeds and chemical fertilizers are used in high dosages.

Walking on two legs
Norman Uphoff is Emeritus Professor at Cornell University in Ithaca, New York, and one of the most energetic and persistent promoters of SRI. After three years closely and critically watching farmers experimenting with SRI in Madagascar in the 1980s, Uphoff became convinced by the results in the field: “It didn’t make sense to me in the beginning, but I saw farmers’ yields go up from 2 to 6 tons and they were working on hard soils in harsh conditions. I had to believe it.”

Even though Uphoff’s background is in socio-economics, he is very interested in the scientific basis of SRI. According to him, the process of upscaling agricultural successes must “walk on two legs”: empirical and scientific evidence. Farmers need practical information, they will see from the results in the field if new techniques taught by extension workers work or not. But scientists need scientific proof. Harro Maat from Wageningen University in the Netherlands explains that despite the enthusiasm of NGOs working with farmers, their non-scientific ways of measuring SRI results clashed with the research institutes’ methods. They work more from a distance and conform to formal scientific procedures: “The NGOs claimed high yields without information on measurement methods, and then scientists disqualified these results,” Maat says.

Further research
So the relationship between NGOs and scientists, and even among different schools of scientists, is difficult. SRI has caused a lot of controversy, with opponents accusing each other of practising voodoo science and believing in UFOs (Unconfirmed Field Observations). Big institutions, like the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) in the Philippines have been critical about SRI from the beginning. “It’s often a question of personalities,” knows Uphoff. “Some people have had difficulties accepting that a social scientist like me is so convinced of this technological innovation which is breaking with all agricultural rules. Think of the consequences: we have always been taught that continuous flooding is the best way to cultivate rice because it is an aquatic plant, and now we admit it doesn’t work like that. What other agricultural laws in which we so firmly believe can be overthrown by the experiences and insights of independent creative farmers? Is it really good to plough the soil, for instance?”

But these days, IRRI is more open to SRI and other techniques that make less use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides. The energy crisis, but also repeated questions and critiques from NGOs and scientists have pushed IRRI in this direction.
IRRI now supports a research programme on SRI at Wageningen University, that has just started. The programme focuses not merely on the technical performance of SRI but includes the distribution and adaptation process of SRI: how it works differently in different places, the organisations involved and the linkages with other agricultural institutions, networks and donors. Other research, by Thakur in India for instance, focuses more on the physiological agronomic explanations for higher yields by SRI.

**Learning from SRI** For Norman Uphoff, the most important lesson from the upscaling process of SRI is that members of the scientific community should be open-minded. They should not be self-referential, but listen carefully to the questions and experiences of farmers. The same counts for policymakers and politicians: the degree of their real involvement with farmers determines whether rural problems are solved or not.

But scientific institutes and governments are still very “top down” and not really organised in a way to automatically take farmers’ interests into consideration. Their collaboration with other organisations may be seen as a step in the right direction.

**More profit from small water streams** The use of simple sprinklers for irrigation in the Andes is another example of the quick and widespread adoption of low cost improvements by farmers. Because of the difficult geography, agriculture in the Andes is mostly rainfed – and limited to three or four months per year. Using the gradients and altitude differences, simple pipes and sprinklers mean that farmers can efficiently use water from streams running downhill. With these small amounts of water they can grow crops and forage all year round. The sprinklers are easy to make (in some cases just from old plastic bottles) and cost approximately US$ 40 per hectare. So implementing the system is cheap, especially when compared to the benefits. Water availability means higher yields, more products during the year, more consumption, better nutrition and higher incomes. This is what Carlos Paredes, the man behind their introduction in many Peruvian villages, sees as a “productive revolution”. Not surprisingly, sprinkler irrigation is being copied all over the place, with a huge impact.

Harro Maat attributes part of the success of SRI to the increased attention given to the crop: more time and attention leads to better yields (as you can even observe in your own vegetable garden). SRI is successful in cases where farmers really devote time to farming, on nearby fields, where they easily weed and transport manure. The principles of SRI are in fact a little counter-intuitive to regular farmers’ knowledge on crop density: you increase fertility but reduce plant density. “Not new as such,” says Maat, “there are different descriptions of techniques for rice improvement in sources from before the 1960s, when the Green Revolution started. That shows there was a lot of thinking and experimenting similar to SRI”.

Both Uphoff and Maat hope that a better understanding of the technical and organisational aspects of SRI may lead to more scientists being “converted” and more research on how farmer experimentation can match with scientific research. This is an area with a lot of potential. Experiments with wheat, finger millet, vegetables and onions show that yields can significantly increase when farmers adopt SRI techniques. By putting the lessons of successful upscaling into practice, farmers might gain a lot.

**Members of a self-help group see their own results.**

Photo: Edwin van der Maden

The World Bank has recently decided to spread information on SRI through a special website and training videos. A how-to guide for farmers and practitioners is available, as well as a more general overview of SRI for policy and decision makers. See more at: info.worldbank.org/etools/docs/library/245848/index.html.
Small-scale farmers are big news these days. “Melinda and I believe that helping the poorest small-holder farmers grow more crops and get them to market is the world’s single most powerful lever for reducing hunger and poverty,” said Bill Gates. It is good news indeed, that the FAO and World Bank are also re-discovering small-scale family farming as the most important source of development, and target for investments to fight hunger, which has reached unprecedented levels this year. The next peak in oil prices, or the aggregation of crop failures, will cause an acute crisis and a famine of global magnitude. Global austerity programmes, as a result of recent bailouts of banks and speculators will leave little room to manoeuvre. Increasing small-scale farmers’ yields worldwide through low input methods is simply the cheapest way to prevent the food crisis getting out of control.

