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MATTERS

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Mutual support = A lighter workload

Highland barley is the main crop grown in the village of Hongpo, in the Yunling township (part of the Deqin Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, in the Chinese province of Yunan). Like most villagers, Mrs Ren Zang has been recently very busy with the harvest from her two-acre field. Growing high quality barley is her responsibility, as her husband migrates looking for work, and only comes home once or twice a year. She also takes care of their cattle, and grows vegetables for home consumption. Her working load is heavy. But she is also part of the local women's group, and this brings many benefits. All the members support each other, especially during the busy harvesting

season. They also run income-generating activities together (such as growing cabbages and tomatoes in their communal greenhouse), which complement the money they earn individually. The group also provides a space where women can discuss and exchange ideas. This is not limited to production issues: with the support of CBIK, a local NGO, they also share other concerns, such as those related to their own health and that of their children. Life in Hongpo is hard, but, by working together, women like Mrs Ren Zang feel they are better able to support their families.

Text and photo: Yao Xiaonan

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FOUAD LAKHAL
STUDENT FAIR TRADE MANAGEMENT

'In the future I would like to have a positive influence on the less privileged in rural areas, to enable the people in these regions to canalise their experience, knowledge and strengths, so they will be able to manufacture quality products.'



IRENE ASARE from Ghana
ALUMNUS RURAL DEVELOPMENT AND FOOD SECURITY / AGRICULTURE COORDINATOR OF THE GHANA EDUCATIONAL SERVICES

'Not only food production should be considered, but also food accessibility and utilisation. After coming back to Ghana this will help me to consider much more topics than before with regard to the Ghana School Feeding Program.'

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Learning for change



Kanthamma, a widow of approximately 70 years old, used to collect ladybird beetles from neighbouring fields and release them in her own: “These insects help me keep the aphids in my cotton crop under control. My neighbours did not believe me that it worked, so they did not mind me ‘stealing’ the beetles from their fields. But now they have seen with their own eyes that it works, so I have to find my ladybird beetles somewhere else.”

Farmers are keen observers. But new technologies and other far-reaching changes in agriculture have taken many decisions out of their hands. Inevitably, some crucial observation skills have got lost. Farmer Field Schools and other participatory learning approaches stimulate farmers to reconnect with nature through discovery learning. The focus of such schools is to improve farmers’ observation skills and to trust their own assessments, rather than depending on the advice of extension workers and input providers. This may seem a simple idea, but it is crucial. Such an approach empowers small-scale family farmers. Discovery learning is not just about facts; it is about relationships in a system, about causes and effects. It empowers farmers to deal with complex, often unexpected, situations. The common theme (or as us Dutch say, the “red thread”) of this issue is the role of partnerships in learning. How do different stakeholders collaborate? What do they learn from working together? What drives them to collaborate? We all know that such processes are complex and often “messy”. They are always political. Pressures on the natural resource base are increasing everywhere, so partnerships that involve different actors – be it a Climate Field School or a group of actors working to establish a sustainable commodity chain - have to deal with an increasing range of perspectives, power relations and vested interests. Yet groups and individuals increasingly recognise the benefit of collaboration, as people can rarely solve such problems by themselves. We hope that the articles in this issue will trigger your imagination. The real learning adepts will enjoy Steve Sherwood’s thematic overview which discusses some interesting theoretical perspectives on learning, knowledge and social change.

Let’s get cracking and have a closer look at partnerships and learning.

Edith van Walsum

Edith van Walsum, director ILEIA



Centre for learning on
sustainable agriculture



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“We’ll continue with our observations”

Participants of a Climate Field School in Indonesia were asked to measure rainfall, and to relate these observations to their local taxonomies and the state of their crops. Their work with scientists helped them all plan a number of strategies to cope with changing weather patterns. And those working with these farmers were equally able to benefit and draw specific lessons.



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GMOs are a serious threat to local breeds

Percy Schmeiser is well known all over the world as a result of the legal disputes he has had with the multinational Monsanto. In an interview with *Farming Matters*, he tells how he and his wife got into such legal difficulties, and the reasons why they decided to continue fighting. “It’s a one-way track when GMOs enter a country”.



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Enhancing learning within certification schemes

Certification is not a “silver bullet” that automatically guarantees sustainable agriculture, although it does bring many positive results. These benefits can be multiplied by paying more attention to the development of skills and knowledge, and to the learning processes in which farmers, extension agents and company representatives are involved.



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Teaching teachers: Agroecology in Argentina

Increasing yields in an economically viable, environmentally sound and socially acceptable manner requires professionals who are trained for this purpose. A group of researchers in Argentina is working with teachers of rural secondary schools who, in turn, are preparing thousands of students for later life and work in agriculture. Their efforts show many promising results.



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FARMING MATTERS informs readers about sustainable, small-scale farming. It offers discussions, background to the news, opinions, research findings, and practical examples of how sustainable, small-scale farming contributes to providing food security, social justice, a healthy environment and development. Farming Matters is for policy makers, researchers, practitioners, educators, farmers, and everybody else interested in agriculture and development.



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Farming Matters welcomes comments, ideas and suggestions from its readers. Please send an e-mail to us at ileia@ileia.org or write to P.O. Box 2967, 3800 CB Amersfoort, the Netherlands.



From Myanmar

We are a small NGO implementing a project in the Dry Zone of Myanmar. The villages we work with are extremely remote and most suffer from water scarcity. Our main activities include renovating ponds, establishing village nurseries and improving hygiene awareness. By reading your magazine, and especially the September issue, we have learned a lot that we can share with the villagers. We really liked this issue.

Prof. Saw Win, DWHH - REAM, Magwe Division, Myanmar

Culture and traditions

I liked the way you presented different, innovative and urgent issues concerning water management and governance. I like the way that you regularly present evidence from the field, but much of what the different authors wrote in your latest issue remained at a discourse level, and not all authors supported their ideas with quantitative and qualitative data. The article on "Irrigation management in the Himalayas" did this well. I especially liked the efforts of the authors of this article in showing how local culture and traditions matter when talking about water governance. Yet social hierarchies have always sustained social inequalities and injustices. I would like to stress that inequalities can never be the basis of sustainable water management and governance.

Juana Vera Delgado, PhD-student, Irrigation and Water Engineering, Centre for Water and Climate, Wageningen University

Raising issues via the blog

Although I didn't study agriculture, issues like sustainability, small-scale family farming and rural development interest me a lot. I have known ILEIA for a long time, and these days I receive Farming Matters at the Institute of Social Studies (ISS), where I currently lecture. Apart from your magazine, I read your blog columns, and I hope that more people will react to them. You ask important questions about issues that are in danger of being forgotten in today's hectic and globalising world. I appreciate being kept up to date with them.

Jan Pronk, former Minister for Development Cooperation, the Netherlands. Institute of Social Studies, The Hague

Water governance (1)

To me, water governance refers directly to the process of planning and implementing management plans in a locality. Normally, community members are not involved in the planning phase regarding water projects, yet they are expected to contribute labour and cash later on. We need to see that water is a common good, but it also needs to be regarded as a human right. If we see it as a basic human right, then it is clear that governments have to make sure that the conditions are there so that water is provided to all people. This is good water governance.

Sule Teophil Michael, Tukuyu, Mbeya, Tanzania, on our Open Forum

Water governance (2)

Whatever the consensus of experts on this matter, we should not forget one thing. The issue of good water governance is not and should not be limited to the supply of water for agriculture alone. The uneven distribution and access to water is also a glaring problem in most urban centres in poor countries, where those further up the ladder have enough to water their private gardens and ornamental flowers, while those below the poverty line struggle on a daily basis to quench their thirst.

Aliyu Kawu, Minna, Nigeria, on our Open Forum

Water governance (3)

Good water governance = openness to all in the transactions that affect other people's lives. This entails a wide range of aspects: institutional (representation/ participation), policy (inclusiveness and deliberate attempts to source views from a wide range of stakeholders and conflict resolution mechanisms) and practical aspects (tools, technologies and other supporting tools to use water efficiently and effectively).

Richard Kimbowa, Uganda Coalition for Sustainable Development, Kampala, Uganda, on our Open Forum

For more letters, see www.ileia.org

Mobilising our greatest resource
for continuity and change:

people

The establishment of strong and efficient partnerships can contribute enormously to family farming, in many different ways. All efforts to enhance learning, however, must ensure that local people remain in control of the process. External agents need to be very aware of the role they want to take and of the role they are in effect taking.

