

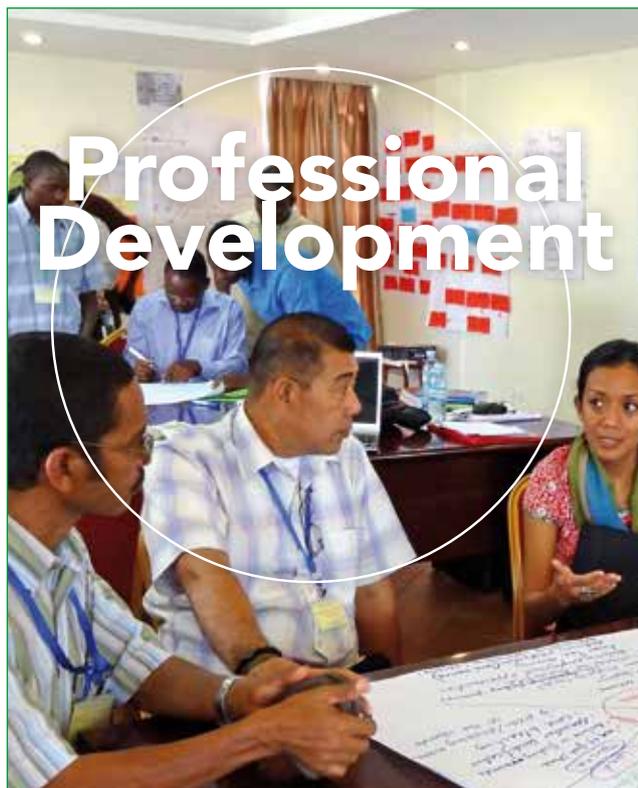
FARMING

MATTERS



New markets, new values

- Farmers' agency ■ Local food systems in Ecuador
- New section: Youth and agriculture



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CALL FOR ARTICLES

Strengthening family farming

The United Nations declared 2014 as the International Year of Family Farming. This is a very important recognition of the multiple social, economic, environmental and cultural functions of family farming. For example, family farmers produce more than 50% of the world's food, and are important guardians of biodiversity. Creating the conditions for family farming to thrive is essential for a sustainable future.

The threats to family farming are multidimensional. Climate change, land grabbing, land degradation, the aggressive promotion of industrial farming and dependence on large agribusiness chains are some of the most pressing challenges. Many family farmers have proven to be innovative and resilient under the right socio-political framework and conditions – especially when supported by public and institutional policies.

Family farmers can exert a large degree of autonomy through the use of agro-ecological practices and the creation of markets that are based on more direct relationships with

consumers. They pool their labour and resources, and increase their yields. They organise themselves and make their voices heard. They build their own educational spaces where they learn from each other and teach others. Women play a key role in these strategies, which are often carried out in close collaboration with local decision makers, researchers, and consumer platforms.

For the December 2013 issue, *Farming Matters* is looking for the most groundbreaking experiences and visionary ideas on how to strengthen family farming. What are family farmers and their organisations doing to advocate for and enhance their rights and livelihoods? How are governments incorporating agro-ecology into their public policies? What other support mechanisms are needed to valorise and promote sustainable family farming? How can agro-ecological family farming become an attractive proposition for future generations? What can we learn from existing and emerging practices?

Please send us your contributions. Articles for the December issue of *Farming Matters* should be sent to the editor, Jorge Chavez-Tafur, before October 1st, 2013. E-mail: j.chavez-tafur@ileia.org



Photo: Nick Hobgood (Flickr)



An efficient system

Many shifting cultivators in Dhaubadi, in the Nepalese district of Nawalparasi, are benefitting from extension programmes and better communication facilities and are changing their relationship with the market as a result. The main staple crop in this region is rice, but farmers prefer not to grow it themselves as the potential for irrigation is limited. Instead they grow a variety of crops such as maize, finger millets, potato, sweet-potato, colocasia and ginger, which provide them with a much higher overall output. However, while they have high yields, they face the problem of finding a market for their crops. The middleman who comes to Dhaubadi to buy their crops offers a very low price. So farmers, such as Gajbir Baraghare, are

actively developing an alternative: exchanging their crops for rice produced in other areas in the Terai, the high-yielding lowland plains at the foothills of the Himalayas. This approach is proving to be effective: farmers in the Terai are pleased to exchange their rice for crops that they don't grow themselves, and are happy to have organic potatoes and other crops delivered to their doors, and "paying" for them with rice. In February 2013 Mr Baraghare went to Kawasoti with a pick-up truck full of potatoes and ginger. He exchanged all the potatoes for rice and sold the ginger in the local market town, thus also generating the money he needed to meet his family's essential needs.

Text and photo: Sandesh Timilsina, IAAS, Rampur, Nepal



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“We need to support what farmers are already doing”

Medius Bihunirwa, head of the Farmers’ Enterprise Development Unit at the Kabarole Research and Resource Centre (KRC), works with small-scale farmers in Uganda, helping them to access markets. In an interview with *Farming Matters*, she speaks about agency. She believes that, provided farmers have accurate information, they are able to choose which markets work best for them – and these may be either sophisticated value chains or informal markets.



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Old traditions, new practices

After a long list of food scares, consumers in the Netherlands are becoming more cautious and want to know more about the origins of their food. As a result, a growing number of farmers are selling their products directly to them. A range of different initiatives, started by both farmers and consumers, and operating at different levels (from the national to the local) are showing the many benefits of stronger linkages between the two groups.



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New section on youth and agriculture

Dinesh Panday, representative of the Young Professionals’ Platform for Agricultural Research for Development (YPARD) in Nepal, is the first to write for the new section in *Farming Matters* which will present the voices of young people and explore the challenges and opportunities they face. Dinesh thinks that one of the things missing in agriculture today is imagination, and that it is up to young people to do something about it.



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Local food systems: Tzimbuto and Canasta Utopía

The growing distance between producers and consumers has led to a drop in farmers’ incomes; more limited choice for consumers and less varied and healthy diets. Ecuador’s *Canastas Comunitarias* is a national network of urban, lower class families who have crafted a model that helps them save money, while providing access to quality foods. Their alliance with farmers’ organisations is showing even larger benefits, and an enormous potential for change.

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Agricultural markets are about more than buying and selling commodities. They are about the relationships between producers and consumers, and all the other actors in a value chain. They are also important for our relation with the food we eat. Globalisation has had far-reaching consequences for these relations, with products travelling long distances and with many new stakeholders getting involved. It has deeply influenced the way we produce and what we eat. At the same time, domestic markets in developing countries are changing drastically due to rapid urbanisation, the emerging retail sector, and vastly improved communication facilities.

Arguing that producers benefit from these changes, the idea of using value chains to connect small-scale farmers to global markets has become hugely popular. Yet, as a recent study by IIED and Hivos shows, an apparent consensus about the benefits of “inclusive businesses” has been reached without a strong body of evidence about the number of small-holders that might be involved, or the impact this will have on reducing poverty and food security.

This issue of *Farming Matters* presents a small sample of the many experiences in (re)creating and (re)vitalising local markets. These experiences generate substantial employment, and also build local food security and food sovereignty. Yet, they are often overlooked by policymakers and mainstream development experts who view them as “niche” initiatives, supposedly irrelevant for larger development processes. There is work for researchers here: by analysing, aggregating and systematising this variety of experiences and quantifying their impact, they would help policymakers to see the real strengths and weaknesses of localisation.

These new ways of connecting farmers and consumers are neither about (inclusive) global value chains, or traditional local markets. They are about a new business model which is local in focus but global as a phenomenon. Producers, middlemen and consumers build new arrangements through farmers' markets, vegetable boxes, meat contracts, or by cleverly using the available ICTs to benefit local producers and local consumers. Many of these are small initiatives, but they have a snowball effect. Supporting such initiatives may be one of the best ways to invest in the future of family farming and in the future of the planet.

Edith van Walsum

Edith van Walsum, director ILEIA

LETTERS

Reactions to the previous issue of Farming Matters touched on several dimensions of the System of Rice Intensification (SRI), showing that it really does involve much more than more rice. Many readers saw the SRI debate as a metaphor for the larger debate on agro-ecological approaches and their relevance for tackling global challenges. Agro-ecology has been defined as a practice, a science and a movement; these three dimensions are inseparably linked.

SRI and SCI

I appreciate the focus of the last issue of *Farming Matters* on grassroots innovations on SRI by smallholders. What was particularly impressive was that the SRI practice can be successfully applied to many other crops such as wheat, maize, vegetables, and tubers. Rajendra Uprety did a commendable job in his article by identifying the key challenges encountered by smallholders in the process of implementing the recommended practices for SRI. Such challenges are common among smallholder farmers in many countries. From time to time, and for different reasons, many areas experience acute food shortages and famine. The concept and experiences of SRI or SCI, if widely disseminated in countries like Tanzania, could considerably alleviate abject poverty. We need to work towards the “triangular model”, where researchers, extension agents and farmers are more effective in working together.

Ambrose M. Kweka, Moshi, Tanzania

Intensification

SRI can increase the amount of grain produced from the same area of land while using less seed and water. But this is still a form of “intensification”, which is accomplished by increasing the amount of care and attention devoted to the crop. It doesn’t necessarily make paddy farming easier. Various operations have to be done more precisely or thoroughly

than before, using new techniques, and in a timely manner. Intensifying inputs of knowledge and care may not take money but it does demand time, skill and attention. In particular, every principle of SRI management needs to be applied sensitively, taking local conditions into account. These are not small matters and they can create problems if they are neglected. Sadly, I have seen SRI methods promoted in remarkably dogmatic and inflexible ways.

I also found that several of your articles depicted SRI as a kind of happy insurgency that bubbled up spontaneously from farmers’ experiments and practices, heroically resisted suppression by mainstream scientists, and overturned conventional wisdom in rice farming. But our research is showing that this “roots revolution” has deeper historical roots than is generally appreciated. Not only can its origins be found much further back in history than the Madagascar of the 1980s, its technical components also owe a great deal to scientific research as well as farmers’ practices. Methods that closely resemble SRI have been tried and promoted before, in various locations. We should pay attention to historical experiences and make sure we are not reinventing wheels or committing the mistakes our predecessors made.

Dominic Glover, Post-doctoral Fellow, Knowledge, Technology and Innovation Group, Wageningen University, Wageningen, the Netherlands

Higher yields

Another good issue of *Farming Matters* on SRI! It gave a good and broad overview of what is currently happening, plenty of additional information, and shows the enthusiasm for SRI from different corners. We have been practicing SRI for eight years now and are 100% organic. We have beautiful plants with great roots, a good yield and an unparalleled full flavour. Subsidised farmers using chemical fertilizers in our area are spraying all day, but have

had considerably lower yields, especially for the last two years. So what are we talking about?

Paul ter Weel, Indonesia

Animosity?

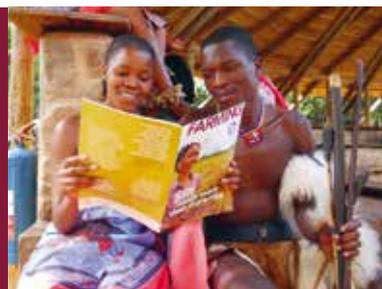
Reading the March issue of *Farming Matters*, I was impressed again by the strength of the SRI movement in catalysing innovations in rice production. However, I couldn’t help noticing the discord being cultivated between “conventional science” and the alternative, “agro-ecological approaches”. In the CGIAR, work revolves around improving “eco-efficiency”. I don’t see anything “conventional” in this work, nor does it stimulate “producing more with more inputs”. So, why suggest and foster discord when it actually doesn’t exist? Mine is a plea to the rice R&D community to look for opportunities for collaboration rather than to perpetuate real or perceived discord. I see common ground in the development of technologies and management practices that contribute to ecological and sustainable intensification and that empower smallholder rice farmers to lift themselves out of poverty. I see a powerful “movement” of SRI that could be further strengthened by collaboration with others who also develop such technologies. But, the biggest common ground is that we all share the same goals and ideals: to contribute to a more food-secure, less poor, and more environmentally friendly world.

Bas Bouman, Director, CGIAR Research Program - Global Rice Science Partnership (GRiSP), International Rice Research Institute, IRRI. (A longer version of this letter was published as a blog on the IRRI website)

Glad to engage

The IRRI blog on SRI that responded to issue 29.1 (“Why the animosity?”) is a positive contribution to making progress in the rice sector. It

Farming Matters welcomes comments, ideas and suggestions from its readers. Please contact us via e-mail at ileia@ileia.org or write to P.O Box 90, 6700 AB Wageningen, the Netherlands.



is important to recognise, however, that any animosity stemmed not from SRI protagonists but from IRRI's dismissal of SRI in its magazine in 2004 as not worth even considering, which was the first in a stream of such dismissals. A decade later, SRI's benefits have now been demonstrated in over 50 countries, and SRI methods are being used by about 5 million farmers around the world. The multiple benefits that they are getting would have been forgone if IRRI's premature rejection of SRI had been accepted. Today, national rice research centres in India, China, Vietnam and elsewhere are advising their governments to utilise SRI methods as part of strategies to improve the food security and income of small and marginal farmers, saving water and buffering the effects of climate change. Almost 400 papers have been published in scientific journals assessing the merits of SRI (see SRI-Rice website). Despite all this progress, IRRI has not made any significant effort to study SRI and evaluate its elements systematically. We have been ready for many years to work together with IRRI to further improve the scientific basis and practical means for more efficient and environmentally-benign rice production. We harbour no animosity.