The recent renaissance of small-scale farmers in global development rhetoric can be traced back to the International Assessment of Agricultural Knowledge, Science and Technology for Development (IAASTD). This report was published early this year after being adopted in an inter-governmental and multi-stakeholder process by 58 nations in 2008. It was initiated by the World Bank and all relevant UN institutions. It comprises the global state of knowledge about the history and future of agricultural development, compiled by over 500 experts. This assessment has a profound and incisive message which affects the whole world: small-scale family farming is the best available option to change the perverted global system of commodity trade and production and to limit the use of fossil fuels and chemical inputs. It is the best hope we have of not exceeding the limits of this planet, while still feeding the population. By only using the resources which are available in abundance over the coming decades (such as solar energy, and human labour and ingenuity), investment in small-scale farmers is not merely a cheap charity add on, but a real alternative. It will also contribute to healing the damage done by centuries of industrial farming.

But for Bill Gates, praise for small-scale farmers seems rather a pretext to then demand another “green revolution”, fuelled by genetically engineered plants as well as by the increased use of fertilizers and pesticides. The FAO insists that world agricultural output must increase by an impossible 70 percent within the next few decades. The leaders of the world still preach unabated economic growth and trade liberalisation as the way forward. They cannot even agree to stop producing agro-fuels and export subsidies. How much will it take before they will swallow the full truth of the IAASTD: “Business as usual is not an option”?

Benedikt Haerlin is director of the Foundation on Future Farming in Germany and co-ordinates the European network Save our Seeds. He represents Greenpeace in the Bureau of the International Agricultural Assessment of Science and Technology for Development (IAASTD).
The world of organic agriculture
Statistics and emerging trends 2009
Helga Willer and Lukas Kilcher (eds.), 2009. IFOAM, FiBL and ITC, 286 pages.

The data and information compiled in this volume document the current statistics, recent developments and trends in global organic farming. The comprehensive data, from 141 countries, are an important tool for stakeholders, policy makers, authorities, the industry and consultants. They can be useful in supporting strategies for organic agriculture and markets as well as for monitoring the impact of support activities for organic agriculture. An overview of the contents plus a summary can be viewed at www.organic-world.net/yearbook-2009.htm.

Millions fed
Proven successes in agricultural development

The “Millions Fed” project set out to assess the evidence regarding the policies, programmes or investments that have actually reduced hunger and poverty in developing countries. Looking back at the last fifty years, twenty cases were selected to best represent success, providing important lessons for the future. These were chosen on the basis of criteria such as impact or sustainability, covering areas such as staple food production or the role of markets. This book is vital reading for anyone engaged in agricultural development. Downloadable from the IFPRI website.

Farmers as shareholders
A close look at recent experience

Having farmers as shareholders is an appealing idea – even at a time when shareholders all over the world are worried about the future value of their shares. Presenting the possibilities that being a shareholder brings in terms of income and empowerment, this is a very interesting book. The case studies, however, show that this cannot be taken as a simple idea, but must be seen as one in which many different factors (and actors) are involved. Although further studies, and comparisons with examples in other countries, will be handy, the authors’ analysis is very useful for all those interested in promoting this approach.

Methodological toolbox on the right to food
Various authors, 2009. Right to Food Unit, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, FAO.

For more than five years, FAO’s Right to Food Unit has been developing methods and instruments to support national governments in their efforts to adopt new laws. Made up of six separate volumes, this “toolbox” is the result of these efforts, and complements a series of studies, manuals and other documents available on the unit’s website. Starting with a thorough analysis of the right to food in international law, the different volumes are meant to help assess current trends and causes of food and nutrition insecurity, and also monitor developments. Very detailed and comprehensive, this is essential reading for policy makers.
Making the most of the water we have
The soft path approach to water management

The title of this book refers to an approach that not only looks at water efficiency, or reducing the amount of water needed to accomplish one task, but also at water conservation, and the need to “change the task” so that it uses less water. Such a comprehensive and integrated approach needs to look at a watershed, but also at people, as end users. The editors have put together papers written by many of the persons who are developing this approach, all of whom illustrate their ideas with examples from different countries. The last section looks at the advantage of this approach as a planning tool.

Climate change in Africa

Although it has contributed the least to climate change, Africa is the continent where the impact of global warming will be greatest. There is therefore an urgent need for African countries to actively participate in the international negotiations. By clearly describing the consequences of climate change in the continent, Camilla Toulmin provides material to strengthen their position. In addition to looking at the current and future availability of water, or at the important role of forests, she looks at the opportunities emerging from the carbon markets. This all makes this book essential reading for those making sure that the African voices are heard.

Scaling up and sustaining the gains

There are many useful publications about this issue that are available online. One of these is a World Bank report written in 2003 (“Scaling-up the impact of good practices in rural development”), which presents concepts and definitions, and also an interesting set of tools. More recent books include the 2008 edition of the World Resources series (“Roots of resilience: Growing the wealth of the poor”), which looks at the scaling up processes of nature based enterprises in order to enhance the economic, social and environmental resilience of rural communities. In “Beyond the village”, the British ODI looks at the different components of the Millennium Villages Project, identifying those factors which determine if an intervention is sustainable (such as, for example, a long term commitment) and those which contribute to scaling up (such as a supportive national policy framework). A similar analysis is made by the RIU programme (“Lessons for out-scaling and up-scaling from DFID’s RNRRS studies and research”), looking at research findings grouped around 19 different themes. Different examples from all over the world are also presented in “Poverty reduction that works: Experience of scaling up development success”, showing how the results of different “innovative initiatives” can reach more people and have a greater impact. Readers are also invited to look back at issue 17.3 of LEISA Magazine (“Lessons in scaling up”), where they can find articles from India, Bolivia, Zambia and the Philippines.