Text and photo: Stephen Sherwood

While facilitators of technology-centred approaches tend to preoccupy themselves with “what farmers do not do” and on “how to get them to farm differently”, a people-centred approach seeks to help farmers understand what they do and why as a source of inspiration for continuity and change. This must be our point of departure when looking at partnerships, or at the role that “outsiders” play in promoting learning that is founded on local experience.

Critics of externally led rural development rightfully raise serious concerns over the influence of outsiders in local development. We call special attention to the moral and ethical obligations that an externally based organiser – be it a farmer from another community or someone from a nearby city or another country – is as transparent as possible about her or his worldview, motivations and agenda in seeking a partnership for change.

This edition of *Farming Matters* presents a diversity of learning-based approaches. Here, I highlight a handful of ideas on rural education that came to mind upon my perusal of the articles, before summarising some thoughts on effective partnerships for learning.

Culture as the seedbed of learning

In his provocative book, “A short history of progress”, the anthropologist Ronald Wright explains that, from a biological perspective, humans are no

smarter today than they were 10,000 years ago. In other words, an ice-age child could be reared in a modern family and, afforded the right nurturing and opportunities, he or she could perform perfectly well and have every bit the same chances as any child in excelling in school and becoming a medical doctor. This insight is a sharp criticism of most modern education programmes, but it is consistent with the sort of approaches that ILEIA has been championing for the last 26 years.

Wright convincingly argues that knowledge is not stored in the brain; rather, it is embedded in culture. Similarly, farmers belong to communities of practice and, as such, they contribute to and learn from unfolding histories. In this sense, learning is about routine – reproducing age-old traditions expressed, for example, in a certain way of planting. But agriculture, of course, is not static. Each time a farmer drops her seed it falls into an ever-changing world. Learning is also about change – occasionally breaking with time-honoured practice and giving birth to future tradition.

Cultivating the human farm

The Honduran educator and farmer-philosopher, the late Elias Sanchez, inspired a passion for popular education in thousands of community organisers. Elias argued that, at the most basic level, learning involves “cultivating the human farm”. He summarised learning as the process of managing the “head”, the “heart” and the “hands”. His ideas were based on a fundamental tenet of individual learning described

by Benjamin Bloom as “domains of knowledge”: cognition (mental skills – the ability to associate, comprehend, and think creatively), affective capacity (the ability to grow emotionally and have feelings, to value and find inspiration for action), and psychomotor skills (the ability to perform manual and physical skills). Accordingly, effective learning involves the simultaneous “cultivation” of each. Neglect the head, heart or hands, Elias said, and learning is incomplete – the human farm collapses.

In this issue, Winarto and colleagues (p. 10) explain how outsiders helped Indonesian farmers to “read” and interpret rainfall patterns, demonstrating why it is important for them to understand the multiple aspects of the “human farm”. They also show why it is important to understand that the “human farm” does not emerge and operate exclusively through the activities of an individual. Rather, it involves the family, which is a part of communities of neighbouring human farms. These, in turn, seamlessly interact in networks of other activities around food. Thus, learning in agriculture is very much a collective enterprise, and as such, effective partnering in people-centred development requires special attention to the social aspects of agriculture.

Social transformation The tradition of “participation” in development is rooted in the tradition of non-formal, popular education and life-long learning pioneered by Nikolaj Grundtvig, founder of the Danish Folk Schools in the 19th century. This groundbreaking work influenced similar rural peoples’ movements throughout Europe. A century later it directly inspired activity across the world, such as that supported by James Yen’s Mass Education Movement in China, Paulo Freire’s adult literacy programmes in Brazil, Myles Horton’s Highlander Folk Education Center in Appalachia in the United States, and countless other examples.

Such examples show that if well managed, and if planned as part of a democratic spirit that respects local tradition and the right to self-determination, partnering can help people break through their pre-conceived notions of what is possible. Beyond mere participation in learning activities, local control over the learning agenda is central to democratic change. This means that an external facilitator must be continually aware of his or her own role in the community.

Partnering for learning As a first step towards assuring democratic facilitation, a practitioner needs to carefully manage how he or she goes about promoting change. In particular, locally led learning processes need to:

- help individuals in understanding themselves as learners (through open discussion of learning styles

and processes of critical reflection);

- encourage individuals to expand their learning experiences and styles (overcoming barriers and exploring new strategies);
- employ a variety of instructional approaches (so that participants experience different ways of interacting and learning);
- create an environment in which tolerance and diversity can thrive; and
- create a climate in which collaboration exists (where participants work with one another as resources).



Effective learning involves practise in context, open debat and discussions - like in this course on alternative ploughs in Potosi, Bolivia.

Admittedly, arriving to a community with a partnership in mind and a learning agenda in your pocket can be problematic. For an outsider, effective partnering for development begins first and foremost with reflective practice and honesty. This means understanding and being up-front with one’s own worldview, biases, agenda and motivations for seeking a partnership for change. It then involves the capacity to work shoulder-to-shoulder with others – both as individuals and in collectives – to mobilise their single most valuable resource for continuity and change: people.

Stephen Sherwood, a family farmer in Ecuador, teaches part-time at Wageningen University’s Communication and Innovation Studies Group. He is also co-founder of Groundswell International (www.groundswellinternational.org), a partnership of grassroots practitioners dedicated to rural transformation. E-mail: ssherwood@ekorural.org

"We'll continue with

Agro-meteorological learning in Indonesia



our observations"

Local knowledge systems are always developing, especially in times of change. The meteorological effects of El Niño, and climate change in general, motivated farmers and researchers in Indonesia to set up a close learning partnership. Working together, and observing the rains in detail, provided new information which helped the farmers adapt their agricultural strategies.

Text: Yunita T. Winarto, Kees Stigter, Esti Anantasari, Hestu Prahara and Kristyanto

Farmers are known to be good observers of their own fields and habitats. Their ways of knowing and the body of local knowledge is called *ilmu titèn* in Indonesian (roughly translated as “carrying detailed observations and memorable results”). But changing weather patterns mean that traditional indicators no longer help farmers decide when to start planting. This was one of the major issues discussed by the farmers who participated in a Climate Field School in Gunungkidul, near Yogyakarta. They all agreed that climate change is having a serious influence on their daily lives.

Two way learning in Gunungkidul

In November 2008 a group of researchers and students in anthropology and other disciplines of the Gadjah Mada University, Yogyakarta, visited Gunungkidul as part of their ethnographic fieldwork. They recommended that those who had taken part in the Climate Field School should further develop their observations, to try to better understand the changes they were experiencing. As the farmers had no reliable way

to measure rainfall, ten rain gauges with calibrated scales were purchased and distributed among them. The researchers assisted the farmers in choosing locations for the gauges, in setting them up, in using them to measure rainfall and in deciding what to observe in their fields. They helped farmers keep track of their measurements and observations.

Farmers became enthusiastic when they were able to relate rainfall to the amount of water trapped in the rain gauge. They were also able to directly see the relationship between these numbers, soil moisture and the growth of their crops. Gradually, their local taxonomy of rain, expressed in words, was enriched by quantifying each category, while the researchers’ quantitative approach was enriched by the local expressions of the characteristics and the impacts of the rains (Table 1).

Researchers also found out that, while farmers frequently go to the field throughout the planting season, it was something completely different for them to go every morning to the field at a particular time and take notes of what they measured and observed. Not all of them were happy to commit to such a regime without any compensation for their time or for the petrol they needed for using motorbikes.

Bringing notes and pens to the fields in order to take notes there was also a new practice. Some farmers relied on their memories and did the writing at home. The researchers tried to develop data-sheets to help farmers write down their findings in a simple way. These sheets went through several revisions and improvements, in response to the farmers' comments. So both parties learned from the process: this was also the first time the anthropologists tried to process rainfall data into a graphic form, and to develop agroecological observations into stories and matrices that could subsequently be interpreted by the agrometeorologist.

More than measuring The agrometeorologist visited the site regularly. Site meetings with him were used to present, explain and discuss the graphics of rainfall distribution at the points of observation, and their relation with the agrometeorological data collected by farmers. Farmers were also able to use these meetings as an opportunity to raise questions about what was happening at the moment.

that they were now better able to anticipate similar future weather conditions and prepare themselves for them.

Sadly, this knowledge did not always lead to action. Heavy rains and a lack of water for long periods were identified as the situations that farmers were most vulnerable to: few farmers in this area have drainage or water reservoirs. But despite many discussions, the suggestion to collectively build drainage and storage ponds was not followed. Such investments would have involved setting up a higher-level organisation, covering large areas of fields which criss-crossed existing administrative boundaries. Without any support from local authorities, the farmers felt incapable of carrying out such measures.