Biksham Gujja, AgSri Agricultural Services Pvt. Ltd. and Norman Uphoff, Cornell University

Simple agronomy

Reactions to your latest issue show that there is still much to be

learned about SRI's contribution to rice productivity and food security. Some respondents (re)define SRI as something its proponents have never claimed: a rigidly defined package of recommendations. Other respondents reformulate SRI as a vague general concept, such as a "social movement" or a "phenomenon". Both sets of comments undermine SRI's significance for rice production in general. By presenting SRI as a niche technology that might work, but only under a particular set of agro-ecological conditions and only for a limited group of smallholders, or by depicting it as a non-scientific approach driven by sentiment, the intention is clearly to marginalise SRI and the agronomic research and experiential evidence on which it is based. But what is SRI really? The set of six principles bring together relatively simple, well-established agronomic practices. Why has international rice research embarked on a *debate* about SRI that has now continued for some ten years?

Willem Stoop, Driebergen, the Netherlands

Valuable information

I work in a research station which is part of a university. Back in 2005 we tried SRI on our fields with very positive results, and we saw the same results repeated in 2006 and 2007. Work stopped, however, when I was transferred to another division, and I hardly heard about SRI until the arrival of the latest issue of your magazine. It is great to

read about the positive experiences taking place: this helps researchers like me know about what is happening in other countries, or even in my own country.

Pedro Saul Castillo Carrillo, Universidad Nacional de Tumbes, Peru



From our followers

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Interested in #SRI ? The March edition of Farming Matters magazine is devoted to the System of #Rice Intensification
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26 March 2013

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Thank you for the wonderful magazines, SRI is great news for farmers
22 May 2013

Building markets:

A challenge for family farming

In a situation where transnational corporations are playing an increasingly dominant role in the world's agri-food systems, two of the greatest challenges that family farmers face are developing strategies to improve market access, and adding value to their agricultural production. There are many successful experiences that set examples that may be amenable to replication. In general, these successful cases involve developing closer relationships between producers and consumers through revitalising and reorganising local or regional markets, in ways that create space for economically beneficial exchanges and also promote the biologically-diverse and culturally-contextualised production typical of peasant agriculture.

Paulo Petersen

By efficiently articulating new developments in information technology, infrastructures and facilities for the long distance transportation of goods, and by exploiting changes in the institutional frameworks that regulate the domestic and international markets, transnational corporations have come to exert an unprecedented level of control on the configuration of agri-food systems – or on the flows that link the production, processing, distribution and consumption of food. Philip McMichael refers to this as the corporate food regime, and points out that this has further promoted and intensified the scientific and technological paradigm of the Green Revolution, with the introduction of genetically modified organisms (GMOs), the rapid and uncon-

trolled expansion of monocultures and the subsequent standardisation of agricultural landscapes. An equally massive standardisation process has been experienced on the consumer's side. The political and economic power accumulated by major players in food retailing has led to the imposition of industrialised junk food, the homogenisation of diets and, by the same token, the destruction of local markets through which family farmers have traditionally sold their produce. The growing homogenisation of production and consumption practices is both a cause and a consequence of the emergence of what Jan Douwe van der Ploeg calls the “food empires”, the governance mechanisms for food and agriculture at a global scale. Truly international, their power increasingly extends to the economic and political arenas,



Creative systems are emerging all around the world, where both producers and consumers play an important role. Photo: AS-PTA

and they now capture an ever larger share of the value added along the food chain.

Local alternatives for global challenges The global dissemination of “nowhere food” (or food whose origins can hardly be traced) is not the only visible trend. In parallel, and developing as a form of resistance to this dominant trend and its negative effects, creative strategies to relocalise and recontextualise agri-food systems are emerging all around the world. In this sense, markets are the arena where power struggles are taking place between the contrasting and coexisting structures and mechanisms that shape the production and consumption of food. On the one hand, there is the political and ideological influence of agri-businesses on national states and multilateral organisations. On the other hand, there are emerging social processes that seek to rebuild, revitalise and diversify market circuits that promote a more equitable distribution of the wealth generated through agriculture, and to simultaneously alter the metabolism of agri-food systems so that the flows of matter and energy are more sustainable. Whether in Brazil (p. 10) or the Netherlands (p. 18), these examples are becoming more widespread and visible, with producers, consumers and their organisations playing an important role.

In this sense, the development of local markets (or short chains) should be understood as an active social process that aims to increase people’s autonomy and independence from the “very visible hands” of multi-

national agri-food businesses on the global market. The political dimension of this emerging process construct is increasingly expressed by the concept of “food sovereignty”, a concept that is rooted in the understanding that the access to food of one’s choice is a basic human right.

Beyond monetary value Achieving increasing levels of governance over markets is one of the main tenets of the movements, organisations and individuals who promote agro-ecology around the world. Without a doubt, the ability to scale up agro-ecological experiences, both socially and geographically, directly depends on the construction and defence of viable marketing channels that link production and consumption together, and establish stable and transparent relationships between these two economic spheres. The advancement of an agro-ecological perspective for rural development does not follow conventional economic logic, defined in terms of competitiveness and vertical social relationships, but crucially depends on regulated markets that stimulate horizontal relations and co-operation among social actors. In this sense, these markets are reproduced and (re)structured around social values that go beyond the monetary dimension.

This edition of *Farming Matters* presents some of the meaningful experiences that are taking place in different countries and in so doing furthers the debate around markets and rural development. What strategies are farmers and their organisations implementing as alternatives to the dominance of large agribusiness corporations? How do farmers articulate strategies that enable them to become more resilient in the face of the uncertainties and threats arising from the volatility of agricultural prices, food crises and global climate change? How do local markets and shortcuts to commercialisation and marketing contribute to generating more sustainable livelihoods for family farmers? How are family farmers’ innovations in organisational models shaping new economies? How can farmers strengthen autonomy within markets? And what is the role of states in interacting with these emerging issues?

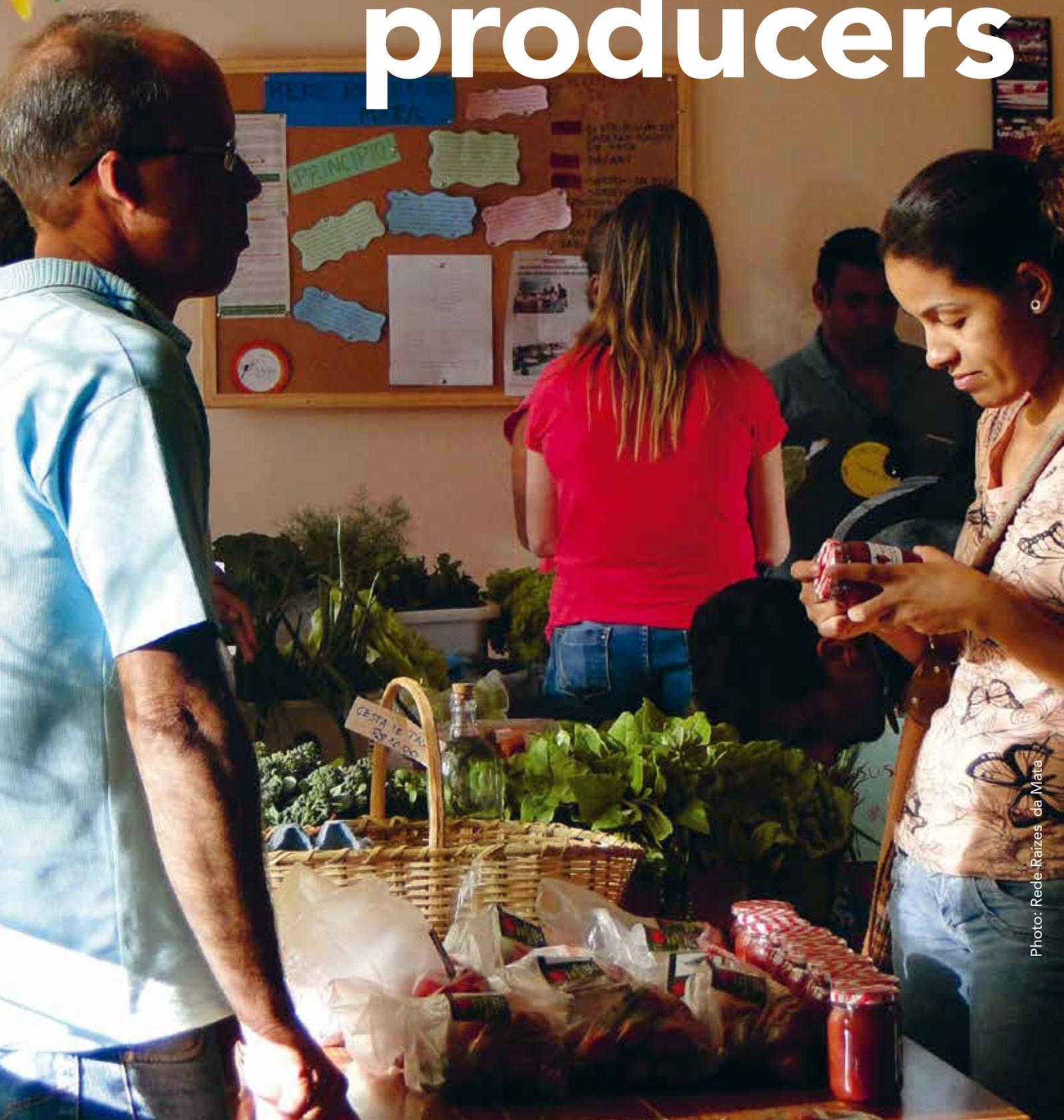
Based in Rio de Janeiro, **Paulo Petersen** works as Executive Director of AS-PTA. He is vice-president of the Brazilian Agro-ecology Association, and is also the editor of *Agriculturas*, our sister publication in Brazil. E-mail: paulo@aspta.org.br

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REDE RAÍZES DA MATA:

Strengthening producers



links between and consumers

As in many other parts of the world, farmers in the Zona da Mata region, in the Brazilian state of Minas Gerais, were encouraged to take up the Green Revolution package. This model also prescribed integration with the international markets. Family farmers, however, have found that this model has not brought the promised benefits. Many different efforts have led to viable alternatives. One of these is *Rede Raízes da Mata*, started in 2011 as a joint initiative by a group of university students and local producers.

Nina Abigail Caligorne Cruz, Fabricio Vassalli Zanelli, Heitor Mancini Teixeira and Irene Maria Cardoso

As part of the democratisation process in Brazil at the end of the 1980s, many protests and movements were organised around the problems that existed in the rural areas, promoting the rights of small-scale farmers and seeking alternatives to the mainstream production model. In the Zona da Mata, many of these efforts were driven by the farmers themselves, founding various farmers' unions ("*Sindicatos de Trabalhadores Rurais*") and other rural organisations. They worked together with a group of students and lecturers from the *Universidade Federal de Viçosa* (UFV), and also with technicians and extension agents sensitive to the environmental and social degradation in the region, to create an NGO to promote an alternative ecological approach. This was named CTA-ZM, or the Centre for Alternative Technologies in Zona da Mata.

Twenty-five years later, a visitor to the region can see many positive results, ranging from the ecological

management of soils to the emergence of a strong organisation of women farmers. Throughout this period, the region has seen a drastic change in agricultural production and the way that farmers reach consumers with their products, which now include not only coffee but also dairy products, honey, vegetables, fruits, grains, amongst others. A study conducted by CTA in 2009 identified several marketing possibilities in Zona da Mata, including street markets, farmers' associations and co-operative sales points, door-to-door selling and the interest of different government agencies for locally-sourced products. However, the commercialisation of agro-ecological products remained, and still remains, a great challenge. A lot of products are seasonal, and increasing the total output is difficult, as most farmers grow many different products simultaneously and experience limitations in terms of land and labour. The existence of sanitary regulations which do not match the reality that family farmers face is also a big obstacle. The study mentioned that many of the



Consumers have access to healthy food, and the opportunity to participate actively. Photos: Rede Raízes da Mata

difficulties faced by farmers could be reduced through an educational process based on the exchange of experiences and knowledge, developing farmers' capacities to enhance already existing initiatives and raising their awareness of the mechanisms for achieving certain required market standards. The recommended strategies also included enhancing the value of products through, for example, the use of specific labels and logos and better packaging.

Rede Raízes da Mata After many small-scale attempts, the accumulated lessons learned led to the foundation of *Rede Raízes da Mata* (or the “Forest Roots Network”) in 2011 in a joint effort between producers, consumers, the university and CTA. The main goal of the network is to improve the commercialisation of local agro-ecological produce by establishing stronger links between producers and consumers. During the past two years it has worked on a co-operative basis, with farmers playing an active role in deciding what products will be provided, and determining the quantities and prices for each product. Consumers help to run the network as volunteers and active supporters, gaining both access to healthy, local and diverse food, and the opportunity to share their comments and suggestions.