For a more extensive overview, please visit our website: www.ileia.org
SCALING UP > SHARING AGRICULTURAL PRACTICES THROUGH VIDEO

Moving pictures

Videos are a very useful tool for the dissemination of both technological and institutional innovations. Producing these videos also helps identify constraints and solutions to local challenges. The result is a much greater impact. | Text Jonas Wanvoeke, Espérance Zossou and Paul Van Mele

How to reach more farmers? This is one of the questions regularly heard within many organisations. It was also one of the major concerns of the Africa Rice Center, especially after it started its adult learning programme. Since 2000, the centre has been working in what is now known as Participatory Learning and Action Research (PLAR) – an approach meant to promote technological and organisational change on the basis of farmers’ knowledge and capacities. PLAR combines ideas from the Farmer Field Schools approach (such as weekly sessions with groups of about 25 farmers, discussing a specific issue while stimulating learning) together with tools like cropping calendars or transect walks.

This approach helps farmers and facilitators interact and learn about local agriculture and its constraints, and has had, according to different evaluations, many positive results. A recent study in Ghana, for example, showed that farmers participating in the PLAR sessions increased their yields by more than 50 percent and their profits by 86 percent. But the centre can only work with a relatively small number of farmers. How could more farmers benefit?

More than filming Having acquired a good understanding of local contexts and regional issues, the Africa Rice Center opted for the preparation and dissemination of short videos. By using videos, the centre aims to reach more farmers with relevant technological and institutional innovations, focusing
in particular on those ideas coming from farmers themselves. The production, use and distribution of low-cost and high-quality videos was chosen as a good way to increase impact, and to scale up sustainable rice technologies.

In recent years, the centre has followed an approach called “zooming-in zooming-out”. The process starts with a broad stakeholder consultation, where participants help identify topics of regional relevance and also identify the local learning needs. During the “zooming-in” part, farmers and facilitators engage in participatory research activities, analysing local problems, discussing possible solutions and identifying local innovations. Only after having “zoomed-in” is the exact content of the video decided upon. Fine-tuning comes next, with the preparation of the script and the actual production of the video, and with tests in different locations. So starts the “zooming-out” phase, which also includes adding practical examples in order to reflect the diversity of alternatives or solutions to a given problem. Scaling up and scaling out means disseminating the final product to a broad range of organisations, both within the region, within one country and also abroad.

Since 2005, when AfricaRice started producing, using and disseminating these videos, they have reached a growing number of farmers. It was thus interesting to look in detail at the path these videos are taking, and at the spontaneous linkages that emerge. Some of the organisations that received the rice videos volunteered to serve as distribution points for in-country distribution. By early 2009 the videos had reached 164 partners (in 33 African and 11 non-African countries). They, in turn, shared them with 346 other organisations. In addition to just sharing them with others, many local partners decided to translate the videos into languages other than French and English, helping to

**Reaching more farmers** The Africa Rice Center (also known as AfricaRice) has facilitated the production and translation of eleven videos since 2005, all of which look at different innovations related to rice production: seed sorting, flotation, drying and storage; rice quality and parboiling; and land preparation, seedbeds, transplanting, weed and soil fertility management. These videos have all been distributed to the centre’s partners during meetings, workshops, conferences, trainings, and also during field visits. These partners are the National Agricultural Research Systems (NARS) of 24 countries, all of which work together with AfricaRice in the identification and dissemination of rice-related technologies, and also on the introduction of new rice varieties. But these videos have also been posted on the website, from where low resolution versions can be viewed. And other organisations, including some from outside Africa, have also written and requested copies. As the role of AfricaRice is to share and provide information, any organisation can request the rice videos. As a result, the rice videos are increasingly being used by development organisations, schools and universities as training or learning material, or also as an extension tool.

**Interesting practices make very interesting videos.** Photos: Paul Van Mele, Folkert Rinkema
make them available in more than thirty languages. AfricaRice facilitated the process by providing these partners with the written scripts of the video programmes and also with the original master tapes (mini DV). All partners sought local expertise and supervised the translation process.

Having shared the rice videos with only 6,300 farmers in 2006, they have been seen by more than 130,000 farmers already in 2009. It has been even more encouraging to hear that these videos have been broadcast on national television in different countries, and that, in many cases, farmers are willing to pay for them. The main reasons mentioned for this are the quality of the videos and the usefulness of the information and technologies presented. In addition, when people own the videos they can watch appropriate sections whenever the need arises during the crop season.

Dissemination = impact These videos are being watched in Benin, Burkina Faso, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, The Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Kenya, Mali, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Uganda. A few examples from different countries have also shown how these are being used, and the positive results that this is having:

In Benin, since 2006, video shows have been organised by a few local NGOs (like Cinéma Numérique Ambulant, LDLD, Rabemar, Castor and Un Monde). These take place in classrooms and public places in the evening, when farmers are back from the field and before the women started to cook. The extension agents facilitated the discussions before, during and after the projection. In one specific case, more than 90 percent of the women who watched the parboiling video improved the quality of their parboiled rice by removing dirt, washing their rice several times and drying it on tarpaulins. Almost all of them started using the improved parboilers which the NGOs helped to obtain. Those who did not have the means to purchase the improved parboiler modified their traditional practices and followed some of the ideas seen on the video (trying, for example, to use sticks so that the rice no longer touches the water during the steaming process).

During the same period, the NGO Association pour la Promotion Economique de Kindia (APEK) in Guinea has trained thousands of farmers using the videos before reinforcing the lessons through Radio Guinée Maritime. The meetings have been mainly organised in market places, showing the video the night before the market. The videos shown are in Susu and Guerze, two local languages. Farmers were highly impressed with the translations and clarity of the videos, and were eager to comment and discuss what they had seen. It was clear that local language videos were a useful tool.

In Nigeria, in 2009 the National Agricultural Extension and Research Liaison Services (NAERLS), a public extension service, multiplied and translated the rice videos into Yoruba, Hausa and Igbo languages, and distributed them to the Agricultural Development Programs (ADP) of all the states. In Ekiti state, the ADP further distributed copies to farmers’ organisations. This encouraged these organisations to purchase the necessary equipment (DVD player, laptops, and television) so that they could see the videos anytime they need. Some groups rotated the videos among members and many farmers stated they would be willing to pay to have their own copy to watch at home. One group had collected money from members to buy a laptop for the specific purpose of watching the videos.