Complex learning in Indramayu

Based on the experience in Gunungkidul, the anthropologists approached a group of farmers in Indramayu, in West Java, an area where the first Climate Field Schools were tried in 2003. The



Unusual weather patterns helped farmers see the relationship between rainfall quantities, soil moisture and the growth of their crops. Photos: Yunita Winarto

In 2009 the rains lasted well into June, the normal dry season, which is a very unusual phenomenon. Several crops, such as tobacco, chilli, and a newly introduced bean called koro, were severely damaged. While this caused the farmers problems, it also allowed them to increase their understanding of unexpected weather conditions by comparing the total quantities of rainfall, the impact on their fields, while also referring to their traditional knowledge. Farmers said that this experience, and the knowledge it gave them, meant

establishment of a network of 50 points-of-observation, representing diverse ecosystems within the Indramayu regency, marked the beginning of a collaborative programme involving anthropologists, agrometeorologists, students from Universitas Indonesia and farmers. Due to the larger size and scope of the project the farmers developed a more complex organisation, dividing their regency into three zones, with co-ordinators in each zone responsible for monitoring a number of points-of-observation.

The project was intended to last for three years but, due to a series of internal conflicts and difficulties in finding funds, the official collaborative research was terminated after only four months. However, in that short period, the farmers learned much from the severe drought that delayed their planting season. They tried out a number of strategies, including switching from wet-nursery to dry-nursery seedbeds, selecting rice varieties with a shorter growing period, and building groundwater ponds, all of which proved to be beneficial. Although the official collaboration with the farmers' organisation could not go on as hoped, some farmers continued their own individual observations. They decided to form "the club of rainfall observers" and continued their own measurements with locally constructed cylindrical rain gauges. They asked researchers to continue supporting them.

negotiations between scholars and farmers. Local elites and leaders can have ideas, perspectives and interests that are not in line with the scholars' objectives. Yet the benefits of working together can outweigh these difficulties, and these are even greater if:

- scholars do not micro-manage the way that farmers make observations. After giving a few basic instructions and suggestions for data taking, the organisation of data collection can be left to the farmers' own initiative;
- proximity and trust is built in throughout the learning process;
- sufficient time is taken to explain the background of climate change and its consequences, in terms that everybody can understand and to allow farmers time to ask questions and have them answered;

No.	Categories of rain in local terms	Rain characteristics	Impacts on soil	Equivalent in numbers
1	Udan kremun	Small rain, very soft, short duration	No trails on the soil	(0 mm)
2	Udan thletik	Fast small rain, lasts only a minute	No trails on the soil	(0 mm)
3	Udan gerimis	No sound of the rain, can be felt by hands, long duration	No trails with a short duration of rain, drops on the crops with a long duration	0.5—5 mm
4	Udan tretak-tretak a.sedèlo b.suwé	Small rain with "thik-thik" sound on the roof. a.short duration b.long duration	Some trails: the soil becomes wet in both the short and the long duration of rain, no standing water.	a.1—3 mm. b.3—5 mm.
5	Udan pral-pril	Small rain in April, not daily, in short or long duration. Sound on the roof.	Similar trails to no. 4 (soil becomes wet, but no standing water)	1—5 mm or 5—10 mm.
6	Udan ora deres nanging kerep (not heavy but frequent and intense)	Not heavy, but noisy on the roof with long duration of rain. Another term: "udané awèt" (persisting rain)	"Red-soil" becomes very wet, some water standing on "heavy-black soil"	<30 mm.
7	Udan deres bres	Heavy rain, very noisy on the roof, but usually not persistent in a long duration of rain	The soil becomes very wet, sticky, and compresses when people step on it	>30 mm.
8	Udan bar-bar (very heavy rain) and banjir in very heavy intense rain which floods	Heavy rains between September and December; high frequency and intensity, long duration	If the rain lasts for one day, there will be standing water, especially on heavy black soil. In the absence of drainage, the fields become flooded	>70 mm. (in 2008/09, up to >100 mm)

Table 1. Rainfall classification in the farmers' lexicon and numerical terms

Lessons learned The cases described here show some of the difficulties involved in collaborative learning between farmers and researchers. Farmers are not always overly concerned about using standardised procedures for measurements, or being very precise in gathering reliable and standardised data. They perceive learning programmes as "projects" and expect money to compensate them for their time and efforts. At the same time, local norms, values and cultural hierarchies can also be a hindrance in the

- a regular exchange of practical information between farmers and researchers takes place, helping farmers address their vulnerabilities and to find adaptation strategies to climate change.

Yunita T. Winarto Professor in Anthropology and Academy Professor in Social Sciences and Humanities (Universitas Indonesia), can be contacted at yunita.winarto@gmail.com. Kees Stigter (cjstigter@usa.net) is Visiting Professor, Agromet Vision, Bondowoso. Esti Anantasari is graduate student at the Gadjah Mada University; Hestu Prahara and Kristyanto are research assistants at Universitas Indonesia.



Small groups of genetic engineers working for multinational companies, with little or no democratic control, determine the genetic composition of crops all over the world. Is this a science fiction movie scenario? No. Two Canadian farmers, Percy and Louise Schmeiser, have had a long fight in court to defend their right to grow their own crops. Farming Matters talked to Percy Schmeiser about farming and his uneasy relation with seed companies.

Interview: Frank van Schoubroeck

The G

in

“The first time in my life I heard about GMOs was in August 1999, when I got a letter ordering me to pay Monsanto for the use of ‘their’ seed material”

MO



Invasion: We're losing our local breeds

We live in Bruno, Saskatchewan, in the prairies of mid-west Canada. For people from Europe or Asia, Saskatchewan is a vast area, where farmers need cars to visit the other end of their farm. In 1946 my wife and I took over the farm from my father. Most farmers in the area were growing wheat in those days, but we were part of a small group of farmers who were growing rapeseed, or canola, as we call it, growing it in pockets up to 30 km apart. At the time canola was vulnerable to black leg and a pod rot, and it was common knowledge that you needed rotation intervals of four-years. My wife was a canola breeder and she managed to gradually increase the crop's resistance. By the 1980s she had developed varieties that were resistant to these diseases, and we didn't need to rotate crops anymore. In the 1990s our neighbours were also changing over from wheat to canola. I was not a full-time farmer, as I also worked as an elected member of the provincial parliament and, for some time, as a mayor. So we were active members of our community.

So you successfully bred locally-adapted canola crops. Then, what happened?

In the 1990s, different companies started to promote the idea of genetically modified crops. They were telling an optimistic story: through the new GM technologies they could breed varieties that would need fewer pesticides, and would have higher yields and be more nutritious than ever. They presented genetic engineering as the way forward to reduce hunger. We farmers and politicians took the story as it was told to us. We did not know how threatening GMOs were going to be to our farming systems.

What happened in Bruno?

In our area, Monsanto organised "informative meetings" with selected farmers. They were given samples of GMO seeds on the condition that they did not disclose that they had participated in these meetings. These farmers were told the same story: that GMO seed would reduce the need for chemicals and that overall yields would be higher. The farmers then planted GMO seeds in many different pockets of our province, without the local government or even their neighbours knowing about it. My neighbour happened to participate in such a meeting

and planted GMO canola in his field as well. The next thing we knew was that we received a letter from Monsanto claiming that we were using “their” varieties in our fields. Canola is an open pollinator and pollen (or maybe even seeds) from our neighbour had entered into our fields. We were accused of illegally planting their crop and charged with US\$ 15 an acre for using their technology. This was the beginning of an on-going legal battle between the company and us.

What struck you most in this case?

Since 1999 this case overtook our lives. The story is a whirlwind of events that shows the ruthless ways companies try to get control over and earn money from ordinary farmers like us. The absurdity of the story is difficult to comprehend. In short, the company took seeds from our crops, and started putting one or two foreign genes in it. After having put in such genes, the company takes out a patent – and next the variety is exclusively theirs! This is absurd enough, but then a farmer plants this new breed, and the pollen spreads within the area, like into our fields. Even if just a small fraction of the plants carries the engineered gene, the company can claim rights over this crop! We refused to pay, and the result was that the company dragged us to court.

How did your fellow farmers react?