Work is organised on a weekly basis and facilitated by a team of students from the university. A spreadsheet is made after consulting the farmers about the availability of products: every Monday, a new spreadsheet with the week's offers is sent to all registered customers. They have until Wednesday to return their order by e-mail. All the producers are contacted every Wednesday with the order for their produce, specifying the amount to be delivered. Friday is the delivery day, when the producers bring their products before 3 p.m. to the network's office, which is located inside the university campus (in a space where workshops, debates and several other activities also take place). Here all the produce is put together as individual packages for the customers by 6:30 p.m., when the office is open for people to collect their orders.

There are over three hundred consumers registered in the network today, most of whom pick up a personal package every week. The list from which they can choose currently contains more than two hundred products, including fruits and vegetables as well as fresh teas, coffee, beans, corn flour, artisanal breads and even natural cosmetics. This diverse range of products changes seasonally. The supply of products comes from seven individual farmers and nine different groups of family farmers in the region, including associations, co-operatives and production groups.

One of many efforts While family farmers are working to improve access to markets, they are also benefitting from an increasing demand from an urban population interested in consuming healthier, good quality, food that is not contaminated by pesticides and is free from GMOs. The Forest Roots Network is a small initiative that is very modest in terms of coverage when compared to most agribusinesses, but it is not the only one. Members of the network see themselves as a “complementary tool”. As Edilei Cirilo da Silva, a farmer and member, says, “the

network is an alternative that is helping to overcome the difficulty that farmers have in accessing the market. Of course, it's not the only solution, but this kind of initiative can reach large numbers and play an important role encouraging and supporting farmers to produce food for the market, and also to feed themselves! The role of the network is also to strengthen the dialogue within society about the problems caused by modern agriculture. We need to work together with others and reach a wide variety of audiences, including workers, employees and civil servants, in order to break the myth that our products, because they are organic, are much more expensive than conventional ones."

Such efforts are benefitting from innovative governmental policies. A good example is the PAA programme, established in 2003 by the national government to promote food security and strengthen family farming through the acquisition and distribution of food products. Family farmers can sell their products directly to the government for a fair price without going through a difficult and bureaucratic process. Some of the products are donated to public organisations such as popular restaurants, or to food banks from where they are distributed to vulnerable social groups. The other part is acquired by family farmers' organisations in other regions.

Another interesting measure was taken in 2009, with changes made to the implementation of the National Programme for School Nutrition. This has been running since 1955, supporting students enrolled in the public basic educational system. The law passed in 2009 stipulated that at least 30% of the programme's resources (990 million reais, or 370 million euros, in

2012) must be used for purchasing products from family farmers.

A win-win model The Forest Roots Network serves as a bridge between local production and consumption, and strengthens the links between farmers and consumers. Through the network, farmers are able to sell small quantities of many different products for a fair price. This turns their production on small plots of land into a viable and profitable enterprise, resulting in higher biodiversity levels. Although small, the Forest Roots Network represents a significant movement towards reorganising the agri-food systems, helping to reshape social relations and creating new market structures. The initiative contributes to raising consumer awareness about agro-ecology and local food, and has already inspired the creation of new consumer networks in two other municipalities in the region.

Nina Abigail Caligiorne Cruz, Fabricio Vassalli Zanelli and **Heitor Mancini Teixeira** are students and graduates of the Universidade Federal de Viçosa. **Irene Maria Cardoso** works as lecturer at the same university. E-mail: heitorteixeira_5@hotmail.com

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Every week, more than 200 different products in a list which changes seasonally. Photos: Rede Raízes da Mata





“We need to
support
what farmers
are already doing”

Medius Bihunirwa is the head of the Farmer Enterprise Development Unit at Kabarole Research and Resource Centre (KRC), Uganda, where she works with smallholder farmers, enhancing the quality of their produce and improving their access to markets. In her role as member and researcher of the Hivos/IIED Knowledge Network, she has delved deeper into the concept of farmer agency and their interest in being part of a value chain.

Interview: Laura Eggens



Photo: Pamella Vasconcellos/PUC (Rio+20 page)

KRC carries out market studies and shares the results with farmers. As part of its efforts, it brings the farmers and traders who are involved in a particular value chain together, especially those working with coffee, banana, maize and cocoa, and analyses the results and possibilities. “I learnt a lot about ‘economic agency’ from the Hivos/IIED Knowledge Network: the level of power that people have because they understand their position in the value chain and are able to make informed choices and decisions about which kind of markets to access. If you only focus on the classical value chains, you may fail to understand the other dynamics that small producers in rural Uganda need to deal with.”

Does the value chain approach work? I find that this is a good approach, because it looks at the different segments of the chain, helps us connect them and improve efficiency. But pro-poor value chains are not always well developed. If I make a value chain analysis, I need to be very critical: does the smallholder farmer really benefit from being part of it? You often find that other stakeholders, like traders, input dealers, processors or retailers, are well organised. In reality, the majority of smallholder farmers are not well organised: only about 10 or 20 percent of the farmers around the world jointly market their products. And then we need to contextualise the sophisticated value chains that are the focus of international debates. Do farmers really need to supply supermarkets? In many countries in Africa the majority of consumers are not supermarket-goers. They buy from informal markets. As development actors and promoters of the value chain approach we

“Does the farmer really benefit from being part of a value chain?”

don’t always take the time to understand the realities of the smallholder farmers, and to understand the different ways in which they are trying to connect to different markets on their own, within their own means, using their own knowledge.

How do farmers do this? For example here, in Kabarole, banana farmers from Kasenda market their products in an informal way. Using mobile phones, they contact relatives in different towns, such as Fort Portal and Kampala, to find out the selling price in different regions. This information is then disseminated through their own networks. When traders come to their village, they already know the prices and have the capacity to negotiate. The farmers cut the bananas on the agreed date and the traders come to collect them. The cycle ends there. There are no rules, it is an informal way of doing things. Development workers often think that these farmers will be cheated. But when we did an in-depth analysis of these arrangements, we found that there are very high levels of trust. Their group ties are very strong, even without a formal organisation. Using their kinship ties to connect to the market, they are able to beat the formal arrangements that are there. These are pertinent issues that development workers need to think through.

Is there any way to support these farmers? At KRC we focus on the power of information. For the banana farmers in Kabarole, we have been able to build on their existing internal arrangements. We do market analyses with our partners at a national level and have a toll-free line whereby farmers can call for information. Farmers then make the decision to sell in a specific place on the basis of information that is well researched, in addition to what they find out through their own network. The liberalisation of trade has encouraged traders to go as far as the farmers' gardens, which makes it even more important that farmers have the right information. With more than 10 million Ugandan citizens using mobile phones, over 5 million browsing the internet daily and millions tuning into more than 200 FM radio stations broadcasting in local languages, should we only focus on the co-operatives that used to connect farmers and small businesses to markets in the 1970s and 1980s?

In Kenya, a study reported that 42% of the milk is sold directly from farmers to consumers and usually delivered to their doorsteps. Another 17% is sold to mobile traders on bicycles, and 15% to small shops, kiosks or milk bars that are mostly unlicensed. In comparison, registered dairy co-operatives purchase just 24% of all dairy farmers' milk. Similarly, only 2% of the milk produced in Ethiopia reaches the market through the formal dairy chain. The debate therefore needs to shift to understanding how the majority of small-scale farmers are making markets work for them. We need to strengthen these "alternative" ways if we are to support the majority of small-scale farmers.

Without organisations? For me it makes little sense to keep stressing the importance of formal arrangements. I'm not saying that we should do away with them, but attention also needs to be given to the informal arrangements that exist alongside them. Only a small percentage of farmers belong to these organisations, despite their benefits. Most development policies and programmes focus on farmers as part of formal organisations, so these support mechanisms exclude the majority. The problem is that the majority of non-organised farmers are not willing, for one reason or the other, to go into these formal arrangements. They have examined for themselves the opportunities and constraints of joining a group and have also analysed their own situation at home. They choose to do their business in their own way, based on their own analysis of the situation and the resources that they have available. In general, the political will needs to be there to protect smallholders in markets and support what farmers are already doing.

Do you only focus on local markets? We work together with farmers in order to understand the different market dynamics at a local, national and an East African level, and then the farmers use their own analysis to make their own choices. Their interest in working at these different levels depends on their capacities and the degree to which they are organised. Usually, it is only after they understand the dynamics of the local and national markets that they get interested and willing to move towards international value chains. It is also clear that many farmers choose to stay at a local level.

Why do farmers prefer to sell at local markets? In certain periods local markets give farmers better options. One of the benefits is that they can get quick cash. Many financial responsibilities, such as household needs or paying school fees, cannot wait. For smallholder farmers to sell large quantities, they often have to bulk their produce with other farmers, sometimes for a minimum period of one month, which delays payment. A coffee farmer revealed to us that, in the three years that he has been a member of his village producers group, he has never sold through this group. He needs to pay his children's school fees, and the group has to wait to sell, especially if it aims at international markets. So he sells to traders who will give him cash. Also, the type of product farmers grow determines the market they focus on. For instance, bananas are very perishable and require a quick sale the moment they are ripe, or you lose your product. With no refrigeration or little infrastructure, perishable products cannot be preserved for long. We need to see how much would farmers gain, but also how much they can lose when bringing their banana from their garden to the market, also including the costs of transport. We advise the farmers on these costs and benefits, enabling them to make the best decision for them.

Does it help to focus on regional markets? In East Africa in general, as in many other places, there is a growing demand for food products. Neighbouring countries buy a lot of foodstuffs from Uganda. When farmers sell to traders from Kenya or from South Sudan they receive a higher price, especially when compared to what the Ugandan middlemen pay. And in addition to higher prices, these markets give farmers a guarantee. But the biggest problem is the capacity and limited resources of smallholders to access these international markets, even at a regional level. International value chains are long and complex, so we try to reduce the number of middle traders and let farmers sell directly. Our objective is that they are able to join the international markets directly.



Working together with farmers in order to understand the different market dynamics and then making a better decision. Photos: KRC

Can a certification process contribute? A certification process can certainly play a role. But the most important thing is that certification standards need to be contextualised. I think that the standards set for the European market cannot be the same standards that the East African farmers should follow. There are already East African organic standards, which makes the certification process a bit easier for smallholders. Nonetheless, only a very small percentage of farmers in my country can be certified. These farmers know that they can add value to their product, but they are limited by their immediate financial constraints. I think that the agricultural financing mechanisms need to be strengthened first. A certification process can then help and encourage farmers to produce in a certain way, for example, organically. But then again, we have to consider that the majority of Ugandan smallholders are already producing naturally, even though they are not certified. They are not adding anything artificial to their soils or crops. Their use of mulching comes from their desire to maintain the soil, not because there is a need to produce for a certified market.

Are farmers encouraged in other ways? Looking at the market before one looks at the production process is a very important contribution of the value chain approach, but this perspective should not be limited to the international arena. For instance, the majority of smallholder farmers in my country produce without really knowing what the market wants. They just push their produce into the local market when it is ready. When we understand what the market wants, we can help develop farmers' capacities to meet these specific demands. When they produce for a particular market,

they must meet particular quality standards. With the right information, they decide on their own if they want to produce for this market.

If the local context is so important, why join an international knowledge network? Being part of it has widened my knowledge on how small producers try to deal with markets in different contexts. I have seen how Bolivian farmers use their kinship ties for marketing meat and other products, realising that this is happening in my own country as well with different products. I was impressed by the strength of small producers' organisations in Latin America, seeing that they have been able to change national policies. These are all important lessons which have helped me understand our situation better.

Before, I was fixated on uniting small producers in organisations, considering this as the only way for farmers to access better markets. But the cases we studied with all other members of the Knowledge Network helped me get a clearer picture. As I said, I realised that we were leaving out a large majority of farmers because they do not belong to an organisation. This is something that we are internally reflecting on in my organisation. While the value chain approach has its advantages, it is important to be critical, and look at the constraints that are there, and the opportunities. One of our main conclusions is that, by stimulating and strengthening farmers' "economic agency", they are empowered to make an even better decision.

For more information, visit the KRC website (www.krcuganda.org) or write to **Medius Bihunirwa** directly. E-mail: bmedius@krcug.org ; bmedius20@gmail.com

Old traditions, new practices

Only 60 years ago, the agricultural landscape in the Netherlands was quite similar to what exists today in many countries: large numbers of small family farms that combine various crops with different species of livestock for milk, meat, manure, traction or transport, and also serving as cultural manifestations. Marketing was done directly at the farm gate or through small shops. But today, over 90% of the Dutch citizens go to the supermarket for their basic needs in terms of food. What happened in the meantime?

Since the 1960s Dutch agriculture has gone through a complete metamorphosis. After suffering a severe lack of food during the Second World War (1940-1945), agricultural policies in Europe were designed to prevent any possibility of a similar situation happening in the future. Major government support was used to protect internal markets, providing easy access to credit and subsidies for the use of chemical inputs. The aim was to maximise food production: obtaining the highest possible yields per hectare or litres of milk per cow per year. The implementation of these policies led to a period of phenomenal growth:

in nearly 50 years, the milk production of an average dairy farm increased 14-fold: from 37,000 litres per year in 1960 to more than 500,000 litres in 2007.