Quality counts Looking at these different cases in detail shows that the success of the centre’s strategy is based on (i) the relevance of the technologies shown; (ii) the production process followed; (iii) the quality of the videos; and on (iv) the existing networks of partners. The quality catches the
Using videos is only one of the ways of increasing the visibility of farmers’ roles, and of the important contribution they make. This also takes place in situ. This is what several organisations are doing in Nepal, building on the traditional Ropai mela, the festival celebrated every year to mark the end of the rice planting season. Serving traditional food and playing traditional music, villagers celebrate the important role of rice as their staple food crop, and the important role that rice producers have in feeding the country. In the central and eastern parts of the country, Ropai mela is now carried out as part of the National Paddy Day celebrations (June 29th).

This year, the district of Kailali, in western Nepal, saw an “improved” version of their festival, as farmers planted 16 local varieties instead of the high-yielding (or “modern”) varieties. This was meant to raise public awareness about the importance of traditional seeds, and to highlight their many advantages. Organised as a competition between different groups, this was also meant to show how farmers work as groups. These groups planted local landraces such as Nirmoi, Anjani or Bagari, and have continued monitoring their growth, and comparing their development with that of the high-yielding (or “modern”) varieties. These activities are supported by the Village Development Committee and LI-BIRD. They expect that, thanks to the growing popularity of the festival, farmers and extension agents will come to recognize the importance of local varieties, and the vital role small-scale farmers play. The media now plays a large part in making this known and seen throughout Nepal, so it will also help reach the local and national authorities.

More information? Please contact Shree Kumar Maharjan, Programme officer, LI-BIRD, Kathmandu, Nepal. E-mail: smilingssiri@gmail.com
Regreening

In the mid-1980s, farmers and NGOs developed a technique to regenerate “forests on the farm” in dry areas in Niger. Now, millions of hectares have become greener and more productive. This African tale of on-farm forestry stands out for its simplicity and impact on farmers’ lives. | Text Chris Reij

In LEISA Magazine 23.2 (2007), Tony Rinaudo reported on the development of farmer-managed natural regeneration of on-farm trees in Niger. Since the mid-1980s, this technique has been developed and, with occasional set-backs, has kept on spreading. In the 1990s several researchers noticed that villages had become greener, but its scale only became clear when Gray Tappan, a remote sensing specialist from the United States Geological Survey, compared aerial photos of 1975 with satellite images of 2005. He estimates that the number of on-farm trees has increased by 200 million, over an area of 5 million hectares. The speed of the re-greening process is surprising. In some densely populated parts of Niger, the transformation occurred in about twenty years. On average, farmers added 250,000 hectares each year. This makes it the largest environmental transformation in the Sahel.

More children survive In 2004/2005 a drought and locust infection hit Niger. In October 2005, field visits to villages with and without on-farm re-greening showed that villages which had invested in on-farm trees had little or no infant mortality. People had been able to prune or cut some trees to sell as timber or for fuel on the market, allowing them to buy expensive cereals. The villagers could also harvest fruit and leaves for consumption or for sale. Villages with few on-farm trees lacked this possibility. These days, trees produce fodder for livestock. Higher tree densities reduce wind speed, retain more...
water, provide shade and reduce local temperatures. Women benefit most from the higher on-farm tree densities as they can now collect firewood on-farm rather than walk long distances. In 2009 it was estimated that farmer-managed natural regeneration in Niger feeds about 2.5 million people.

**Why this success?** Although local researchers and officials knew about the increase in on-farm tree densities, nobody realised its scale and intensity, until it was detected and verified through remote sensing. This re-greening is only partially the result of project interventions. It happened mainly in regions with high population densities where environmental degradation had become very severe in the 1970s and 1980s. Farmers felt a sense of urgency to do something. Before the 1980s, all natural resources belonged to the state. But after 1985 farmers began considering themselves the owners of their on-farm trees, which induced them to protect and manage them. As soon as farmers felt the different benefits, they copied the example. In re-greened areas, a sense of property developed and taking wood from the neighbour’s land is now considered stealing.

The standard reaction of governments and NGOs to environmental degradation is to launch tree planting campaigns. Yet, in dry areas, four out of five trees die soon after planting. Therefore, nurturing trees that pop up naturally is a more efficient strategy. Natural regeneration comes from what Rinaudo (2007) called...
the “underground forest” (the roots and stumps of trees cut in the 1960s and 1970s) but also from the “seed memory” of a soil (seeds stored in the soil and from manure of livestock). The Maradi and Zinder regions of Niger have about 500 mm rainfall, but in regions with higher rainfall natural regeneration can be even quicker, as experiences in southern Ethiopia show. In the Asian monsoon climates, degraded forests regenerate quicker naturally than through planting trees.

Not only in Niger There are many more examples of natural regeneration. On Burkina Faso’s Central Plateau, farmers have rehabilitated an estimated 300,000 hectares of barren degraded land since the early 1980s. They used simple water harvesting techniques like zaï, contour stone bunds and half moons, and in-between they produce crops on land that was unproductive before. Mali adopted a new forestry code in 1994. An NGO, SahelECO, decided to inform the farmers through the regional radio of Bankass that they could refuse woodcutters with a permit issued by the forestry service arriving on their fields. They began doing so and since then on-farm re-greening on the Seno plains, between the Plateau Dogon and the border with Burkina Faso, has spread like wildfire. SahelECO also helped revive the Barahogon, an institution traditionally responsible for management of trees. Tens of thousands of hectares have been re-greened. Agro-forestry is part of a long-established tradition, which is getting stronger for two reasons. The first is that increasing population densities oblige small-scale farmers to intensify agriculture. Investing in the protection and management of on-farm trees is productive and cost-effective: it does not require cash, but labour investments. The second reason is the environmental crisis: environmental degradation

pushed many farmers to act. Since the middle of the 1990s average rainfall in the Sahel has increased, but it has also become more irregular and unpredictable. When crops fail, trees produce. Trees are a local “safety net” by which farmers survive in times of drought. Conventional tree-planting is not always effective. Recently, plans were announced to expand rainforest in Brazil, which has dwindled to 7 percent of its original size. Tree planting at a cost of US$ 1,000 per hectare should bring it back to 30 percent of its original size. Estimated costs: US$ 11 billion. Probably, the same results can be achieved at almost no cost through natural regeneration, complemented where necessary by tree planting.