We have no ill feelings for the neighbour who planted the GM seeds. He never intended to bring this story into our lives. We are still good friends – our children play hockey together. Farmers who planted GM canola had to sign a contract that they would not pass on GM seeds and that they would pay fees for using GM seeds in subsequent years. The company asked people to report farmers who were “illegally” planting GM seeds. They would offer people free chemicals or a Monsanto leather jacket for such reports, even money in some cases. All of a sudden, we didn’t know anymore if the person we were talking to was going to report what was happening to the company. In small communities such as ours, such ways affect the social fabric. Now, as we say, instead of “agri-culture”, we are practising “fear-culture”. I can tell you that not many people wear Monsanto jackets these days!

This is a story in Canada. Would seed companies be able to do the same in the developing world?

Since the start of this story in our fields, we have travelled all over the world to talk about our case and to learn more about the application of GMOs elsewhere. I am not a specialist, but what I understand from cases in India and Africa is that there are many ways through which companies gain control over farmers and force them to pay for “their” seeds. For example, in micro-credit schemes, farmers get credit in the shape of chemicals and seeds that are genetically engineered. If you fail to pay for the seed, next time you get no credit. When GMOs spread naturally, companies might claim ownership over entire crops, as we have seen in our case. Companies might introduce “terminator” genes forcing farmers to buy seeds every year. We have seen the chemical treadmill with the Green Revolution: you need to apply more and more chemicals for the same yield. Poor farmers then have no other option than to pay, even if he or she does not want to grow GMOs. I am a Canadian farmer who could drag a company to court - but how could a poor farmer ever do that?

The scary thing is that engineered genes quickly spread. Within a decade after their introduction, often over 90 percent of fields in an area might be infested. Buffers don’t help. In Europe they used to talk about the co-existence of GM and non-GM crops by creating obligatory buffers of 30 metres – although GMO pollen can easily be carried for miles! Everybody who plants a GM crop knows that he or she is infesting their neighbours’ fields. Here in Saskatchewan, indigenous people grow wild rice in natural lakes. They are afraid that their wild rice populations will soon get infested with GMO genes.

What’s the problem with crops that contain new genes? The recombination of genetic material has been going on for millennia...

Traditional breeding resulted in varieties fit for

“We have entered this path but do not know where it will lead us”

agricultural fields that did not threaten wild populations. GM genes spread more aggressively. For example, Bt genes inserted in a crop make the plant produce a pesticide that kills some pests. Normal pesticides are tested for health hazards and sometimes forbidden on these grounds and in the same way prescribed drugs are sometimes forbidden because after some years people find out that they have side-effects. Suppose we find out that the chemicals produced by GMOs cause human diseases, for example if they slowly build up in your body. By then the genes will have spread to all crop populations – including organic and wild ones. Then it will be too late to decide and say: let's do away with the GM crop. That's what scares me most: that we have entered this path but do not know where it will lead us, and there is no way back. Companies are not applying precautionary principles. Luckily, the American Society of Medical Doctors recently supported a ban on GMOs – years after organisations in Russia, England and Germany did the same.

What would you advise to farmers and policy makers in developing countries?

First I would say: don't let GMOs enter your country. It's a one-way track. Second, be careful about farmers' rights vis-à-vis seed companies. The company that introduced GM canola to our area did so with one goal: to gain control over farmers' fields and make huge amounts of money. They do not develop new seeds to reduce pesticide use. They have shareholders, whose goal is to make as much money as possible, so companies are never motivated by developing technology that will be cheaper or more efficient to farmers. Thus, it is very important that farmers keep control over the crops they grow in their fields, based on the material of their choice. So let the Lord help us to avoid companies getting control over the seeds that farmers use.

More information

For more information on the Schmeiser-Monsanto case, visit www.percyschmeiser.com

GM cotton captures India and Africa

Genetically Modified (GM) cotton was introduced in India and South Africa in the early 2000s, and now more than 80 percent of the cotton grown in both countries is GM. This happened mostly because of carefully planned seed sales, with a strong government support. At the same time, it has been seen that cross-pollination introduces foreign genes from GMOs into traditional cotton varieties, even if cross-pollination in cotton is relatively low, and GM seeds mix easily with local varieties at the gins.

Do GM cotton strains serve farmers better than traditional crops? This depends on the variety that is genetically modified. If the original variety wasn't fit for a certain farm, the GM strain will not yield well either. Good soils and regular rain help the new genes in GM cotton plants to produce more anti-insect toxins. In areas with a high presence of pests, GM varieties do better than their traditional counterparts - but these plants remain vulnerable to other pests. As a result, more pesticides are sometimes used in GM than in traditional cotton fields. Environmental and long-term health effects are still unknown.

What's the problem for family farmers? The most important issue is that farmers have no choice. Whether you like it or not, your crop will get contaminated with transgenic material. There are regulations in place in most countries to avoid such contamination, but they are rarely effective. Even countries that oppose the introduction of GM cotton are not free from the newly introduced genes. This means that the breeding agenda of a few multinationals determines the genetic composition of crops in farmers' fields, even if they do not want it. And the greatest problem is that, once introduced, these genes will persist in the ecosystem. There is no turning back. (FvS)



Photo: Mans Lanting



Exceeding expectations

The “Degraded Pastures” project in Central America has had an impact that has extended far beyond the duration and scope of the project. This is because the joint learning process that it established motivated the participants to continue working together, and also motivated other organisations, both public and private, to join or support them.

Text: Danilo Pezo, Jorge Cruz, Karen Hernández and Raúl Villeda

In the past 40 years the area under pastures in Latin America increased from 473 to 555 million hectares, and the number of cattle has risen from 195 to 394 million. This growth has resulted in forest loss and fragmentation.

Pastures are now the main agricultural land use, particularly in areas like El Petén, in Guatemala. However, between 50-70% of those pastures are degraded, with low forage yields that have poor nutritive value. This lowers their carrying capacity and the performance of the cattle. Equally, degraded pastures are less effective in providing ecosystem services, such as carbon sequestration, biodiversity and water availability and quality. All these aspects of pasture degradation reduce the income and food security of livestock farmer families and the livelihoods of rural communities.

Learning about sustainable land use...

Between 2003 and 2008, the Tropical Agriculture Research and Higher Education Center (CATIE) carried out a project on sustainable land use alternatives for degraded pasture lands in Central America, the “Degraded Pastures” project. Its main objective was to promote a joint learning process between livestock farmers and their families, the staff of research and development institutions and policy makers. This was intended to develop and strengthen peoples’ capabilities and skills for more sustainable land use practices. In this article we only refer to the experiences in El Petén (Guatemala), although similar results were achieved in central Nicaragua and the northern coast of Honduras.

Although several institutions (academic, governmental and NGOs) were invited to participate, during the first two years the project staff worked almost solely with farmers’ groups. Potential institutional partners appeared hesitant to participate and follow approaches that deviated from the “top-down” extension model with its “sender-receiver” approach to communication. But in the end, the use of the Farmer Field School methodology was highly appreciated by farmers and by the field staff of the institutions that did participate. This approach helped catalyse a general shift in training modes from the formal, traditional approaches, towards a more practical “learning-by-doing” approach.

... through more participatory methods

All programme partners were trained in Livestock Farmer Field Schools methodologies to ensure that sessions followed the principles of participatory learning and experimentation. An unplanned result of the exposure of faculty staff to these innovative methods was the introduction of “new” topics (such as agroforestry, rural development,

sociology and tropical forages) into the curricula of several undergraduate courses at the university. FFS methodologies also became part of the basic training for advanced students. Between 2007 and 2008, 230 students, and 46 lecturers and other staff of partner institutions were trained in Guatemala (and an equivalent number of professionals and students were trained in Honduras and Nicaragua).

Forty Farmer Field Schools, with more than 500 participants, were established in different regions of Guatemala. In the lowlands (in the southern and eastern part of the country) these focused on dual-purpose cattle systems, the main livestock activity. In the Central Highlands they focused on small ruminants. In all cases advanced students and staff from the university functioned as facilitators. The target groups were very diverse, from “ladino” men who traditionally work with cattle, to women from the Ixil ethnic group. It was expected that these experiences would enrich the curricula of other agriculture schools in Central America, and result in a large group of motivated young professionals trained in effective extension measures that can be used in other communities in the region.

Expanding and sustaining success

The Degraded Pastures project tried to engage institutions by sharing documented experiences and by offering to train staff in participatory methods. They also organised farmer-to-farmer exchange visits, inviting new groups to visit those that had participated in the project for at least two years. And they shared project resources with partner institutions and new



Preparing for upscaling success: training staff and farmers, and sharing experiences.