In the process, farms have become bigger, specialised in either crops or livestock, with high levels of mechanisation, and the country is famous for its yields, exports and “efficiency”. Together with this, the social effects have been equally phenomenal: employment in the agricultural sector has seen an 18-fold reduction: only one person was needed in 2007 to produce the same amount of milk that had required 18 people in 1960. Moreover, over 90% of the farms have had to close down – a process that is still going on today. This process not only influenced farming and rural development, but also implied a change from local marketing to the dominance of the few major retailers and supermarkets that we have today.

Scandals and blurred chains But another tendency is gradually gaining ground. Since the turn of the century, a growing number of Dutch citizens – the vast majority of them living in urban areas – wants closer links with those who produce their food. Parents want to show their children that milk comes from a cow and not from a supermarket

The August 2012 issue of *De Boerderij*, a popular magazine for Dutch farmers, showed how “innovative farmers are increasingly successful in finding their consumers”. More than 3,300 farmers (out of a country-wide total of 67,000) are selling their produce directly to consumers – bypassing supermarkets in the process. And this number is growing fast. The age-old practice of direct marketing is coming back to the Netherlands, and consumers are playing an important role.

Katrien van't Hooft



New ways to engage with consumers. Photos: JawsMedia Productions/Michiel Wijnbergh/Waddengoud/Koos & Monique van der Laan

container. Buying “anonymous food” in the supermarkets is no longer the only option and direct linkages between farmers and consumers are growing, in both numbers and in forms. Today, an urban citizen can, for example, choose to “adopt a cow”, enjoy a camping site on a farm, or engage in one of the numerous other activities that provide an extra income for farmers.

During the past few years, different factors have fed consumer interest in knowing about the source or the origins of their food. These include a growing movement against so-called “mega-stables” – the large-scale industrial animal production units that increasingly dominate the Dutch countryside. This has received extensive media coverage, focusing especially on the animals’ wellbeing and also on environmental issues. More recently, the growing threat of multi-resistant microbes, for example in poultry meat, has been documented by the media. People are becoming more aware that food safety cannot be taken for granted.

A more recent scandal was the presence of horse-meat in ready-made meals labelled as “beef”. Suddenly people realised that dozens of manufacturing companies, all over Europe, are involved in producing their food, with ingredients travelling thousands of

kilometres and going through different hands and multiple transformations. Not surprisingly, growing vegetables in one’s own garden is increasingly popular; forging direct linkages with farmers is another expression of that concern. Words like “local” and “sustainable” trigger consumers to buy their products directly from farmers, instead of through supermarkets. “Local for local” is a new trend – still small, but gaining ground. This is all about consuming products from your own region.

A recent report estimated that today 40% of the Dutch farmers have diversified their income with secondary activities. But farmers are also trying out different initiatives to market their products, and are being followed by a growing number of consumers.

Farmers’ initiatives Some farmers have been quick to pick up the opportunity and are developing innovative ways to engage directly with consumers. Often special quality products – such as organic products or “forgotten vegetable varieties” are offered, and in this way farmers attract special client groups. Other marketing initiatives include:

- *Farmers’ shops at the farm.* Around 5% of all farmers have a small shop on their farm, where they sell

their produce as well as other locally produced items that are often not available in supermarkets. This number is growing and since 2006 such farms work together under the name *landwinkels* (or “country shops”). Social media play an important role in this new development: it is estimated that farmers with a website sell twice as much in their shop as those without;

- *Direct delivery systems run by farmer co-operatives*, such as the farmer’s co-operative in Altena Biesbosch, where farmers are selling their potatoes, cheese, vegetables and fruits directly to consumer groups or restaurants. This co-operative has a membership of 100 farmers and 160 consumers – and this number is growing;
- *Direct delivery systems run by individual farmers*. This is becoming especially popular in the case of beef: individual farmers have developed a client group to which they deliver directly on a regular basis. Often local dual-purpose breeds – such as the *Brandrode Rund* – are used, and in this way animal diversity is promoted. Some of the marketing examples include *Natuurboer uit de Buurt* (or “Nature Farmer in your Neighborhood”) and *Hemels Vlees* (or “Meat from Heaven”).

Generally speaking, farmers get a better price for the products sold directly to consumers – sometimes up to 200%. But this is not the only advantage. Farmer Berrie Klein Swormink, who delivers beef directly to his clients, emphasises how “*I get more feedback and acknowledgement for what I produce. It requires more effort and that does not always pay out, but you are directly engaged with your clients. It is important for me, not only for the money, but also for the appreciation.*”

Consumer power At the same time, throughout the country, consumers and their organisations are taking the initiative. More and more consumers are not going to the supermarkets but elsewhere to get their food, and are putting their ideas for a better world into practice. As a result, a wide array of initiatives has developed over recent years, involving various kinds of groups, at a local and at a national level.

- *The Week of the Taste* is a yearly event that takes place throughout the country, where producers and consumers meet around “good food” and new products are presented. As part of this series of events, “the heroes of the taste” are selected through a contest: to find out for instance who produces the best local cheese or beer;
- *Versvokos* are consumer co-operatives run on a non-for-profit basis that buy their vegetables and fruits directly from a nearby farmer. Consumer

groups place orders and the fresh food is then distributed directly to them;

- *Webshops*: many different websites present an overview of all farmers’ shops in the Netherlands. Some of these, such as www.thegreenbee.nl, are visited by thousands of people every day. Consumers can place orders and the food-packages are delivered to their homes. This service also includes updates via Twitter about new products.

Consumers are supporting farmers by buying their products. Yet they also play a larger role. In many cases they provide money in advance, helping farmers cover part of their production costs. In some cases they also invest in new technologies, for example there is one programme that helps farmers install solar panels. Just as importantly, consumers provide valuable information. Participants in the “adopt a cow” scheme are invited to the farm twice a year, and also to become “friends” through social media. In this way farmers are informed about citizen’s ideas and priorities and sometimes adapt their management practices. Koos and Monique van der Laan of the Beekhoeve organic farm, for example, started keeping calves with the cow, because they found out that that was actually one of the issues that their “friends” were concerned about.

The most important power which consumers have, however, is their capacity to influence policies – those at a national level, and even those which shape the actions of supermarkets. This was clear in September 2012, when Holland’s largest supermarket chain, Albert Heijn, unilaterally decided to pay farmers 2% less for their produce, in spite of earlier agreements. The Youth Food Movement – the Dutch branch of the youth section of the Slow Food network – made thousands of “2% discount” stickers and distributed them in front of the shops so that people would stick them on fresh products and then try to pay 2% less. This created a lot of media attention.

The number of marketing initiatives mentioned above is growing by the day. Many of them include traditional ways that seemed forgotten but are proving their value once more. They install a feeling of pride and innovation rather than dependency, both amongst farmers and citizens. Consumer preferences and the changes in marketing patterns linked to these preferences are proving to be a viable path towards a truly sustainable agricultural system.

Katrien van’t Hooft (katrienvantheoof@gmail.com) is a veterinarian working with Dutch Farm Experience, a company specialised in linking sustainable farming initiatives between the Netherlands and developing countries. For more information, please visit the website www.dutchfarmexperience.com

Most family farmers produce both for their own consumption and for local and regional markets. However, in today's globalised world it is often hard for small-scale producers to access such markets on equitable terms. Many development organisations are involved in looking for ways to increase agricultural production and improve the food security of small-scale farmers. But, to what extent do these agencies and political leaders take into account the need to create conditions under which small-scale producers receive a fair share of the benefits of this increase? How can they help strengthen the capacity of small-scale producers to access local markets and to sell their products and make a profit? It is becoming increasingly important to explore the opportunities for farmers to increase their productivity and generate an income while also still feeding their families.

The eastern region of my country, Burkina Faso, suffers from recurrent food insecurity, and poverty levels are among the highest in the country. Yet, this region has a significant economic potential. Population growth and the expansion of the urban areas mean an increase in demand for food. Furthermore, people in urban areas are adopting eating habits that provide exciting new market opportunities for producers and processors.

Farmers are starting to develop networking strategies to create better market conditions for their products, and sell them at profitable prices. One example is the women farmers' group in the town of Gayéri. Realising that to improve their livelihoods they needed to win a share of the newly emerging but highly competitive markets, they established a communication network to share information about the availability and prices of products in different parts of the country. Through cell phones, they communicate with women's groups in other parts of the country. This initiative has reduced the influence of middlemen, who often have more resources and negotiation capacity than the producers. The women report that this innovative networking system allows them to sell their products at reasonable prices, which was not previously the case.

The agility and strategic insight of these women are striking. But at the same time, organisations and networks of small-scale farmers still face significant challenges. It is important that development agencies engage in advocacy to ensure that the concerns of such farmers are taken into account in national policies. Local, national and regional markets need to be properly regulated, and the related value chains must be well managed if producers are to receive better prices for their products and ensure the well-being of their families. If we are seeking to encourage production and achieve food security, this is where the emphasis must lie.

Fatou Batta is the Groundswell International Co-coordinator for West Africa and also a member of the "We are the Solution! Celebrating African Family Farming" campaign of the Alliance for Food Sovereignty in Africa (AFSA). E-mail: fbatta@groundswellinternational.org



Getting a fair share

Markets: Learning by doing

Agrobiodiversity@knowledged aims at generating and sharing evidence and insights. At the heart of the programme is a global knowledge and experience community of organisations working on agricultural biodiversity with millions of farmers worldwide. Markets are a key entry point to scaling up practices that build on agricultural biodiversity. PELUM's work demonstrates how testing and the analysis of different marketing models has led to the development of a new marketing approach.

Maryleen Micheni

Most economic activities in the rural areas are related to the region's biodiversity and to the services this biodiversity provides. Although many of these activities contribute to the loss of this biodiversity, a number of them have a positive effect, while at the same time providing for higher incomes or economic profit. The generation of incomes or profits, at the same time, can have a large influence in the development of new initiatives that contribute to the conservation of a region's biodiversity.

The PESA model PELUM, or Participatory Ecological Land Use Management, is a network of more than 230 civil society organisations, representing ten countries in East, Central and Southern Africa. Since it was founded in 1995, it has worked with small-scale farmers in the promotion of ecological land use practices as a way of empowering communities and simultaneously reducing the loss of the region's biodiversity. Working together with the East and Southern African Farmers Forum (ESAFF), we developed the PESA Agro Enterprise Marketing Model (while the word "pesa" means money in Kiswahili, the title takes the "P" from PELUM and "ESA" from

ESAFF). Various marketing models were selected and looked at in detail in a consultative process involving the ESAFF farmers and the PELUM extension staff, comparing them with the "theory" as presented in, for example, the FAO Farmer Business Schools model.

Participants in four different countries (Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Rwanda) carried out a study of these different marketing models, paying attention to the role played by different stakeholders and carefully taking into account how each case succeeded in helping farmers market their products. Results were shared in a meeting in 2012 in Kigali, from where a task force took the assignment of developing a proposal. The group came up with the "PESA marketing model".

The model embraces a 6-stage process that encourages farmers to interact with the market through a "learning by doing" approach, engaging with the different stakeholders and developing skills in a step-by-step way. In short, these steps include (a) the formation or strengthening of a group, (b) the introduction of marketing and business concepts, (c) the identification and prioritisation of market opportunities, (d) the identification of potential investors, (e) the development of a business plan, and (f) the provision of (and access to) specific services.

Following the same "learning by doing" approach, we



A business plan to improve incomes and conserve biodiversity in East Africa. Photo: PELUM

started a pilot project to try this model in the field – and learn from its implementation. This was planned for two years, after which all the PELUM member organisations will introduce it in order to facilitate the commercialization processes of their members. The lessons will be applied depending on the product and context of marketing.

Trying it out Located in the district of Baringo, in the Rift Valley province in western Kenya, the Kapkuikui Livestock Self Help Group (KLSHG) focuses on bee keeping and the production of honey in an ecological friendly way, maintaining a rich crop and tree diversity as a source of food for the bees (see box). Every year, the group produces an average of 2.5 tons of honey; half during the main harvest season (November to January) and half during the minor season (June and July).

Trying out our PESA model, we started by identifying the market opportunities for this honey in the area. A smaller team of six members conducted a market chain assessment, trying to assess and understand the purchasing practices, the terms and conditions followed, and the main demands or interests of consumers. A “business market facilitator” from the Baraka Agricultural College helped making the initial contacts. After visiting and interacting with 4 supermarkets, 4 pharmacy shops and 3 hotels, the group secured many new orders to supply buyers with honey. Even more important, the process helped the group learn about the need of a stronger “business relationship” between producers and consumers, and the minimum conditions and requirements. Group members discovered the advantages of preparing a detailed business plan which includes adding value to their products, and thus expanding their market options. Furthermore, they saw the need to invest money in machinery or equipment, and the importance of their organisation to implement their plans.