Convincing people For several reasons the interest in farmer-managed natural regeneration is likely to increase in the coming years. Populations grow. It is an urgent necessity to adapt to climate change in Africa’s drylands, and at a large scale. Increasing the number of on-farm and off-farm trees not only fixes carbon, but also reduces temperatures and wind speed. The first thing to do is to convince people and to inform them about the phenomenon and the way it works. Besides informing farmers, it is vital to develop policies and legislation conducive to re-greening. Recently, a number of people decided to bring this home-grown success under the attention of policy makers, through the African Re-greening Initiatives (ARI). The idea for a Sahel re-greening initiative emerged in 2007, inspired by the large-scale on-farm re-greening in Niger. ARI became operational in Burkina Faso and in Mali in June 2009, and will most likely soon expand to Niger and Ethiopia. ARI is not about creating a big and expensive regional project, but much more about creating a movement and a process. It is important that NGOs and other stakeholders are aware of the multiple impacts generated by re-greening, move away from conventional tree planting as the sole solution and re-direct their activities to promoting natural regeneration. ARI wants to support the sharing of relevant experience, to initiate policy debate and to develop advocacy initiatives based on the role of trees in adapting to climate change, improving food security and reducing rural poverty.

Chris Reij is facilitator of the African Re-greening Initiatives, VU University, Amsterdam, the Netherlands. E-mail: cp.reij@dienst.vu.nl

The re-greening initiative also features in the recently published “Millions Fed: Proven successes in agricultural development”, see page 26.
What is Learning AgriCultures?
ILEIA’s new educational series provides ideas for teaching about the principles behind sustainable small-scale farming, at higher academic institutions. It includes seven modules focusing on different sustainability issues regarding major agricultural themes. Different kinds of pedagogical resources help stimulate learning and discussions on issues important to small-scale farm sustainability. We would like these modules to be as useful as possible, and will contact educators in our readership to help us keep us on track.

Linking theory to practice

In a recent visit to Ethiopia, I met with educators at two universities – Jimma and Haramaya – to get some feedback on the first two modules produced at ILEIA as part of the Learning AgriCultures project. Do they meet the needs of educators?

Text and photos: Mundie Salm

All teachers I spoke to agreed: lectures need to be more practically applicable, and relate to the realities of small-scale farming – the bulk of farmers in Ethiopia. Having a systems’ approach to agriculture is much appreciated, as it offers a different way to teach. While the systems’ approach relates soil and water systems to the farm and its context, the currently used syllabi include a lot of theory, scientific formulas and mathematical equations. How do students relate this theory to different ecological, social, political and economic issues that come up for small-scale farmers in their region - such as lack of land tenure, climate variability and resource competition? Abebe Nigussie, Soil Conservation lecturer at Jimma (pictured above), expressed his excitement in getting different tools: “I have never used games before, and I like this idea – also, getting ideas for role plays and debates would be very useful.”

But classes at both universities typically include sixty to eighty students, so ideas are needed on how to work with larger groups. Dereje Mamo, Hydrology & Engineering lecturer at Haramaya is interested in more group work: “I like the idea of using PRA-type tools with students, to get them to better understand and discuss different issues farmers come up against.”

Low-cost farm exposure Using LEISA Magazine’s 25-year archive as the basis for case studies from around the world, including questions and suggestions for discussions, was a useful idea. Students come from all over the country, and many from towns, so visual tools such as illustrations, photographs and videos are also welcome. All classrooms have access to a computer and beamer; however, internet access is still unstable in Ethiopia, so DVDs are necessary. “We would especially like to get more videos,” stated Zerihun Kebebew, head of Natural Resource Management at Jimma. While the best way to understand farmers’ issues is through visits, these are not always possible to organise, and expensive. Students at Jimma used to visit farmers close to the university regularly, but farmers tired of the visits. One farmer asked a student for his umbrella, because he needed that more than his advice. Rewarding farmers for helping students, such as by giving them improved seed, is a good idea but costly.

In a recent visit to Ethiopia, I met with educators at two universities – Jimma and Haramaya – to get some feedback on the first two modules produced at ILEIA as part of the Learning AgriCultures project. Do they meet the needs of educators?

Text and photos: Mundie Salm

All teachers I spoke to agreed: lectures need to be more practically applicable, and relate to the realities of small-scale farming – the bulk of farmers in Ethiopia. Having a systems’ approach to agriculture is much appreciated, as it offers a different way to teach. While the systems’ approach relates soil and water systems to the farm and its context, the currently used syllabi include a lot of theory, scientific formulas and mathematical equations. How do students relate this theory to different ecological, social, political and economic issues that come up for small-scale farmers in their region - such as lack of land tenure, climate variability and resource competition? Abebe Nigussie, Soil Conservation lecturer at Jimma (pictured above), expressed his excitement in getting different tools: “I have never used games before, and I like this idea – also, getting ideas for role plays and debates would be very useful.”

But classes at both universities typically include sixty to eighty students, so ideas are needed on how to work with larger groups. Dereje Mamo, Hydrology & Engineering lecturer at Haramaya is interested in more group work: “I like the idea of using PRA-type tools with students, to get them to better understand and discuss different issues farmers come up against.”