Photo: Danilo Pezo

farmer groups in order to scale up efforts. By the end of the project, many of the partners had become enthusiastic participants, having seen the

benefits of using participatory approaches. A similar change was seen, for example, with one of the project's concrete activities, the *Leucaena* protein bank. Before this started, farmers believed that livestock could only be fed on pastures. Farmers learned to feed their livestock with *Leucaena*, which became an important fodder during the dry season. At the start of the project, only one hectare was established on one farm; after three years, more than 160 farmers were growing 100 hectares of *Leucaena*.

The University of San Carlos of Guatemala, four El Petén municipalities and two regional NGOs (FUNDEBASE and PROPETEN) joined forces to further promote and scale up this approach. The municipalities of San Luis, Dolores, Melchor de Mencos and Poptún (grouped together as the Commonwealth of Municipalities in Southern Petén, MANMUNISURP), hired two livestock extensionists and contacted FUNDEBASE to work as partners. This partnership was positively evaluated by the local governments, in particular by the newly elected mayors, because it provided technical assistance to the previously neglected smallholder livestock sector. The local authorities were particularly impressed by the attitude and motivation of the NGO staff trained by the Field School.

The experience gained by FUNDEBASE through the work done in association to MANMUNISURP and the Degraded Pastures project, motivated its leaders to take a more relevant position in a new partnership project: "Sustainable use of agricultural land in Mesoamerica" (MESOTERRA). FUNDEBASE is promoting participatory and territorial approaches within this project. They estimate that, by the end of 2010, they will have worked with 625 small and medium scale farmers, and strengthened a network of more than 250 rural promoters in three municipalities of El Petén. In this new partnership, FUNDEBASE is applying the experiences in livestock production from the Degraded Pastures project, as well as strengthening platforms of community leadership at the municipal and departmental levels.

Farmers' interests MESOTERRA also covers livestock systems, so the methodological approach and training materials developed by the Degraded Pastures project are still relevant in this programme, and are being applied by new partners and communities with good success, leading to an improvement in farmers' livestock activities. Livestock farmers are interested in developing partnerships, and are very keen to diversify and/or intensify their traditional cattle systems, as they are faced with declining beef prices. Opportunities for exporting hair sheep to Mexico and support for reforestation are two of the options identified from the

Degraded Pastures project that farmers find interesting. At the same time, more information is needed about the interactions between livestock and forest plantations in order to revise the current regulations for reforestation incentives. Members of the different partnerships, NGOs, national and regional authorities, municipalities and the local associations of livestock farmers and of tree growers are working together to resolve these issues.

Further scaling up of the lessons learnt In early 2010, civil society organisations in the watershed of Lake Peten-Itza expressed their concern about the conservation of the lake and started an initiative called "All Together for the Lake". This platform included the local municipalities, the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock (MAGA), the National Forestry Institute (INAB), the National Council for Protected Areas (CONAP) and many members of the civil society. They are seeking to promote eco-friendly production systems in order to reduce erosion, preserve the volume and quality of water in the lake, improve the livelihoods of the communities and contribute to the conservation of natural resources and wildlife within the watershed. The members of the platform saw value in the approach developed by the Degraded Pastures project, and use it as a source of information and inspiration for promoting sustainable management in the watershed. They are making use of several mechanisms developed by the Degraded Pastures project, including Farmer Field Schools; the ways of generating field-based knowledge that can be used for building land use policy proposals; or also the way of providing efficient and effective technical assistance to livestock farmers.

More opportunities Projects have a fixed life span and spatial range. However, the dynamics of institutions and communities may create opportunities for the lessons learned from a project to be more widely applied, even when the project is finished. These experiences from Guatemala show that the opportunities for scaling up projects can greatly exceed the original expectations of the originators of a project. The training of technical staff and farmers, and a systematic sharing of experiences within a partnership, can open the doors for the lessons learned being much more widely spread.

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A couple of months ago, *The Economist* published a long article praising Brazilian agriculture, something that led to outbursts of patriotism, and to many colleagues expressing pride on our “success”. But how successful is this model that *The Economist* so generously praised? On closer examination, this article seems to have been “planted” by those interested in talking up the role of agribusinesses in my country, and in playing down the environmental and social impacts of our agricultural model.

The magazine says that the growth of large-scale farming in Brazil in recent decades shows its greater competitiveness. The truth is that the history of Brazilian agribusinesses is full of renegotiation processes and debt forgiveness. Official data, not mentioned by *The Economist*, show how taxpayers actually pay the bill. Equally absent are the figures of the latest agriculture census, released in September 2009, which show how family farming, though occupying only 24% of the total area, produces between 60 and 70% of the food that all Brazilians eat, and provides 8 out of 10 jobs in rural areas. And no mention is made of the relation between the praised model and the social and environmental problems we regularly hear of.

It is equally striking to read that other countries are recommended to follow Brazil's example. But the type of agriculture praised by the magazine does not produce foodstuffs. Rather, it produces commodities for export (soybeans, orange juice, sugar, coffee), mostly to meet the demands coming from livestock-producing countries. Is this a good recommendation for countries hoping to reduce hunger? These countries should also be told that Brazil imports two thirds of the fertilizers that it uses, or that Brazil has become the world's largest consumer of pesticides – despite the promise that GM crops would bring a reduction in the use of agricultural chemicals.

The magazine also refers to those who prefer small-scale farming systems and organic practices as “agro-pessimists”. This is another sign that the article was “planted”, as it is hard to believe that *The Economist* does not know about the increasing production and consumption levels of organic products, or about the strategic role which family farms play in producing foodstuffs all over the world. To label people who advocate for healthy food production systems, without a serious environmental impact, with a better distribution of wealth, or with more job opportunities, as “agro-pessimists”, shows, to say the least, a deeply flawed analysis – something uncommon in *The Economist*.

Francisco Roberto Caporal works as General Training Co-ordinator at the Ministry of Agrarian Development in Brasília. He lectures at the Universidade Federal Rural de Pernambuco, and is president of the Brazilian Agroecology Association, ABA-Agroecologia. E-mail: caporalfr@gmail.com



The Economist is wrong

Making Markets Work for Small-Scale Farmers?

Join us for a series of six provocative seminars September 2010 – June 2011



HIVOS, IIED, MAINUMBY and the Small Producer Agency in the Globalised Market Knowledge Programme are teaming up with lead agencies and organizations in the sector to host a series of seminars that really challenge conventional thinking and to tackle some controversial issues around the concept of “making markets work” for poor and small-scale farmers.

We are looking for lively discussion and challenging debate from participants in business, policy, civil society and including those working in small-scale production. We invite participants to stay engaged throughout the programme, perhaps attending one venue but continuing to take part online. Proceedings, papers and podcasts will be produced throughout.

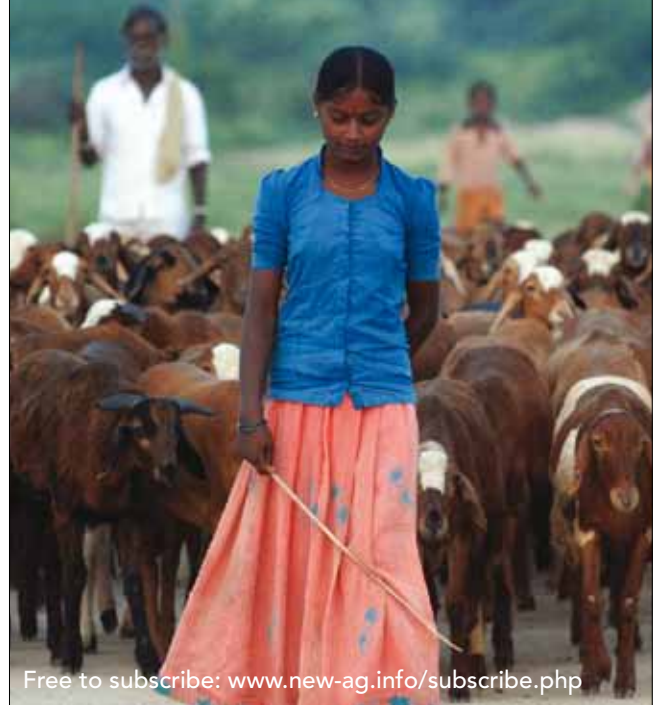
Seminars will be hosted in different cities and will encourage engagement and questions from a global audience by live streaming over the internet in English and Spanish.