Looking into the future The PESA model has been tried for 12 months, and will continue for another 12 months. Although the pilot project is not yet finished, the initial results are very promising. The knowledge and skills acquired by the KLSHG members through the 6-stage approach have empowered the group. During this period, KLSHG has shown that higher incomes and the conservation of an area’s biodiversity can be mutually supporting efforts. If these initial results prove to be indicative of the success of the approach, all 230 PELUM members will introduce and implement the model in their own specific context. In the meantime, the participatory process of learning by doing is already helping other organisations. The PELUM experience demonstrates that the participatory process of analysis, development and implementation of an innovative marketing approach is a powerful tool for positive change.

Maryleen Micheni works as Senior Programme Officer at PELUM, Kenya. The “markets and trade” thematic group of the Agrobiodiversity@knowledged programme would like to invite readers to send case studies describing other marketing process. Focusing on agrobiodiversity products, these case studies should consider the financial returns, the commercial viability of the enterprise, or the emergence of public- private partnerships. These case studies need not only be success stories. Please send them to Maryleen Micheni (maryleen@pelum.net) and Willy Douma (wdouma@hivos.nl).

Beekeeping is as a good example of an economic activity that, while resulting in high-profits, also contributes positively in terms of a region’s biodiversity. Farmers in Kenya, for example, prefer to let the bees feed from natural sources and not from sugar syrup. Farmers also prefer their bees not to travel long distances to look for food, since they easily get tired or lost after travelling far. So they have deliberately planted a diverse selection of trees, shrubs and flowers in the areas where the bee hives are kept. Some prominent varieties of bee forage trees, shrubs fruits and flowers that have been propagated include *Croton* spp., *Acacia* spp., *mathenge*, neem, sisal, *Aloe vera*, citrus trees, mangoes and bananas, and also crops such as millets or sorghum. Most of the shrubs or trees would have otherwise been cut down to make charcoal – especially the *Acacia* trees which can be sold for a good price. The community is also keen on adding more tree and shrub species that are found to be of medicinal or therapeutic value in their natural state so that they serve a double role – for the bees and the community members.

Creating better opportunities:

PGS and Ana

Besides providing for many of our needs, forests play a pivotal role in providing ecosystem services, ranging from biodiversity conservation to climate regulation. Yet over the last decade the world has lost an average of more than 5 million hectares of forests every year. Different examples show that marketing forest products can have a very positive impact, leading to higher incomes and also to healthier ecosystems.

Eduardo Aguilar and Cavan Gates

Analog Forestry (AF) is a silviculture method that mimics the natural structure and function of a particular seral stage of an ecosystem. Its main objective is to restore the natural ecosystems, and to implement modified ecosystems with the same ecological functions as the natural ones. By re-creating a forest system's composition, structure and function, AF systems can help to increase food security and resilience to climate change – while also creating income-generating opportunities.

Products such as plant fibres, medicinal herbs,

spices, wild fruits, honey and many others, are known as Non-Timber Forest Products, or NTFPs. Analog Forestry methods aim at obtaining these products through a design system (see box) that helps farmers to manage the land where they work, using the available resources while preventing degradation. Most NTFPs are harvested in a traditional way, so it is generally thought that only small quantities are involved. Yet the income-generating potential of NTFPs should not be underestimated: in India, for example, the majority of forest revenues come from NTFPs. It is estimated that 60% of honey in the Indian market is harvested from the wild. There is also a widespread misperception that the price for such products should be low – despite the traditional knowledge involved and the risks communities undergo in order to harvest the produce – because they were not planted and taken care of in a conventional production system. There is an even larger challenge from logging, mining or other extractive industries which decrease the areas available for wild harvesting and make sustainable management and natural regeneration more difficult. However, different examples show that the commercialisation of these products can not only help improve the incomes and opportunities of the rural population, but can also help preserve forest resources.

Certification for marketing Third party certification, using the Forest Garden Products (FGP) label, is an emerging possibility for NTFPs in different parts of the world. An FGP label reflects a set of production standards which are currently under revision in the International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements (IFOAM) family of standards. FGP certification is carried out by inspectors authorised by the International Analog Forestry Network (IAFN). This type of certification is primarily designed for high value export products, because of the costs of involving a third party. Experience shows that a Participatory Guarantee System (PGS) is more suited for products that are sold in local markets. This is a less expensive

log Forestry



Plucking tea leaves in Sri Lanka: different PGS are being developed for small-scale producers.

Photo: Eduardo Aguilar

method and the process also helps strengthen communities.

In general, a PGS is based on a peer review system, whereby farmers, consumers and other stakeholders verify compliance with a set of standards defining the production methods and product quality. These standards are decided upon internally by the group, and can contain any pertinent criteria ranging from organic methods to sustainable wild harvesting. The method of inspection is agreed collectively, and is usually done by a selected group that takes turns to make the visits and exchange and share information about products and the produc-

tion process. Often this task is done on a voluntary basis.

The benefits of a PGS include creating a brand name and community building. The brand name is based on the standards employed by the group (which often focus on organic agriculture). Products with a known or recognised brand can be sold at a premium as they can show that, having followed a given process, they are of a better quality than conventional products. When interested producers join a PGS, they are also joining a community that can support them and share information. Thus, a PGS can raise production standards not only through compliance to criteria, but also through peer education.

Products such as spices, tea and *guarana* are being certified as Forest Garden Products and as a result are reaching some European markets. At the same time, different PGS are being developed for small-scale producers in local markets where exports are not a priority. These local markets are helping farmers and producers, as well as supporting the development of Analog Forestry. In Sri Lanka, Rainforest Rescue International (RRI) has helped farmers' co-operatives with the production and commercialisation of their tea and spices. These co-operatives market their certified products using Analog Forestry as their production method. This enables them to address the challenges of environmental conservation and restoration of the forested area around their communities whilst also meeting their financial needs. RRI trains these communities in environmentally-friendly low-input production systems, encouraging farmers and communities to engage in forest restoration and seed saving programmes in the country's arid northern region.

Similar results have emerged from the work of the Centre for Nursery Development and Eru Propagation (CENDEP) in Cameroon. As partners of IAFN, they promote Analog Forestry in all their projects and are currently supporting the commercialisation of *eru* (*Gnetum* spp.) and other products such as honey through a participatory certification process.

Adding value Value can be added by using a label or brand associated with a set of production standards, such as third-party or participatory guarantee systems, but it also involves processing or transformation. This can vary from packaging wholesale quantities of honey into retail-sized jars with information labels, to drying leaves and other plant parts to create special blends (i.e. curries or teas). The benefits for consumers are obvious: better access to products and, just as importantly, higher quality products.

Farmers see also many advantages. Processed *eru* attracts a price that is five times higher than the unprocessed product. CENDEP is showing how the involvement of farming groups in a PGS can lead to considerably higher income levels. A PGS can cover several different food (and non-food) crops, such as cereals, beans and vegetables, as long as the best practices associated with the PGS are ascertained and communicated to consumers. Further market studies still need to be undertaken in order to determine the revenue streams associated with the PGS process; however, CENDEP's experience with two NTFPs (*eru* and honey) show the potential of a steady increase in incomes. At the moment, the group of participants has grown to more than 300 families, representing 6 communities.

The benefits can be even broader, as the “added value” is also seen in the forest ecosystems. This is very clear in Cameroon, with the (re-)introduction of native species such as *eru*, or trees like *Anarcadium occidentale*, red mahogany or *Ilex metis*.

Analog Forestry differs from other silviculture practices in that, in the long term, it seeks to reach the same level of maturity as an original forest. In the short and mid term, the objectives will vary according to the producers' needs. These are based on an assessment of the ecosystem structure, comparing a given area with a healthy ecosystem. A roadmap towards the regeneration of the soil and the forest is then established to help practitioners restore the landscape and biodiversity while producing consumable and/or marketable products. The benefits of AF systems include enhancing the carbon cycle, providing pollinators with new niches and contributing to the formation of condensation cloud nuclei, which help with water conservation and stabilise precipitation patterns. The IAFN is still at the beginning of what may be a long, but worthwhile, process of engaging communities in new ways of connecting with their ecosystems.



Restoring the landscapes while providing a wider array of products to be consumed locally. Photos: IAFN

Local forests, local markets The inherent species richness in AF systems promotes diversified income streams by providing multiple products that offer a variety of processing and marketing opportunities. For example, systems that produce spices, such as vanilla, nutmeg, cinnamon and black pepper, also produce cut flowers, animal fodder, rice, beans, bamboo, and plants for essential oils such as patchouli and orange leaves. While much effort is required to get these and other NTFPs into high-end markets in northern countries, it should be remembered that most of these products are consumed in their countries and regions of origin. This suggests that more attention needs to be paid to developing new market opportunities at the local level. So instead of focusing on one or a few products, we feel that it is better to promote the sustainable management of the forests, increase biodiversity, restore landscapes and provide a wider array of products to be consumed locally. Analog Forestry can be used as a tool to produce commercial products while preserving the structure and function of ecosystems, and a PGS process can help develop local markets for these products.

Eduardo Aguilar (eduardo@analogforestrynetwork.org) and Cavan Gates work at the Secretariat of the International Analog Forestry Network (IAFN). For more information, visit their websites: www.foresteriaanaloga.org ; www.analogforestrynetwork.org

It's up to us

With a population of more than 28 million, Nepal is the poorest country in Asia. But it is enormously rich in terms of biodiversity and natural resources, and agriculture plays a very important role in the country's economy. It is also very rich in another way: young people make up 40 percent of the population. The problem is that young people don't seem to be interested in agriculture.

For years I have heard about young people wanting to move to the cities to work in a "more sophisticated" sector than agriculture. People of my generation are not interested in farming or in anything related to agriculture, perceiving it as an "outdated" occupation. Yet this raises important questions: who will feed future generations, and who will help manage our natural resources? And why do young people seem to prefer anything to agriculture?

More than a year ago I had the opportunity to meet representatives of the Young Professionals Platform for Agricultural Research for Development, YPARD, during the Second Global Conference on Agricultural Research for Development. Hearing about their aims and objectives, I immediately decided to join them as I appreciated their efforts to link young agricultural professionals together, provide information, show the many opportunities existing in agricultural development, share the success stories of young role models and encourage young people to become more involved in agriculture. One of the things I liked most is that YPARD takes advantage of an ICT-savvy generation to share and exchange ideas



Dinesh Panday obtained his BSc in Agriculture from Tribhuvan University in 2011, and then worked as research assistant at the Soil Science Division of the Nepalese Agricultural Research Council. He is now Nepal's representative on YPARD. E-mail: ypardnepal@gmail.com ; dinesh@agriculturenepal.com

and information. ICTs have a great role to play in agricultural development and food security, and youth have a great role to play in ICTs.

So we designed the "YPARD Awareness Campaign", visiting the country's three agricultural universities and encouraging students there to join us. Our goal is more than just sharing information about web applications and the use of social media; we want to connect students and to create a network of like-minded young people. We are convinced of the importance of joining hands for advocacy campaigns, or of providing ideas and inspiration. Farming is not always an easy or a glamorous option, but it can certainly be profitable and rewarding.

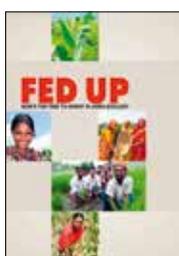
I think that one of the things missing in agriculture today is imagination. Today's generation of farmers, teachers, agricultural scientists, policy makers and even media specialists, have collectively failed to trigger my generation's imagination. If they have all failed, isn't it up to us, the younger generation, to try to do something about it? I have no doubt that the imagination of young people, both inside and outside Nepal, and inviting them to join forces, is the way forward.



Community biodiversity management: Promoting resilience and the conservation of plant genetic resources

W.S. de Boef, A. Subedi, N. Peroni, M. Thijssen and E. O'Keeffe (eds.), 2013. Routledge, Oxon. 418 pages.

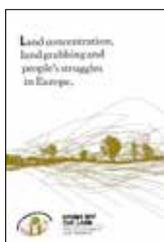
How to conserve agro-biodiversity in practice? Simply promoting different varieties has not worked. This book presents experiences from different organisations that support farmers through community biodiversity management (CBM). This methodology is based on the premise that farmers have their own ideas and priorities when it comes to agricultural development and the use of plant varieties. Conservation measures and plant varieties are put in the context of livelihood development rather than making them the primary goal. The book starts with the history of CBM and goes on to describe experiences of CBM practices including diversity fairs and community seed banks. The final part summarises the lessons learnt from these experiences and discusses their implications for community resilience.



Fed up: Now's the time to invest in agroecology

A. Wijeratna, 2012. Action Aid, Johannesburg. 39 pages.

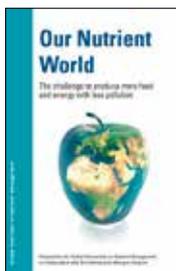
Agricultural and food systems are failing and agro-ecology can play an important role in fixing them. That is the message of this publication in a nutshell. Drawing on a number of studies the author shows how climate change, biodiversity loss, natural resource degradation, urbanisation, hunger, obesity and excessive food waste are threatening the health of existing social and ecological systems. A strong, empirically grounded case, drawing on examples from Pakistan, Bangladesh, Indonesia and Cambodia, is made for agro-ecology as the way forward. The report shows how agro-ecology can increase yields, improve food and nutrition security, reduce rural poverty, build community and climate resilience and empower small scale producers.