Low-cost farm exposure Using LEISA Magazine’s 25-year archive as the basis for case studies from around the world, including questions and suggestions for discussions, was a useful idea. Students come from all over the country, and many from towns, so visual tools such as illustrations, photographs and videos are also welcome. All classrooms have access to a computer and beamer; however, internet access is still unstable in Ethiopia, so DVDs are necessary. “We would especially like to get more videos,” stated Zerihun Kebebew, head of Natural Resource Management at Jimma. While the best way to understand farmers’ issues is through visits, these are not always possible to organise, and expensive. Students at Jimma used to visit farmers close to the university regularly, but farmers tired of the visits. One farmer asked a student for his umbrella, because he needed that more than his advice. Rewarding farmers for helping students, such as by giving them improved seed, is a good idea but costly.
Advertisements

Reach more than 18,000 subscribers in 154 countries.

Advertise in Farming Matters and reach everybody that matters in sustainable agriculture and development.

For information contact Petra Rooijakkers at p.rooijakkers@ileia.org or +31 (0)33 467 38 75.

“...if you are working in a developing country and can only afford one journal, this is the one to get”
Appropriate Technology Sourcebook

Wherever you live in the world, you will find lots to interest you in Appropriate Technology. Concentrating on real-life experiences and problems, the magazine deals with practical development in a clear, straightforward way, and the lessons learned can be applied in any part of the globe. Each issue provides practical technologies, policies and ideas addressed to the elimination of poverty and hunger, with articles and case studies giving a full range of viewpoints and perspectives.

View a sample copy on our website:
www.appropriate-technology.org

Subscription Order Form
Please send me Appropriate Technology (four quarterly issues) for one year @
[ ] £150 (US$315) Institutional
[ ] £52 (US$104) Personal

Name / Job title:
Dept:
Organisation:
Address: Postcode:
Tel:

[ ] Please send a proforma invoice
[ ] I enclose a cheque drawn on a UK bank

Please charge my:
[ ] Mastercard [ ] Visa [ ] Amex

Card no:
Expire date: Security (CVV) digits:

Name on card:
Signature:
Food security in Africa: “Go beyond low input systems”

Bashir Jama, director of the Soil Health Program of the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA), wrote on how to scale up the yields of small-scale farmers in Africa. About a third of Africa’s close to 650 million people are food insecure. Yields need to be raised to at least 4-5 tons per hectare and sustained at that level if Africa is to feed itself and make agriculture its engine of growth. Low input organic production systems cannot do it. AGRA’s strategy has identified three key interventions that must be scaled up: Improving fertilizer supply. Africa’s fertilizer use is less than 9 kg of nutrient per hectare, only 10 percent of the global use. Reversing this situation requires first improving supplies. Countries can make tremendous savings by pooling together fertilizer procurement. Another option is to improve supplies from local production sources. Scaling up integrated soil fertility management (ISFM) practices. There are many proven practices that have been tested or piloted in various locations, like grain legumes fixing nitrogen, fertilizer trees and farm yard manure and composted manure. The integration of these organic with inorganic fertilizers can improve yields significantly. This has also the benefit of controlling biological pests. But to improve access to and efficient use of improved seeds and fertilizers, a better network with agro-dealers and extension services is needed. Creating incentives for farmers to produce. Policies that foster public-private investments in input and output markets will stimulate economic activity. For smallholder farmers, getting affordable financing is particularly important. With credit, farmers can access the key inputs. They can also afford to put in place storage and drying facilities to reduce the high post-harvest losses and run profitable farming businesses.

Bashir Jama, Kenya

ILEIA: the next 25 years

As regular readers know, we are celebrating 25 years of exchanging knowledge on sustainable agriculture in its many forms. We were pleased to receive a letter from two long-term readers in support of our efforts, Willem A. Stoop and John Farrington. Both are internationally experienced researchers and long time proponents of sustainable agriculture.

Congratulations ILEIA! Over the years, you have become an autonomous information centre with regionalised networks all over the world, and an audience of subscribers that has grown from 6,000 in 1988 to 50,000 now. In the current debate about the needs for large-scale (industrialised) versus small-scale farming, ILEIA has an important role to play in showing the relevance of the latter. For farming and agriculture to cope successfully with uncertainties in weather and diseases, it must be dynamic and flexible. From the semi-arid Sahelian zone to the densely populated Asian countryside, everywhere the ingenuity of farmers in coping with the local risks and in exploiting the variations in their natural resource base bears witness to the sophistication of local knowledge. Apart from this know-how and experience, it takes a particular mentality to cope with the risks and personal stress involved.

The support for industrialised farming in developing countries is mainly based on a very narrow technological package of improved seeds, the use of mineral fertilisers and pesticides, and machinery. These are useful elements when used professionally, but no guarantee for viable farming operations: often they ignore practical complexities and intricacies of farming under variable conditions. It follows that we see ILEIA’s relevance as going way beyond the problem of small farmers in the developing world and the promotion of low external input technologies. Its concerns and preoccupations are relevant for all types of farming and throughout the world. We wish the ILEIA staff much success in the next 25 years!

Willem A. Stoop, the Netherlands and John Farrington, United Kingdom.

Want to share your knowledge, experiences and opinions with the rest of the world? Send us an e-mail to farmingmatters@ileia.org or write to P.O. Box 2067, 3800 CB, Amersfoort, the Netherlands. Contributions may be edited for length. For a full version of these and other letters, see www.ileia.org.
In sub-Saharan Africa, where water is always a limiting factor, moisture conservation is essential. In the arid savanna zone of Nigeria, vegetables are mostly grown during the dry season under irrigation. Expanding such production would mean exhausting the already scarce water sources. Mulching becomes a necessity, yet the practice is often neglected. In Nigeria, we saw various reasons for this. The farmers: although mulching materials like maize stalks are readily available, they are often used for fencing or thatching instead. As the benefits of mulching are not immediately visible, farmers often ignore this practice.