To find out more about the six “provocations”, to register for any of the events or how you can join online please visit www.hivos.net, www.iied.org



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Trees and farming

Trees are important to farming in that they provide fruit, fodder and wood products, but they also provide many other services, both in their immediate environment and elsewhere (for instance in downstream catchments). One of the local benefits of trees was described at the recent Conference on Agriculture, Food Security and Climate Change, which took place in The Hague, where scientists presented “Evergreen Agriculture.” This approach, which involves integrating fertilizer trees into farm systems, has been shown to have the potential to double crop yields. Yet it is not always easy for farmers to adopt such an approach. For example, farmers without rights of tenure will not feel motivated to invest in planting trees that may take years to mature. In the next issue of *Farming Matters* we plan to look at the actual and potential benefits of agroforestry, and at how to maximise these.

At the same time, we shall also consider the wider context, and explore the relationships between small-scale farmers and trees and forested areas in a changing world. REDD (Reduced Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation) projects, for example, are currently being presented by some as an effective way of stopping deforestation and paying the local population for the services provided by their forests. Yet, critics say these mechanisms are little more than an expedient way for rich countries to buy their way out of their obligations to reduce their own

greenhouse gas emissions. Payment for Ecosystems Services (PES) is another mechanism used to reward farmers for providing environmental services. Here too, there are different views and experiences about their effectiveness and fairness. What do small-scale farmers think about such mechanisms? Do they benefit from them, or do such schemes imply losing control over their resource base?

We welcome your suggestions and contributions as articles, photographs, contacts of people you think have expertise in this area, or ideas for other topics you think we should address. Please write to Jorge Chavez-Tafur, editor, (j.chavez-tafur@ileia.org) before March 1st, 2011.



Photo: Karen Hampson

Enclosed CD-ROM

The Agrodok series of low-priced practical booklets published by Agromisa and CTA have now been compiled on CD-ROM – and *Farming Matters* is happy to help distribute it. Produced to commemorate 20 years of fruitful collaboration between these two institutions, the CD contains some 50 Agrodok titles in English, French and Portuguese, as well as other practical publications that deal with small-scale agriculture and rural development in the tropics. The booklets cover a wide range of topics including growing crops, livestock production and health, post-harvest technology and processing and natural resource management. To find out more about the Agrodok series and other publications by Agromisa and CTA, visit www.agromisa.org or www.cta.int.



Participate in our readers' survey!

Last month, we sent out a request for readers to participate in our online survey. We would still greatly appreciate your input! We want to know about you and your experiences with the magazine. Your responses will help us review the themes and sections in the magazine and, most importantly, the use given to each issue. Please help

us to improve the quality and outreach of *Farming Matters* by filling in our online readers' survey. You can access the survey through the following web-address: <http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/FMreaderssurvey2010>.

“We want to challenge parts of the discussion around smallholders and markets”

Small-scale farmers are being urged into international markets as a way out of poverty – and they need to be able to protect their interests and make effective choices. Bill Vorley of the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) is helping to co-ordinate a new Knowledge Programme on Small Producer Agency in the Globalised Market. How does this programme aim to help smallholders?

Interview: Anna Barnett

Why start a new programme on smallholder agriculture? What are the issues this is responding to?

Right now, a lot of expectations are piling up at the doorstep of smallholder farmers. They are expected to deliver global food security. They are expected to be engines of rural poverty reduction. They are expected to manage natural resources and adapt to climate change. And they are expected to organize themselves in regional and global markets. By building this agenda in the world of donors and international NGOs, we risk making the same mistake that has beset so many development interventions — treating poor people and small-scale producers as passive beneficiaries of an external agenda, rather than as agents in their own development and as economic actors in their own right. The purpose of the Knowledge Programme is to change this approach.

What does it mean for small-scale farmers to be agents in their own development?

We are defining agency as the capacity of small-scale producers to make effective choices that advance their interests, and to act on those choices.

Nowhere is that capacity needed more than in markets. There are a lot of promises out there about the ability of markets to “work for the poor”. In much of the world, globalisation is changing the way that markets operate, exposing small-scale producers to risks and opportunities. The price of food is going to be very volatile because of increased demand, changes in climate, speculation. There are NGOs in the countryside saying, you should be diversifying, growing high-value crops, forming a co-operative. There are companies looking for new sources of supply. There are new market instruments to pay land users for managing carbon in their soils and managing biodiversity on their farms. So agency is the knowledge and skills to find your own course through those risks and opportunities — and also to shape the rules that govern them.

So how does the Knowledge Programme tackle this?

A global learning network has been established of people who work with, support and lead small-scale producers. Not just researchers, but also farmer leaders, traders and businesspeople — there’s the former director of a large Indian retail company in

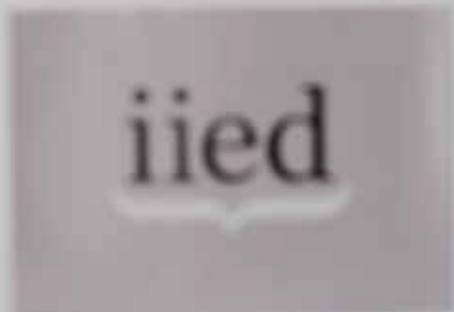


Photo: IIED

there, and there's an officer of a regional African farmers' federation, for example. The learning network is pursuing a programme of research and advocacy, bringing new voices and analysis to support smallholder agency and shape the global debate. The aim is to figure out some new pieces of the puzzle — for example, regional trade agreements, arrangements that empower small producers in supply chains, and ways that informal markets can make a difference.

You're talking about taking on sprawling global changes. How do you face the challenge of scale?

There are about half a billion small-scale farmers in the world. So it can seem ridiculous to say that we will, as just one organisation, support smallholders in finding their way through this tremendously challenging situation.

But the learning network model has a lot to offer. The overall programme is a collaboration between this learning network, IIED in the UK and HIVOS in the Netherlands. The network is led from Bolivia, with member groups in Peru, Nicaragua, Kenya, Uganda, India and Indonesia. Those groups also have their own networks in their countries. They're grounded at the grassroots, but the insights they develop can spread through the network. It's not so much top-down or bottom-up. It's more middle-out. It's been 18 months in development, and by the end of next year, I think we're going to have some really useful insights.

In Europe, you've also launched a series of "provocations" – debates around smallholder agriculture. What's the purpose of those?

We're well aware that a lot of development policies

are set in the headquarters of ministries and businesses. So you also need to shake the tree here in Europe. That's why we set up what we call "provocations", looking at some of the big assumptions in this area of markets and small-scale production.

Why "provocations"? Are you trying to stir people up?

We want to challenge parts of the discussion around smallholders and markets that have got stuck. For instance, the way that the development community paint two opposing development paths, one marked "rights-based" and the other "market-based". Or the division between how the development community look at smallholders and how they look at farm workers. Each "provocation" will be a three-hour session in a different European city, streamed over the internet in English and Spanish, and also communicated through *Farming Matters*.

How can small-scale farmers get involved with this work?

In the countries where we have a learning network member, smallholders can be involved through them. And we really encourage small-scale producers and their organizations, as well as businesspeople and policymakers, to connect with this programme through our websites at IIED and HIVOS – to help us bring new perspectives to this debate around smallholders and markets.

More information

For more information about the Knowledge Programme and the "provocations", please send Bill Vorley an e-mail: bill.vorley@iied.org

Can family farmers benefit from bio-fuels?

Opponents of the development of a bio-fuel sector make us believe that cultivation of fuel crops is radically different from agriculture as we know it. But why? Farmers don't really mind if their cash crop is cassava, tobacco, soy, coffee or jatropha. If jatropha pays better than coffee, the farmer will shift to jatropha. Should farmers only grow crops for food? Should we also ban cotton? A major part of the food crops produced today is not consumed by humans. More than 40% of world grain production is fed to animals, and this is increasing rapidly with the growth in meat consumption. The resources allocated to bio-fuels are small in comparison.