Land concentration, land grabbing and people's struggles in Europe

J. Franco and S.M. Borras (eds.), 2013. Transnational Institute, Amsterdam. 190 pages.

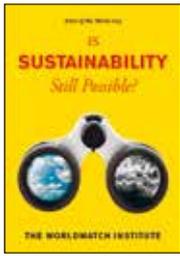
When it comes to land grabbing most people think of the global South. This publication challenges this view. In the EU, 3% of the largest farms control 50% of all farm land. Moreover, land concentration is accelerating and subsidies paid under Europe's Common Agricultural Policy stimulate this. In Spain, for example, 16% of the largest farmers receive 75% of all subsidies. In addition to land concentration, this report also examines cases of land grabbing in Europe: by Chinese companies in Bulgaria, Middle Eastern companies in Romania, and European companies elsewhere in the EU. The articles also show how new movements are emerging that are both resisting these land grabs and concentration, or arguing for alternatives.



Our nutrient world: The challenge to produce more food and energy with less pollution

The Global Partnership on Nutrient Management and the International Nitrogen Initiative, 2013. Centre for Ecology and Hydrology, Edinburgh. 115 pages.

Ever wondered what the world food problem looks like from the perspective of nutrients? If so, this publication offers some interesting insights. A major problem is the loss of nutrients; 80% of nitrogen and between 25 and 75% of the phosphorus consumed is lost to the environment. The results include a deterioration of water quality, air pollution, greenhouse gas emissions, the loss of ecosystems and biodiversity and the acidification of soils. Another problem is a shortage of nutrients which can lead to land degradation. The authors propose several solutions, including improving nutrient efficiency in crop and animal production, reducing food waste, recycling nutrients from waste water systems and lowering the personal meat consumption.



State of the World 2013: Is sustainability still possible?

The World Watch Institute, 2013. Island Press, Washington. 464 pages.

"We live today in an age of *sustainababble*, a cacophonous profusion of uses of the word sustainable to mean anything from environmentally better to cool". Sustainability, continues Robert Engelman, author of the introductory chapter and president of the World Watch Institute, has become a marketing catchphrase for practices or products that are at best slightly less damaging than the conventional alternatives. In this latest edition of the State of the World series, scientists and policy experts attempt to restore the meaning of sustainability. What definition do we need to work from? What needs to be done to move towards true sustainability? And how to prepare for the possibility of a global environmental catastrophe?



The Committee on World Food Security (CFS): A new space for the food policies of the world, opportunities and limitations

La Via Campesina, 2012. La Via Campesina, Jakarta. 15 pages.

The 2009 reform of the United Nations Committee on World Food Security (CFS) opened a space for civil society organisations in the global policy arena. This 4th edition of La Via Campesina's Notebook reflects on some of the sessions that have taken place since the reform and analyses the impact La Via Campesina and other civil society organisations have had within the CFS. The central questions are whether and to what extent the CFS provides a vehicle for promoting the concerns of grassroots and social movements. The report ends by discussing one of the dilemmas faced by La Via Campesina: does investing so much energy on institutional work have a detrimental effect on mobilisation and the struggles on the ground?

More on markets

Most resources on smallholders and markets deal with commodity markets. Both "Small producer agency in the globalised market: Making choices in a changing world" (B. Vorley *et al.*, 2012) and "Value chains, social inclusion and economic development: Contrasting theories and realities" (A.H.J. Helmsing and S. Vellema, eds., 2011) explore the relationship between value chains and small scale farmers. "Organic supply chains for small farmer income generation in developing countries: Case studies in India, Thailand, Brazil, Hungary and Africa" (W. Edwardson and P. Santacoloma, 2013) looks at the opportunities for smallholder farmers in the growing market for organic certified products. "Learning and

earning: How a value chain learning alliance strengthens farmer entrepreneurship in Ethiopia" (J. Belt and W. Goris, 2011) describes an approach through which smallholder farmers gained the necessary skills to produce for the commercial market. Interestingly, there is also a growing body of literature on alternative food markets. In "Rural development through the construction of new, nested, markets: Comparative perspectives from China, Brazil and the European Union" (J.D. van der Ploeg *et al.*, 2012) and in "On governance, embedding and marketing: Reflections on the construction of alternative sustainable food networks" (D. Roep and J.S.C. Wiskerke), the emergence and dynamics of these



markets are explored. A special, policy driven market is described in "The Food Acquisition Program in Brazil: Contributions to biodiversity, food security and nutrition" (C. Grisa and C. Schmitt, 2013). (LvdB)



Markets

From research to outcomes

The CGIAR Challenge Program on Water and Food was launched as an initiative to improve livelihoods and food security through better water management for food production (crops, fisheries and livestock). From an initial focus on productivity, the emphasis changed towards the adoption of innovations that improve livelihoods and address specific challenges in different river basins. After more than ten years of work, there are a lot of lessons to share. Our work in Zimbabwe and Cambodia, for example, has shown how markets can contribute to the dissemination and adoption of these innovations.

Michael Victor and Swathi Sridharan

Ten years ago, the International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT) started a series of “Innovation Platforms” in different parts of Zimbabwe. Each platform consists of a group of farmers, traders, rural development agencies and extension officers, all of whom meet at regular intervals to discuss the main challenges facing them. These results are clearer in Gwanda, where different stakeholders have been working together for the last six years.

ICRISAT looked at the possible changes in terms of water productivity, income and food security, resulting from changes in the local farming systems, focusing simultaneously on fodder production and staple crops. “If farmers devote three hectares, half to maize and half to *mucuna* [velvet bean] in a rotation system, then on average they are able to meet 80% of the total biomass required to see their livestock through the dry season, even in a drought year”, says Patricia Masikati, a scientist at ICRISAT. “However, if they just grow maize on the same land, they can only get 20% of the biomass

they need.” The beauty of this type of solutions is that farmers do not have to compromise their food security. “It isn’t a solution that asks them to grow fodder at the expense of their own food. Farmers’ food requirements can also be met this way”.

Farmers’ interest grew as a result of the platforms’ activities. The platform in Gwanda has helped create a strong local market for goats, helping raise the value of one goat from US\$ 10 to 60. This has proved to be an enormous incentive for farmers to invest in their goats by growing their own stock feed, complementing it with (purchased) commercial feed, and also to improve their rangeland management techniques. “Farmers who used to sell one or two animals at their farm gate now plan ahead and sell their animals at the auctions, because they trust this system,” says Andre van Rooyen, a scientist at ICRISAT-Bulawayo. It is the creation of this regular marketing channel, with a reliable pricing structure, that has inspired the recent push in livestock-related technology adoption rates. “Farmers know what their animals are worth. And so they are now willing to invest in technologies or ap-



Innovations have a greater chance of succeeding if linked to an effective marketing strategy. Photos: CPWF / Swathi Sridharan / CPWF

proaches that help them produce more”, says Mr Van Rooyen.

Water management In Cambodia, one of the Challenge Program small grants supported iDE, an international non-profit development organisation, in its efforts to encourage a more efficient irrigation system. The original assumption was that poor water management was the major constraint in commercial farming in the project area, and drip irrigation was viewed as a solution. We soon saw that, although drip irrigation is a water-efficient and an effective labour-saving strategy, it is not cost-effective on its own, and farmers were not keen to try it. But when used in conjunction with changes in their farming patterns, or with techniques that help improve the fertility of the soils, their interest grew, and more of them were able (and willing) to cover the costs.

In order to further spread this approach, the project started working with farmers who were trained as “Farm Business Advisors”, helping them serve as mobile “retailers” of horticultural products and services, and also as providers of technical advice. This led to the development of strong links and relationships between farmers, input suppliers and marketplace retailers (and, through them, also with consumers). A stronger and regular demand helped more and more farmers see the benefits of the drip irrigation system and encouraged them to install them in their plots.

Many lessons A number of lessons can be derived from these cases. First, that committed local champions are a key to success. ICRISAT’s researchers have been working with local stakeholders for many years, allowing a relationship of trust to be built. In Cambodia, locally trusted farmers help spread ideas or innovations more effectively than extension agents or outsiders.

Second, researchers usually focus on improving one piece of the system (whether it is water or fodder yields). However, it is important to recognise that this may not necessarily be the best option. “We are generally concerned with the efficiency of one of these components. The problem is that improving water-use efficiency, for example, is not necessarily what motivates farmers” says Mr Van Rooyen. Together with actively engaging the beneficiaries of the research process in all activities, researchers have seen the need to find the right entry point. As seen in Zimbabwe or Cambodia, agricultural innovations have a greater chance of succeeding if linked to a marketing strategy. In both cases, the technologies (fodder crops and drip irrigation) have been around for a long time. However, it is only when producers are better linked to the markets, and when these pay well for a particular product, that farmers are encouraged to innovate, or to adopt a specific technology, on a regular, sustained basis.

Finally, both stories show the importance of exploring local markets first, before focusing on large-scale commercial chains. A stronger local market benefits everyone. It benefits farmers through improved incomes; traders and consumers get better quality products, and even local governments see higher incomes.

Swathi Sridharan is a science writer and communication specialist with ICRISAT based in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe.

Michael Victor (m.victor@cgiar.org) works as Communication Coordinator at the CGIAR Challenge Program on Water and Food. This programme was launched in 2002 with the aim of increasing the resilience of social and ecological systems through better water management for food production. The Challenge Program is a partner of the CGIAR Research Program on Water, Land and Ecosystems. To learn more about the stories presented in this article, contact Andre van Rooyen at ICRISAT Zimbabwe (a.vanrooyen@cgiar.org) or Michael Roberts at iDE Cambodia (mroberts@ide-cambodia.org).

Throughout the world, small-scale farmers face different challenges when building a market for their products. Different strategies, involving different stakeholders, are proving to be beneficial, contributing to the generation of more sustainable livelihoods.

Organic certification

The Zimbabwe Organic Producers and Promoters Association (ZOPPA) helps organic producers to market their products through a certification process. Adapting the international guidelines for organic production to local conditions, ZOPPA worked with other organisations to prepare the Zimbabwe Organic Standards, and now provides training to help farmers to comply with them. A certification process normally involves a third party and the high costs involved are a big barrier for small-scale farmers. As such, ZOPPA has designed a local compliance system modelled on a participatory guarantee system (PGS): stakeholders inspect each other and ZOPPA verifies the process before awarding the ZIM Organic label. ZOPPA is now also developing a label for natural products, which although not strictly organic, are produced without external inputs. This is intended to help more farmers to benefit from a

growing demand for natural products. It will stimulate more farmers to stop using pesticides, and will create a “near-organic” food supply that is affordable for all sectors of the population. ZOPPA is mostly focused on national and local markets: they raise awareness among consumers about the advantages of the ZIM organic label and try to strengthen the linkages between small-scale producers and local institutions, such as hospitals, schools and hotels.



Photo: ZOPPA

For more information contact Fortunate Hofisi Nyakanda at ZOPPA. E-mail: fortunate@zoppa.org.zw

A local chain

Sahaja Samrudha started in 2001 as a group of farmers interested in exchanging seeds and ideas, and thus sharing knowledge on sustainable agriculture. Based in the state of Karnataka, the network has spread to the neighbouring states of Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Kerala, focusing on the conservation of the local biodiversity. Since 2010 it runs the Sahaja Samrudha Organic Producers Company Ltd., helping farmers exhibit and sell their products, and thus supporting their conservation efforts. Products are purchased in bulk, procured directly from more than 750 certified organic farmers, and also from more than 1,000 farmers in transition to an organic system. Working in partnership with other organisations and



Photo: Seema Prasad

farmer groups, with organic fairs and bazaars, these products go to a total of 26 “network outlets” in the major cities of southern India on a regular basis, reaching urban consumers directly. Sahaja Organics markets a wide range of traditional products, including thirty different varieties of rice, fifteen varieties of millets, as well as wheat, pulses, fruits and vegetables, herbal products and processed foods. As well as buying and selling organic products, the company is helping to develop a strong network of producers and consumers.

For more information contact Seema Prasad at Sahaja Samrudha or visit their website: www.sahajasamrudha.org. E-mail: sahajaindia@gmail.com ; seemaprasadg@gmail.com

Tanzania

Collective action

In 2009, the Aga Khan Foundation started a 5-year long project to enhance food security in the regions of Mtwara and Lindi, in southern Tanzania. Fully aware of the potential benefits of the System of Rice Intensification (SRI), it started working with the government's extension officers to form SRI producer groups. Four years later, more than 15,000 farmers have adopted SRI, including 3,700 farmers who, because of time constraints, never attended a training session. The results have been very encouraging. However, as average yields doubled or even tripled, storage became a new limitation. In 2012, the first 13 producer and marketing groups began to store rice, helping farmers to sell their produce when the prices are higher. Collective action also helps them to bulk their surpluses, reduce their post-harvest losses, and improve their marketing opportunities. This has also led to the formation of different savings groups, helping farmers connect to those who provide financial services and inputs. Working together with the Financial Sector

Deepening Trust, thousands of families are now meeting their household needs and investing in their production systems. By boosting productivity and supporting its commercialisation, rice has shifted from being a subsistence crop to becoming a cash crop.