The International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT) is developing a range of techniques to reclaim severely degraded farmlands in western Africa. Population pressure has meant that fewer women have land to farm. Bringing useless lands back into production will permit Niger’s women to make a livelihood through agriculture again. Women have learned how to create favourable conditions for planting crops that will enable effective rooting. They know how to harvest rainwater on their farms, using planting pits known as zaï holes, which hold water for prolonged periods after the rains. The holes contain compost to support the growth of locally adapted, deep-rooting and highly nutritious fruit and vegetable trees such as the Pomme du Sahel, Ziziphus mauritania, and moringa, Moringa stenopetala. These techniques that women now use form part of an integrated system of food production. This includes rebuilding the fertility of degraded soils, managing water and general land reclamation using drought-tolerant tree species. ICRISAT estimates the value of fruit and vegetables produced from these indigenous tree crops at about US$ 1,200 per hectare. With continued efforts, these trees and other crops could transform vast areas of degraded land into Africa’s new horticultural front.

Want to know more?
Contact Tobias Dierks: t.dierks@cgiar.org
Eritrea

The Doum palm (*Hyphaene thebaica*), also known as the gingerbread tree, is one of the most important species found in the riverine forests of the western lowlands of Eritrea. Doum palms protect river banks from erosion, and provide a habitat for wildlife. Many farmers, however, clear them from their lands, affecting local biodiversity. They are failing to benefit, economically and ecologically, from this rich resource.

Every part of the tree can be used: the trunk as termite-resistant timber, the leaf stalks for fencing, and its fruits are eaten by humans and animals. Many communities cut and process Doum palm leaves for income generation: they can be used as roofing material, or woven into mats. Its fibre is used for making baskets, ropes and other household products. Traditionally, Eritrean farmers use Doum palm tree leaves as livestock feed during the dry period, when grazing is scarce. There is a new Doum palm processing factory, where the fruit is ground and prepared in the form of meal, as a sustainable alternative livestock feed. If clearing continues, the riverine forests will suffer. Efforts should be made to conserve and protect the few remaining sites of the Doum palm tree, because it is a unique and uncommon vegetational type in Eritrea, with many potential benefits.

Want to know more?
Contact Abel Tekeste: abelteha@yahoo.com

Cameroon

In 2005, the Ministry of Livestock, Fisheries and Animal Industries in Cameroon launched the Swine Production Development Programme (SPDP), to improve the quality and quantity of protein in the country. Pig farmers who did not already belong to groups were invited to form Common Interest Groups. They were trained on organisational management, pig health and disease control. In June 2007, the Confederation of South West Pig Farmers was formed. This Confederation now has a membership of over 150 interest groups, three Federations and 783 individual pig farmers.

As the programme’s success spread, the pig farmers decided to set up a revolving loan fund. Loans were given to pig farmers to fatten piglets over a period of six months. Government advisers provide technical support, while the Confederation’s Marketing Committee identifies profitable markets for selling the pigs. This routine continues to sustain pig farmers, and pig breeding has now become a lucrative economic activity in the South West Region of Cameroon.

The Confederation has been advising local NGOs working with pig breeding projects for persons living with HIV/AIDS. The entire programme has been so successful that in June 2009 the Confederation signed new grant documents for 15 million CFA (approximately US$ 34,000) with SPDP.

Want to know more?
Contact Awudu Ngutte: awudungutte@yahoo.com

Protecting the Doum palm

The Doum palm (*Hyphaene thebaica*), also known as the gingerbread tree, is one of the most important species found in the riverine forests of the western lowlands of Eritrea. Doum palms protect river banks from erosion, and provide a habitat for wildlife. Many farmers, however, clear them from their lands, affecting local biodiversity. They are failing to benefit, economically and ecologically, from this rich resource.

Every part of the tree can be used: the trunk as termite-resistant timber, the leaf stalks for fencing, and its fruits are eaten by humans and animals. Many communities cut and process Doum palm leaves for income generation: they can be used as roofing material, or woven into mats. Its fibre is used for making baskets, ropes and other household products. Traditionally, Eritrean farmers use Doum palm tree leaves as livestock feed during the dry period, when grazing is scarce. There is a new Doum palm processing factory, where the fruit is ground and prepared in the form of meal, as a sustainable alternative livestock feed. If clearing continues, the riverine forests will suffer. Efforts should be made to conserve and protect the few remaining sites of the Doum palm tree, because it is a unique and uncommon vegetational type in Eritrea, with many potential benefits.

Want to know more?
Contact Abel Tekeste: abelteha@yahoo.com
Here they are, the results of our photo contest. We had a hard time picking a winner. Some of the entries that creatively expressed the Future of Family Farming unfortunately were too small to be able to be printed in the magazine, others gave a beautiful impression of family farming but did not really address the theme. The winner of the photo contest (see page 3) provided both a good quality picture and expressed a view on the theme. Congratulations, Emy Grace I. Wallares from the Philippines! We will be sending you a netbook.

The second prize, a digital camera, goes to Gbenga Dada from Nigeria who, in an original way, expressed what several of you have been telling us in your letters: returning to farming offers families a better chance at a secure future than trying to make it in the city.

The third prize is for Julie Carney from Gardens for Health in Rwanda. Her photo is taken at a co-operative...
community garden for people living with HIV/AIDS. In a country where more than 10 percent of the people face food insecurity, gardens like these make the future look a little brighter. Julie will receive the radio with nine functions.

The other two photos on this page have won one of the ten USB sticks. We could not publish all ten, as some were too small. But we felt they were too beautiful to not reward. All these photos can be viewed on our website, www.ileia.org. Thanks to everyone who sent in a photo!
How do different regions look at scaling-up? This is what some of our partners consider important.