Many studies, such as FAO's 2009 report, "Small-scale bioenergy initiatives", have concluded that bio-fuel production can be beneficial to small-scale farmers. It is true that bio-fuels have contributed

to increasing food prices, which is particularly problematic for the many people who are dependent on cheap food. But food prices have been low primarily because developed countries have subsidised their farms for decades. This has made farming in developing countries a miserable way to earn a living, which has prompted young rural people to move out to the city – where they end up in slums. Higher prices for agricultural products are good for farmers in the long term, and bio-fuels remain an interesting option for breaking this negative spiral. While agro-corporations grab land for bio-fuel production, this is a separate problem that emerges because there is now an agricultural commodity that fetches a reasonable price, and therefore attracts entrepreneurs and investors. If we ban bio-fuels to reduce land-grabbing then the logical consequence is that we ban any crop that is attractive



to entrepreneurs, and condemn farmers to eternal poverty. Obviously this is absurd: land-grabbing is a political and juridical problem that needs to be dealt with outside the discussion about bio-fuels. Small-scale farmers should have the option to choose bio-fuels to develop their farming. Let them decide for themselves what makes sense to them.

Flemming Nielsen has been developing options for small-scale farming in Africa for two decades, and now works for the FACT Foundation.
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“Small-scale farmers should have the option to choose”

With the world's reserves of oil going down, governments and companies have started looking for alternatives. A global market for bio-fuels has been developing during the past ten years, which was one of the factors that contributed to the sharp increase in food prices in 2008. Since then, the cultivation of crops for bio-fuels, such as jatropha, has been a hot topic in the international development debate. Are bio-fuels an opportunity for small-scale farming? Or are they a threat? Join the debate at www.ileia.org > Open Forum



As part of the word “bio-fuels”, the prefix “bio” has a false positive connotation, implying a solution to the depletion of fossil fuels and to climate change. As we are talking about oil from agricultural crops, I prefer the word “agro-fuel” – and then their positive image disappears.

Agro-fuel corporations present Africa as a sick continent that has vast “marginal” lands waiting to be put to use. For example, industry claims that jatropha does well on degraded lands, such as those found in Swaziland, where a company, D1 Oils plc, told farmers that jatropha does not need water to bring income. It did not take too long for

them to find out the bitter truth: that they not only need expensive chemicals, but also to divert water from their food crops. In Ghana I recently spoke to farmers who feared a land use change from food cropping to agro-fuels production. And it's the industry who determines prices. African governments and local chiefs now hand over land to corporations, which turn it into large-scale fuel production fields for the export market. This is land where local people used to graze their animals or grow locally adapted crops. Farmers and pastoralists now risk becoming refugees in their own regions. In the process, GM giants are lining up with oil companies and contaminating our cassava and potato fields. The former UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, Jean Ziegler, classified agro-fuels as a “crime against humanity”. Ironically, the contribution of agro-fuels to the world's energy supply is marginal: the entire 2005 soy and maize harvest in the United States

could have only replaced 12% of the country's fossil fuel demands. Who really benefits from allotting poor people's land to the production of fuels for cars? The answer is clear. History has proven time and again that such “innovations” benefit corporations, while communities are left hungry and impoverished. I do not dispute the use of agro-fuels for their use within a community, as happens in Mali, where communities grow jatropha in hedges to meet domestic energy needs. But, all in all, the earth is too small to cultivate agro-fuels on a large scale. Our governments should scrape all agro-fuels targets and enforce international moratoriums on exports. Agro-fuels are a false solution that threaten the livelihoods of millions of poor people.

Mariann Bassey is the food and agriculture co-ordinator for Environmental Rights Action / Friends of the Earth in Nigeria. E-mail: mariann@eraction.org

“Who benefits from the production of fuels for cars? The answer is clear”

“Proof” vs “Improve”

Enhancing learning within certification schemes

Many small-scale farmers aim to certify their production processes, hoping to get better access to markets and higher prices. Different case studies have shown that strengthening the learning processes that are part of such certification schemes can help farmers follow more sustainable practices and attain a wider set of benefits.

Text and photos: Dave Boselie, Sabine Hiller and Davies Onduru





During the past decade, private sector companies, NGOs and public agencies in many countries have embraced standards-based certification schemes as a way of enhancing sustainability in agriculture and promoting pro-poor development. A set of standards determines what practices or activities are encouraged or forbidden in the production process, and is intended to improve the process and the end product, so that it meets specific quality demands. Once a set of standards is defined, much emphasis is placed on proving to consumers and other stakeholders that the standards are actually being met. The intention of a certification scheme is thus to give consumers the proof of principal and to assure them that the product they are buying meets their quality criteria. To convey their message, many certification schemes have launched consumer labels, and back these up with branding campaigns for those labels.

But experience has shown that certification is not a “silver bullet” for guaranteeing sustainable agriculture. Some standards (such as Fair Trade) are successful, although there appear to be many difficulties in expanding beyond niche market segments. Other standards have had a limited impact, or struggle with the non-compliance of farmers or other producers. In many cases, training, promoting field experiments and investments to improve ways of working can address these problems. These interventions can strengthen certification schemes by contributing to the establishment of more sustainable production processes and more resilient business models. This article draws on two of a larger number of impact studies of projects where small-scale farmers are involved in certification schemes. These studies show how learning processes contribute significantly to quality, yields and sustainability. We recommend that policy makers and NGOs pay more attention to supporting and encouraging such learning mechanisms and instruments.

Capacity building and certification One of the longest established projects we looked at was that of Fair Trade fruit production in the province of El Oro, Ecuador. In the early 1990s, fourteen banana producers in this region started the *Asociación de Pequeños Productores Bananeros “El Guabo”* (or AsoGuabo), and in 1998 they started selling Fair Trade-certified bananas to AgroFair, a European importer. Since then, the association has grown to become an export

organisation that includes fifteen local groups, with a total membership of more than 400 producers. In 2006 they exported 1,727 million boxes, representing 46% of AgroFair’s total banana sales. An in-depth study of the impact of 20 years of involvement with Fair Trade revealed a number of insights about the factors that have contributed to the success of this association.

In many ways, Fair Trade-certified producers appear to have achieved better results than their conventional competitors. Fair Trade farmers have substituted chemical fertilisers with organic ones, carried out cultural measures to control leaf spot disease (Sigatoka) and enhanced nutrient take-up by using more efficient irrigation systems. These changes have increased productivity levels. Major investments in cable ways and improved packing stations have helped to maintain quality while increasing the number of boxes sent abroad. Compared with their non-Fair Trade neighbours, AsoGuabo members have performed better in terms of yields, production volumes and banana quality. Moreover, they appear to be more inclined to invest money in improving production and packaging; as well as investing in environmental care (and also in health care, and many of them having even bought life insurance policies). As a result, Fair Trade farmers now own more assets and equipment, have better access to credit and better production strategies. In short, they have improved their livelihoods considerably more than their non-Fair Trade neighbours.

Could this all be attributed to the certification scheme? Yes and no. Given the number of farmers involved and its export volumes, it is clear that AsoGuabo has received considerable financial benefits from the certification scheme. The standards of the Fair Trade Labelling Organisation specify that buyers should pay a premium of US\$ 1 per box, and AgroFair follows these rules. Of this premium, AsoGuabo has used 20 percent for credit provision to enhance further technical improvements, and channelled 80 percent towards social and environmental programmes (i.e. school fees, childcare, health and social insurance). AsoGuabo has also received technical support from several non-governmental development organisations (including SNV and GTZ) for business development, to improve its quality management systems, and to make effective use of the premium funds. These additional resources have helped AsoGuabo go beyond the minimum requirements for complying with Fair Trade standards.

Beyond niche markets In response to criticisms that labels like Fair Trade only reach niche markets, new certification schemes are trying to help producers reach mainstream markets. One of the leading examples is the Rainforest Alliance programme, which certifies a range of product categories including fruit, coffee, cacao and tea. In 2006, the Kenya Tea Development Agency (KTDA), Lipton, ETC East Africa and some institutions affiliated to Wageningen University started working together to try to scale up adoption of Good Agricultural Practices, or GAPs (including, for example, a 7-day plucking interval, storing rain, keeping records, etc.). The partnership sought to combine certification with the Farmer Field School approach, with the aim of eventually reaching the 500,000 small-scale farmers who regularly work with KTDA. Four pilot field schools were set up and 120 farmers were invited to participate. The logic of the intervention was based on a number of assumptions. First, it assumed that Farmer Field Schools would broaden farmers' knowledge about tea production and that they would adopt the set of GAPs. It was also assumed that trained farmers

would share their know-how with their neighbours, who would also adopt better practices. This in turn would improve social, environmental and economic performance, which would provide a solid basis for obtaining Rainforest Alliance certification.

about GAPs and standards than their untrained colleagues. FFS attendees were twice as likely to put GAPs into practice. But non-attendees also applied GAPs: almost 40 percent of the non-FFS farmers in the region had applied information they had received from FFS-trained farmers. The pilot projects provided interesting results. FFS-trained farmers reported an increase in their incomes and also in their relative wellbeing. The trainings also increased knowledge, group cohesion and strengthened learning capacities. Much of this emerged as a result of the emphasis on the farmers' own interests and capacity for learning, key aspects of the FFS approach. Trained farmers were more aware of the importance of the environment for sustainable farming and, for example, collected rainwater more often than their non-trained counterparts. There was no significant evidence of an increase in tea production as a result of the FFS (probably because several KTDA factories were closed during this period as a result of social turmoil), but all the FFS-trained farmers considered their tea to be of a better quality.