For more information contact Mike Bowles or Sam Pickens at the Aga Khan Foundation. E-mail: sam.pickens@akdn.org



Photo: Sam Pickens

Sri Lanka

Information for stronger organisations

Dairy farming is an important livelihood option in Sri Lanka, contributing substantially to food security. Farmers, however, face many difficulties in marketing the milk they produce, relying on middlemen who pay low prices. The Ministry of Livestock Development has helped set up many different "Farmer Managed Societies" (FMS) to help farmers to deliver their milk directly to a subsidiary company under the purview of the Ministry, thereby ensuring higher profits. Farmers are encouraged to organise their own FMS to

help themselves in their marketing efforts, and to join the groups already established throughout the country, of which there are more than 2,000. The Lifelong Learning Farmers programme is playing a key role in eastern Sri Lanka, fostering strong linkages between "knowledge providers" and farming communities, helping the latter to develop technical and organisational skills. Under this programme, the Eastern University of Sri Lanka has been organising a series of workshops and providing technical assistance, focusing on issues that range from pasture conservation to improved milk quality, as the price of milk is based on its quality. This is not only leading to more FMSs being formed, but also to groups that are better able to benefit from the marketing options being developed.

For more information contact Thayamini H. Seran or Thivahary Geretharan at the Faculty of Agriculture, Eastern University of Sri Lanka. E-mail: thayasera@yahoo.com



Photo: S. Srikrishnamah

A new approach in fragile areas

The north of Uganda has seen havoc and terror for more than two decades. More than ninety per cent of the inhabitants of the Pader district have lived in camps for refugees for ten years or more. Only since 2005 have people dared to return to their land, where they are gradually rebuilding their lives. For most, the only means to survive outside the refugee camps was to start growing their own food again. This has not been easy. But agriculture is not only possible: farming is also becoming a profitable activity.

Theo Groot and Hans Joesse

In 2007, the MWH Foundation took the initiative to support the inhabitants of Pader in their efforts to rebuild their lives and to invest in the economic development of the region. Investing in the economic development of fragile areas is a risky decision: the war meant that there was no technical infrastructure in place, the social fabric was broken, and much knowledge had been lost. Considering the enormous difficulties, we decided to follow a “U-process”: a specific approach for complex situations in which long-term strategic development plans with clearly described outputs, outcomes and activities, will simply not work. Complex situations need decision makers and investors who are able to seize the ever-changing opportunities, to quickly prototype possible solutions and to constantly re-adjust their course of action, following a patient step-by-step approach.

Discussing the possible ways forward with all participants, we learned that the group of farmers we

had started working with was not as homogeneous as most other development actors tend to think, and realised that this could have serious consequences. At the same time, we saw that farm labour is a serious bottleneck. Labour is scarce; not everybody is interested in agriculture or willing to participate in it, so hired labour is expensive. Since labour is scarce, it takes farmers a long time to get their crops planted once the rains have started; as a consequence most farmers only grow one crop per year. It also became clear that farmers who are interested in producing more than their immediate household food security needs (estimated at 800 kg of starch crops and 400 kg of protein rich crops per year) require capital for seeds, equipment and hired labour, but neither the capital nor the inputs are readily available. Finally, and just as importantly, the market was unreliable and did not provide fair prices. Our point of departure was that the work of an “impact investor” such as MWH had to be different

than that of a charity: besides social returns, we also wanted farmers to see a financial return. This seemed to be a huge challenge.

During the first years we worked with approximately 3,000 farmers, following the Farmer Field School approach: forming groups in which farmers could learn from field observation and their own experimentation, improve their household food security and generate some income. This approach helped farmers to refresh their agricultural knowledge and skills and to learn about new crops. But it soon became obvious that we needed to develop our approach further, and we started working with those who saw themselves as commercial farmers – even if they were only farming a very small plot. We visited farmers’ initiatives in other parts of Uganda and identified and met the key agricultural actors in the region.

A path to follow Development actors rarely stratify the farmers they work with and therefore tend to miss out on what is called the “missing middle”. Many tend to consider that the rural areas are inhabited by a homogeneous group of farmers, and develop programmes and projects to help these “average” farmers enhance food production and reach the market with their (small) surpluses. The socio-economic reality, however, shows an enormous diversity, as soon became clear in Pader. A number of farmers have easier access to land and some of them have a keen interest in developing their farms. For many others, farming is a default activity: with no other jobs available and no state-

organised social security system in place, they have no other option. MWH came to the conclusion that working with the “missing middle” can make social and financial sense.

So in addition to working with the participants of the Farmer Field Schools, we opted for an economic development perspective working with those who have the ambition, attitude and possibilities to turn their agricultural activities into a family-owned commercial farm, be it a large, medium or small enterprise. Our vision was that, through developing a long-term, market-oriented, crop production plan, farmers would be able to generate a sustainable family income, and invest part of these profits in their enterprise for further growth. We also discovered that the development of family-owned commercial farms is still an untrodden path, especially in the very difficult context of areas like northern Uganda. However, our “U-process” is showing that some of our key decisions are having a positive effect.

(a) Long-term Most development programmes run for three and sometimes five years at most. These programmes intend to make a substantial difference in the lives of the rural poor during this short period of time, and also to develop conditions under which these initiatives can continue and prosper after the funding runs out. We soon saw that this is a rather naïve way of developing enterprises and promoting rural economic growth. We have committed ourselves for a minimum of ten years, inviting our business partners (farmers and their enterprises) to commit themselves to a long-term effort.

Developing a long-term, market-oriented, crop production plan. Photo: MWH Foundation





Towards a collaborative and sustainable production system. Photo: MWH Foundation

(b) Holistic Value chain development is another “hot item” in the development world. The development of these chains is based on the assumption that the different actors in the value chain exhibit clear business behaviour (they are reliable, competitive, client oriented, etc.), have a long-term perspective and operate in a conducive environment. None of this is the case in Pader: other actors are either absent or unreliable, the market is incomplete and not transparent, and there is a general lack of infrastructure. An additional handicap is the lack of inputs or services. Inspired by the history of agricultural co-operatives elsewhere we started a one-stop service centre (“the HUB”), inviting all farmers to become members, without necessarily focusing on one product or chain. To access these low-price and high-quality inputs and services, the member is asked to sell his or her harvest to the HUB, which buys it at fair market prices, stores it and then sells it when the prices are higher – redistributing the profits to all members.

(c) A social enterprise The liberalisation of the economy, a low level of government investment in agriculture, or the lack of national legislation (and compliance with it) can all increase the difficulties experienced in rural areas. Coupled with the severe damage to the social tissue resulting from the long years of war, it is no surprise that the group members regularly display opportunistic behaviour. The most common form is side selling, where farmers sell their products to another buyer or use the crop they are growing as a collateral for an additional loan. It is not uncommon for the quality of produce to be compromised, as officials sometimes take bribes to accept produce of a sub-stand-

ard quality. Free-riding, whereby farmers use subsidised inputs and services for crops they do not intend to sell to the HUB, is also common. A substantial part of our work is therefore directed towards building trust: intense personal contacts make it more difficult for opportunistic behaviour to go unnoticed. Membership of the group aims to combine economic and social motives and provide a sense of belonging and trust that the wider society still needs to regain.

There is little doubt that it will take a couple of years before any business in post-conflict Pader can become profitable. This applies to the family farm enterprises as well as to the HUB. For this reason we created a trust that holds all assets. The ultimate aim is for farmers to unite and collectively take ownership of the HUB. In the meantime, the HUB is run as a social enterprise which, in itself, is a new concept in Uganda. In short, it is a business unit that operates according to commercial principles, but where decisions are not only based on financial considerations. The long-term benefits in terms of a collaborative and sustainable production system and the short-term financial benefits are equally important.

Results In 2012, the first full year of the programme, 150 farmers, cultivating close to 1,000 acres in total, became members of the HUB. They got access to credit and marketed 89 tons of maize and 17 tons of soya through the HUB, most of which was sold in Pader and in the nearby districts. The HUB’s mechanisation services ploughed, harrowed and planted 334, 243 and 155 acres respectively. Farmers began to discover the value of high-quality seeds and of paying attention to the fertility of their soils: average maize yields went up from 400 to 800 kg/acre. A number of farmers have understood what commercial farming really means and – more interestingly – are already investing their profits in order to improve their production system and reach more consumers with their products.

A limited focus on relief and rehabilitation, or the relatively short presence of development programmes and projects in areas like Pader, has had a limited impact on local and regional economic development. MWH combines high risk investment, long-term commitment, social enterprise and a focus on the “missing middle” as a viable way of promoting farmer-led economic development in fragile areas.

Theo Groot (theo.groot@mwh-trust.com) has lived and worked in Africa since 1979. Based in the Netherlands, **Hans Joosse** (hans.joosse@mwh-trust.com) started the MWH Foundation.

Female entrepreneurs are a formidable force in Zimbabwe's rural areas. Although often only seen as subsistence farmers, women are the main traders of fresh fruits and vegetables. They are strategic players in the movement of food from the field to the nearby urban areas. Yet, they face challenges on a daily basis, including inhibitive market rules and regulations, and gender insensitive institutional structures.

Research in the Goromonzi District in 2012-13 has shown some of the constraints that they face – that add to the many issues that their male counterparts have to deal with when marketing their products. Female traders are required to work and often sleep in open market spaces, where there is no shelter to accommodate them, a lack of toilet facilities and the presence of bullying middlemen. The obsolete market infrastructure and general mayhem in the market spaces is particularly challenging for women. In addition, formal finance institutions have historically entrenched stringent criteria for granting loans and credit to small enterprises which are biased against women. If the farm is not joint titled, married women are not eligible to be considered for a loan. Options for accessing credit from micro-finance institutions and lending agents are limited, as they ask for large collateral and high interest rates.

Despite these challenges, women play a very important role in all rural areas, and many venture further to access distant markets in the capital – which again poses another set of risks. In an attempt to overcome the cumbersome, frustrating and unappealing process of securing loans, women in Goromonzi, and other parts of the country, have established social finance schemes, as savings groups where members pool together their resources.

These attempts need to be accompanied by adequate public policies and private support. Zimbabwe needs by-laws that are formulated in a participatory manner, involving those who link producers and consumers. And these by-laws then need to be enforced in a manner that doesn't disenfranchise women entrepreneurs. At the same time, finance institutions and banks need to revisit the criteria and conditions under which women can access credit facilities, particularly those aspects related to collateral and titles to assets. Such anomalies should be addressed openly. Finance institutions should also build on the existing informal social networks for the provision of finance, working with those groups of women that have demonstrated the ability to organise themselves and be accountable for revolving funds. These changes will help women entrepreneurs continue supporting their families, while simultaneously contributing to economic recovery and growth.

Shiela Chikulo works as Programme Coordinator at the Ruzivo Trust; a not-for-profit organisation based in Harare, Zimbabwe. E-mail: sheila@ruzivo.co.zw



Breaking institutional barriers

Local food systems

Tzimbuto and Canasta Utopía

In December 2012 *Farming Matters* ran an article about “Development 3.0”, highlighting the importance of showcasing peoples’ experiences as an inspiration for social change. The *Canastas Comunitarias*, a movement started by families to address their concerns over food prices (and presented in vol. 28.3 of our magazine) provides a clear example of this approach. Today, the movement has expanded to six cities in Ecuador and has diversified to address new concerns, but remains a perfect example of the benefits of local food systems.

Ross M. Borja, Pedro Oyarzún, Sonia Zambrano and Francisco Lema

Over several decades, intermediaries have acquired more and more power in influencing how urban families in Ecuador acquire their food. As part of this process, the urban population has progressively lost track of the different relationships and meanings generated through food procurement. At the same time, agricultural production is less shaped by the local context and culture. The growing distance between producers and consumers means that consumers have lost touch with the farms or region where their food comes from, producers don’t know who will eat their products, and both groups are increasingly vulnerable to the interests of intermediaries. The development of longer chains is a main characteristic of the modern food system. Consumers and producers do not know

one another (and it is becoming increasingly difficult for them to know one another), farmers’ incomes are falling, consumers’ choices are limited, and diets are less varied and less healthy.

Based on a renewed relationship between producers to consumers, the concept of local food networks is becoming increasingly relevant. Various examples of direct access to markets, or of “shortcuts to commercialisation”, have emerged as a reaction to the growing power exerted by intermediaries and a handful of supermarkets, showing that families, when they organise, have the potential to change a difficult situation. One of the best examples is that of the *Canastas Comunitarias*. These started in the 1980s as urban consumer groups, with members pooling funds to make bulk purchases, which are then divided among the families in the group, giving them substantial savings. Today, the *Canastas Comuni-*

tarias are a national network of urban, lower class families who have crafted an alternative model that helps them save money, while providing access to quality food.

But what first started as a collective purchasing mechanism to save citizens money, slowly led participants to question the origins and ways in which the food they consume is produced. Many consumers openly started to question the value of saving money by buying food produced with chemical inputs. This encouraged them to approach farmers in search for answers and closer ties, helping the *Canastas Comunitarias* to become a tool to strengthen the relationship with producers.