A stronger consumers’ organisation

Consumers can also play a very important role in sustainable agriculture. Cecilia Jurado, subscriptions officer of the Latin American edition of our magazine, is an active member of the local Committee of Organic Consumers in Lima, Peru. She described her work in informing urban consumers about the benefits of organic agriculture, and looked at the challenges they have as an organisation made up of volunteers. “We regularly hold seminars, and run short courses and lectures, through which we provide information to the general public. Of course, as volunteers, we can only do so much, all of us have limited time to dedicate to volunteer work. But every little bit helps, and together we do a lot. Results so far are positive: the second Andean Meeting of Organic Consumers, which took place in Lima last October, showed that the work of this local committee is now being taken as an example in other cities and countries. Although the resources available are not many, the growing recognition of the importance of their task is helping people stay motivated. Cecilia recalls a statement from one of the participants to the October meeting, who said that “it is the link between rural producers and urban consumers which can ensure the sustainability of small-scale agriculture”. That is exactly what every member of the committee is trying to do: to strengthen this link.

More information? Write to Cecilia Jurado at ETC Andes. E-mail: cecilia@etcandes.com.pe

Better documentation skills

AME, our partner organisation in southern India, has been supporting many organisations during the last few years, helping them see the need for a documentation process and developing the necessary skills to document their work. Since June 2009, AME has been working with a group of organisations implementing what is known as a People-led Approach (PLA), both in India and in Bangladesh. This approach has helped these organisations to be more effective, but has also shown the need to document their work. According to T.M. Radha, editor of LEISA India, a documentation process can help organisations to analyse, reflect and learn from their experience.

“When such understanding is lacking, documentation activities are not given priority in terms of time and resources. This is perhaps one of the major limitations which many NGOs have.” Together with ILEIA, AME organised two workshops in June, where they presented a short documentation method, and then encouraged all teams to try it. This was followed by another visit in October, where special attention was given to the process of presenting the information gathered. As Radha said, “I feel we have been successful. These organisations are now in a stronger position to help spread the benefits of small-scale agriculture.”

More information? Please contact T.M. Radha, at the AME Foundation. E-mail: leisa-india@yahoo.com
Strengthening local organisations

Having an active local organisation is essential when talking about developing ideas and “building knowledge”. With this objective in mind, AS-PTA, the network’s partner in Brazil, has been working in the northern state of Paraíba since 1993. Their work led to the establishment of Polo Sindical e das Organizações da Agricultura Familiar de Borborema, a network formed today by 14 farmers’ unions and more than 150 grassroots organisations. “We started by looking at the main characteristics of farming in this region, considering the local diversity and the major perceptions which farmers shared. We wanted to have a shared understanding of the situation”, recalls Luciano Silveira, head of the AS-PTA’s Paraíba programme. “This led to an extensive process of experimentation and exchange of information, and at the same time it led to a better understanding of the local agroecosystems, and of the possibilities that these have.” Farmers saw the potential advantages of having groups with a specific purpose (like a seed bank) or discussing a specific theme, and, working together, were able to set them up and to keep them going. Looking back, Luciano identifies some of many aspects that helped getting farmers involved. “Forming one network was essential in bringing the existing and the new organisations together. Just as important was the process of developing local capacities, with specific training on management issues.” Not surprisingly, there is widespread recognition that one of the key factors has been the increasing participation of women in the network. Polo de Borborema is now moving one step further, working with the local authorities in order to influence public policies and the different governmental agencies. Representing all farmers and also all local organisations, Polo is in a very strong position, and is nowadays seen as a very relevant political entity for the benefit of Paraíba.

More information? Please write to Luciano Silveira at AS-PTA.
E-mail: luciano@aspta.org.br

COLOPHON

Farming Matters
Small-scale agriculture for a sustainable society. Farming Matters is published quarterly by ILEIA

Address:
P.O. Box 2067, 3800 CB Amersfoort, the Netherlands

Visitors address:
Zuidsingel 16, 3811 HA Amersfoort
Tel: +31 (0)33 467 38 70, Fax: +31 (0)33 463 24 10
E-mail: ileia@ileia.org

Editorial team
This issue has been compiled by: Jorge Chavez-Tafur, Karen Hampson, Petra Rooijakkers, Mundie Salm, Frank van Schouwvroec and Mireille Vermeulen.

Subscriptions
Subscription rate for one year (four issues): organisations 45 euro, individuals 25 euro.
For local organisations in the South there is a reduced fee of 10 euro. Individuals in countries not covered by a regional edition, may receive the magazine free of charge on request. For an overview of the regional editions, see www.agriculturesnetwork.org.

The AgriCultures Network
ILEIA is a member of the AgriCultures Network, eight organisations that provide information on small-scale, sustainable agriculture worldwide, and that publish LEISA Revista de Agroecología (Latin America), LEISA India (in English), SALAM Majalah Pertanian Berkelanjutan (Indonesia), Agridape (West Africa, in French), Agriculturas, Experiências em Agroecologia (Brazil), 来源 (China), and Kilimo Endelevi Africa (East Africa, in English).

Design & layout
Frivista, Amersfoort, the Netherlands

Printing
Koninklijke BDU Grafisch Bedrijf B.V., Barneveld, the Netherlands

Funding
The ILEIA programme is funded by Sida and DGIS.

Cover photo
Folkert Rinkema

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.

Volume 25.4
ISSN: 1569-8424
ILEIA uses the Attribution-Noncommercial-Share Alike 3.0 Unported Creative Commons Licence. For details please see www.creativecommons.org
The future of family farming, according to one of our readers

“IT IS ADVISABLE FOR PEOPLE IN AFRICA TO LEAVE THE URBAN POOR LIFE AND ENGAGE IN BUSINESSES LIKE POULTRY FARMING IN RURAL AREAS.”  Erick Mutai, Kenya