Tzimbuto and Canasta Comunitaria Utopía

With approximately 250 inhabitants, Tzimbuto is a small, rural community located in the province of Chimborazo, in Ecuador's central highlands. It is one of the areas where EkoRural, a local development organisation, had been supporting a farmer-led initiative. Farmers have different plots spread throughout the area, where they grow a variety of crops. At an average altitude of 3,000 m above sea level, these plots contain various crops, medicinal plants and fruit trees, forming a mosaic of diversity.

At the beginning of 2010, the *Asociación Nueva Generación*, which is mostly made up of women from Tzimbuto, met the leaders of *Canasta Comunitaria Utopía*, one of Ecuador's oldest *canastas*, which is based in the nearby city of Riobamba. Having previously worked with both groups, EkoRural saw the opportunity to bring together their complementary interests around food consumption and production, and facilitated the initial meetings. Our interest in building stronger consumer-producer relationships was mainly a response to the producers' recurring preoccupation with their limited bargaining power, the low prices they received for their products, and the seemingly unjust benefits that families – both urban and rural – gave to intermediaries.

Three years later, around 50 farmers regularly deliver their products to the *canasta*, and these are taken to consumers in Riobamba. Today, the producers provide approximately 25% of the purchases made by the *Canasta Utopía* (and about 50% of the vegetables). The Tzimbuto farmers make an average profit rate of 80% – approximately twice what they make when selling the same products to the wholesale retailer. Their association is also stronger than before and they have put mechanisms in place to encourage other neighbours to join.

At the same time, the advantages for members of the *canasta* in Riobamba are clear: they pay half of what they would otherwise have to pay in the city supermarkets or retailers. The *canasta* pays the farmers in Tzimbuto the same that they paid to wholesalers in the past, but get better quality products (environmentally-friendly products, free from pesticides and other chemicals) for the same price.

Establishing linkages While stronger links between consumers and producers give many advantages, building these new relationships is not always a straightforward process. We saw some initial difficulties because of the cultural differences between the rural and urban families, and some producers found it difficult to avoid the use of pesticides and other harmful production practices that they were used to. This created some difficulties when trying to co-ordinate the efforts of both parties, ensure the quality of all products, and build a trust-based relationship.

Yet all the participants found that working together for change opened up exciting new possibilities, starting with the identification of the relationships and reciprocities that had been lost, and which they all wanted to rebuild. Both groups wanted a good business deal; consumers also wanted to gain access to healthy food, while farmers were interested in knowing more about those eating their products, their tastes and preferences. Members of the *Asociación* began planning in detail what to grow and when, organising a more efficient way of pro-

Better incomes, healthy food, a stronger organisation. Photo: EkoRural





Not only economic, but also social and environmental benefits. An enormous potential for change.

Photos: EkoRural

viding the required products. A process of produce diversification led to the introduction of new species and varieties, including indigenous potato varieties and crops such as *mashua* (*Tropaeolum tuberosum*), *oca* (*Oxalis tuberosa*), *arracha* (*Arracacia xanthorrhiza*), and *melloco* (*Ullucus tuberosus*), all of which became gradually available for selling and consumption. In addition, farmers started paying more attention to their own farming practices, the clear advantages of crop rotations, associations, and the use of manure. Looking back, these practices have had a major impact on the availability of new foods for families in both Tzimbuto and Riobamba.

Both groups have learnt about the importance of a sustainable approach to agriculture

How to achieve all this was essential for a lasting change. The farmers agreed on the need to strengthen their own organisation and to assign clear roles and responsibilities within it. They also agreed to capitalise their organisation by giving back to the group twice as much as they receive from it (in the form of inputs, seeds and other materials). To guarantee the origin and quality of production, the association created a committee to oversee all operations, and named a community leader to ensure that the products meet the established criteria. Without a doubt, the successes seen have been the result of the leadership efforts of farmer members like Elena Tenelema, and of the inspiration and motivation of Roberto Gortaire, Lupe Ruiz and all those behind the *canastas*. There is now a co-ordinated system of production and delivery in place which gives all members the opportunity of participating, and benefitting.

A force for change The link between *Canasta Comunitaria Utopia* and Tzimbuto demon-

strates that the creation of new, healthier relationships between urban and rural families has clear and direct benefits. These are not limited to the creation of a more stable market, better prices for farmers and better quality products for consumers. Both groups have also learnt about the importance of a sustainable approach to agriculture, of having a strong organisation, about the role and contribution of volunteers, the need to plan and co-ordinate activities in detail, and also about quality – something that faceless consumers never demand. These efforts are showing how the commercialisation of farm products can become a major force for healthier living, with immediate (and highly positive) economic, social and environmental consequences. This is all even clearer when we take the true costs of modern food into account.

There is an enormous potential for strengthening such practices that are based on people's inter-dependence and their endless creativity. The existing wealth that is already invested in food production and consumption can be used to strengthen urban and rural organisations. It can also help address the exclusion of certain sectors in our communities and societies and open up spaces for more pluralism and democracy, for example, by involving schools, hospitals, and community organisations. Eating is perhaps our most basic activity, but its potential as a tool for change has been neglected and forgotten. The resources are already in place. They just need to be re-invested and re-placed for new social purposes.

Ross Borja, Pedro Oyarzún, Sonia Zambrano and Francisco Lema work at Fundación EkoRural, Quito, Ecuador. E-mail: rborja@ekorural.org

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Social learning to amplify agro-ecology

Using documentation for social learning, three female farmer leaders, a journalist and representatives from non-governmental organisations across West Africa gathered together in May 2013 to analyse strategies to upscale sustainable farming.

Faced with hunger and climate change, farmers in West Africa are experimenting with ways to let the vegetation on their soils regenerate, and with the cultivation of traditional, drought-resistant crops and seeds. Local organisations support farmer-to-farmer learning and involve decision makers and traditional authorities in the process.



Photo: Janneke Bruil

Sharing these strategies allowed participants to learn from each other and to sharpen their own analysis. One participant said: “We learned a lot from each other. We really need to include this type of analysis in our documentation so we can share lessons with others.” Another agreed: “Our dream has long been to break the language barrier between English and French speaking West Africa and to be able to work together. Through the exchanges I saw the areas of our work that we can strengthen. We are now really connected and we will work together to achieve results.”

Looking to the future, plans were made to continue cross-country learning. In Mali, Sahel ECO aims to start raising farmers’ awareness about the benefits of green manure, learning from the practice in Ghana. CIKOD is planning a visit to Burkina Faso to learn more about the local soil and water conservation techniques which they might start implementing with communities in northern Ghana. In turn, ANSD is very interested in the roadshow for policy makers that took place in Mali.

Farming Matters will continue to report on the progress and insights gained through this West African learning initiative. We welcome your comments and suggestions.

For more information, contact **Janneke Bruil** of ILEIA (j.bruil@ileia.org) or **Steve Brescia** of Groundswell International (sbrescia@groundswellinternational.org)

Documented strategies

The Rural Women Farmers Association of Ghana Ghana is convincing rural women to reduce the use of toxic pesticides on vegetables, which are making families sick.

Sahel Eco from Mali organised a visit to see farmer-led efforts to regenerate trees on farmland, an initiative that helped to increase food production and re-green the landscape.

Association Nourir Sans Detruir (ANSO) from Burkina Faso is supporting farmer leaders to teach other farmers about successful experimentation with soil and water conservation and diversification of crops on their own farms.

The Centre for Indigenous Knowledge and Organisational Development (CIKOD) helped farmers adopt traditional seed varieties in response to climate change.



The AgriCultures Network was present at the Second Scientific Conference of the UN Convention to Combat Desertification, which took place in Bonn, Germany. Network members have also been active on many other fronts.

CBIK: Promoting healthy grasslands

Over the past year, the Centre for Biodiversity and Indigenous Knowledge (CBIK) has been helping to improve farmers' capacity to deal with the degradation and biodiversity loss of grasslands. Over-grazing in the sub-alpine meadows of the north-western part of the province

of Yunnan has led to this becoming a serious issue. CBIK has introduced a grassland management model that builds on traditional knowledge and practices, and which is proving successful. After May each year, farmers take their animals to graze on mountain pastures for the summer. After about five months, the animals return to their

winter pastures, in the valleys. CBIK's magazine has been featuring these experiences, which have been especially relevant for women farmers. As Ren Jian, editor of *LEISA China* points, "this is because most young men leave the rural areas to seek work in the cities, while women and the elderly stay at home and engage in agriculture and animal husbandry". Practices that had been abandoned are now being taken up again, with good results. Grassland degradation is reducing visibly, and biodiversity in these areas is increasing.



AS-PTA: A new policy proposal

Brazil's national policy proposal for organic production and agro-ecology is about to be completed. In April 2013, a national committee consisting of 14 government and civil society representatives met to

discuss the final details. AS-PTA has been involved throughout the process, with its Director, Paulo Petersen, acting as one of the Brazilian CSO representatives in this committee. "We have high hopes, even if many of our proposals are not included in the final drafts." These key issues include land reform and a drastic reduction in the use of pesticides: "If Brazil really intends to promote an agro-ecological approach, we have to do something about our country being the largest consumer of pesticides in the world, and one where land ownership is concentrated in the hands of a few." Yet there are also promising measures, including higher levels of government procurement of food from family farms, the strengthening of the networks that promote the use of native seeds and support for education programmes on agro-ecology.

ILEIA: Learning from young farmers



All over Europe, young people who wish to farm face difficulties in gaining access to land

and capital. Many are developing innovative strategies to start and run their farms, by building direct contact with consumers.

In some cases consumers share the risks and benefits related to the farm. They provide financial support before the cropping season starts, helping farmers to purchase seeds and other supplies in return for a share of the crops. In many farms, consumers also physically help with the farm work. Arjan Swinkels is one of the farmers in the Netherlands portrayed in the *Future Farmers in the Spotlight* initiative. He is offering consumers the opportunity to invest in his young water buffalo bulls. "If you invest 100 euros in my buffaloes today, at the end of 2014 you'll get buffalo meat worth 125 euros." The money he collects will be used to rent and fence the land in a nearby nature area where his bulls will graze. "It really works. Within one month I already have 35 participants." The initiative uses short video portraits to highlight this and similar experiences and to



share the lessons resulting from these strategies. ILEIA has started a partnership with *Future Farmers* in anticipation of the 2014 International Year of Family Farming.

A more inclusive perspective at UNCCD

Scientists from all over the world gathered at the Scientific Conference of the UN Convention to Combat Desertification, sharing the results of their work on land degradation, desertification and sustainable land management. However, there was little mention of the many well-documented and proven agro-ecological solutions applied by dryland communities. Our network organised a session that focused on the need to bridge this practice-policy gap. Working with other organisations, we released a statement calling for an inclusive perspective and attention for agro-ecological innovations which, although developed outside the formal scientific domain, hold great promise for the future of drylands. This statement was endorsed by 13 organisations present at the conference. (JB)

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Address
P.O. Box 90, 6700 AB,
Wageningen, the Netherlands.

Visitors address
Lawickse Allee 11, 6701 AN
Wageningen, the Netherlands
Tel: +31 (0)33 467 38 70,
Fax: +31 (0)33 463 24 10
E-mail: ileia@ileia.org
www.ileia.org

Editorial team
This issue has been compiled
by Laura Eggens, Leonardo van
den Berg, Janneke Bruil,
Geneviève Lavoie-
Mathieu, Edith van Walsum
and Jorge Chavez-Tafur.
English language editing: Nick
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**“MORE AMERICANS
ARE PAYING ATTENTION
TO THE PROVENANCE
OF THEIR FOOD. AS
A RESULT, SALES OF
LOCAL FOODS IN THE
U.S. WERE PROJECTED
TO REACH US\$ 7
BILLION IN 2011...”**

“Local food grows up”. October 15th issue of Time Magazine.

**“It would be better for
governments, donors,
development agencies and
big business to work to
understand and support
the strategies small-scale
farmers are already using,
as they combine formal
and informal ways to
make markets work
for them”**

Ethel Del Pozo-Vergnes, senior researcher at IIED, quoted by The Independent (Kampala) after the publication of “Small producer agency in the globalised market: making choices in a changing world”. November 29th, 2012.

**“The policy to procure
local foods [for school
feeding] has set in
motion a cycle where
the smallholder farmer
is ensured a solid market
for their produce thereby
enriching their income,
and those who make up
the school feeding supply
chain. This has had
a great impact on the
economy of Ghana”**

Ghana's President, John Kuffuor, addressing the Global Child Nutrition Forum 2012, Addis Ababa. Quoted by The Guardian (“School meals: as good for farmers as they are for children? How an African-led initiative to provide local food for school children is building a new market for smallholder farmers”). March 15th, 2013.

**“LOCAL CIRCUITS
ARE FUNDAMENTAL.
PEOPLE DON'T LIVE
GLOBALLY, PEOPLE LIVE
LOCALLY, EAT LOCALLY,
THEY PRODUCE
LOCALLY... SO TO LINK
LOCAL MARKETS WITH
LOCAL PRODUCTION IS
ESSENTIAL”**

José Graziano da Silva, FAO Director-General, referring to local markets as one of the seven “ingredients of the menu” to achieve food security. Closing session of the debate “New, unified approaches to end hunger in Africa: Promoting food security and nutrition”. Rome, April 22nd, 2013.



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