These results led KTDA, Lipton, the Rainforest Alliance and the tea producers to decide to scale-up their efforts. The first attempt took place in 2008, when 20 FFSs (with 600 farmers) were established around the four KTDA factories that had participated in the pilot project. The second phase, in the early part of 2010, involved establishing 200 FFSs (with more than 5,000 participating farmers) supplying 60 tea factories. In 2010, Rainforest Alliance certification was granted to the first group of farmers, which allowed them to get better prices and market access in addition to higher yields and an improved environment.

Broader benefits These two cases illustrate how learning processes have contributed significantly to improving yields and product quality, as well as providing social benefits. The cases show that the "learning element" plays an extremely important role in improving production and making agricultural practices more sustainable. Certification schemes should not only work as mechanisms for guaranteeing transparency, but also include training programmes such as those seen in a Farmer Field School approach, complemented with monitoring routines or self-assessment procedures. By helping develop skills and knowledge, such learning routines multiply the benefits of the certification process.

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Certification schemes are more than mechanisms for guaranteeing transparency.

Impact assessment An evaluation of the pilot projects revealed that farmers who had attended the FFS had significantly more knowledge

Multi-stakeholder processes



Getting people who have polarised views to sit together, listen to and learn from one another is a major challenge. Take the palm oil industry, for example. A product of the humid tropics, palm oil is currently the most important and versatile vegetable oil on the world market and demand keeps increasing. However, the growth in demand has given rise to land conflicts, deforestation and biodiversity loss, issues that have shaped the global debate. Joyce Msuya shares some lessons from a recent major multi-stakeholder process led by the World Bank Group (WBG) to help improve its palm oil strategy.

Text: Mundie Salm Illustration: Fred Geven

The scale and format of these consultations were new for us,” explains Joyce Msuya, who oversaw the recent WBG palm oil consultations. Nine face-to-face workshops were held around the world with nearly 400 (out of 1,200 invited) people from civil society organisations, local groups, businesses, smallholders, government and research institutions participating. Thousands more took part in an electronic consultation. Msuya is happy with the amount of useful feedback received from all the stakeholders. The consultations brought up many concerns that will need to be addressed in the WBG’s new palm oil strategy, although as Msuya says, “we never set out to get 100 percent agreement between them all.” The facilitators’ synthesis report does show some agreement, as stakeholders made “strong calls for the WBG to take a strategic role in the sustainable development of the sector.”

Msuya identifies a number of factors that contributed to the success of the consultations. Firstly, “we designed it to be as dynamic, open and transparent as possible.” For example, a website was created to post summaries of all the consultations and reports immediately. An independent facilitator, using varied participatory methods, also helped set the tone. “We were lucky to get an excellent facilitator who was perceived as objective and neutral throughout the consultations. He helped us to take an iterative

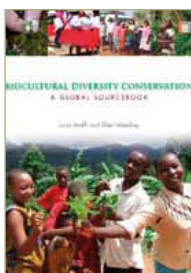
approach, which means that we kept adjusting the process as we learned more about what worked best and what not so well,” says Msuya. The “up-front and candid” face-to-face consultations played a key role in getting participants to voice their views while also being able to agree to disagree in a “mature way”. Msuya explains this further: “People needed to understand their connectivity. We all have more in common than differences – we all want the sector to be sustainable, inclusive and to reduce poverty”. The concept of partnership was also important – that all participants have a role to play, while recognising the many challenges that exist. ■

Contact Joyce Msuya, Principle Strategy Officer at the International Finance Corporation (IFC) at: jmsuya@ifc.org. Go to IFC’s palm oil framework and strategy website for more details on their multi-stakeholder consultations: <http://www.ifc.org/ifcext/agriconsultation.nsf/content/home>

Learn more about methodologies useful for multi-stakeholder process facilitation:

- World Café: <http://www.theworldcafe.com/>;
- Ritual Dissent: <http://www.cognitive-edge.com/method.php?mid=46>; and
- Technology of Participation: <http://www.ica-usa.org/index.php?pr=whatistop>.

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Biocultural diversity conservation: A global sourcebook

Luisa Maffi and Ellen Woodley, 2010. Earthscan, London, 275 pages.

Sahelian pastoralists keep lines of cattle which are different from those of European dairy farmers, while Brahmin rice growers in the Himalayas grow different varieties than those of their counterparts in Florida. The strong linkages between cultural diversity and biodiversity are analysed here in detail, showing how the two are interrelated and mutually supportive. This book is the result of a project run by Terralingua, which began with a worldwide survey in 2004. The book contains a thorough theoretical background and more than forty case studies showing different efforts to conserve biocultural diversity. The identification of gaps in terms of research, policies or education programmes form the basis for the authors' recommendations. This is truly a "first resource of its kind".



Making the most of agricultural investment: A survey of business models that provide opportunities for smallholders

Sonja Vermeulen and Lorenzo Cotula, 2010. IIED / FAO / IFAD / SDC, London. 106 pages.

This report immerses the reader in the amazing arena of agri-business models. Much attention is currently being given to "land grabbing" and the problems this presents to small-scale farmers, but what are the alternatives? Contracting, sharecropping or joint ventures are just a few of the possible models by which the global economy can take over your farm. All business models link businessmen with family farmers, who have very different negotiation power. No two situations are the same, and the devil is in the details. This book is a must-read for understanding the many ways in which farmers can benefit, or lose out, from their dealings with agri-business.



More rice for people, more water for the planet

Africare, Oxfam America and WWF-ICRISAT, 2010. WWF-ICRISAT Hyderabad, India. 40 pages.

Farmers all over the world are adapting the System of Rice Intensification (SRI) to their local conditions, and benefiting from higher yields. Interestingly, farmers are not waiting for scientists' confirmation before adopting, adapting and spreading the technology, but instead are running ahead of them. And, as the case studies in this booklet show, the benefits of SRI are not limited to higher yields and increased food security. By using less water, for example, SRI contributes to environmental sustainability. Richly illustrated, the cases from Mali, Vietnam and India are complemented with a general discussion of the lessons learned and recommendations that are aimed at governments, aid agencies and research organisations.



Livestock sector policies and programmes in developing countries: A menu for practitioners

Ugo Pica-Ciamarra, Joachim Otte and Chiara Martini, 2010. FAO, Rome, 150 pages.

It is difficult to overestimate the potential contribution that livestock can make to the livelihoods of small-scale farmers. Yet, for different reasons, policy-makers and practitioners seem to prefer to focus on crops and agriculture. This easy-to-read manual shows a wide range of very practical policy options which could help tap into these advantages – from policies related to land governance to those helping cope with risk; from health services to financing, and from market brokering to extension. The authors show how, with a bit of know-how and political will, it is possible to shape existing practises so that they benefit those most in need. This "policy menu" is not only interesting for rural policy makers, but also for farmers' organisations or for advocacy groups.



Gender and rights: A resource guide

Maitrayee Mukhopadhyay, Chris Hunter and Kirsty Milward, 2010. Royal Tropical Institute / Gendernet, Copenhagen.

If you think that women have equal rights to men in the programme or project in which you are working, then you may want to read this online resource guide. The authors describe common biases and (mis)interpretations, as well as day-to-day dilemmas (gender or women? equality or rights?), from which they present a set of recommendations for development programmes. Building on the existing normative framework (including, for example, international treaties), they analyse the main issues that influence how gender and rights approaches are operationalised: power issues, the role of social institutions, the legal structures needed, etc. This guide includes a set of briefings which summarise the main arguments about political participation, youth and children, violence, and the management of natural resources.



Strengthening people-led development: A joint effort to redefine participation

T.M. Radha (ed.), 2010. MISEREOR / AME Foundation, Bangalore, India, 56 pages.

The difference between theory and practice shows that it can be very difficult to achieve a truly participatory approach. Yet it is not impossible. During the past few years, several organisations in India and Bangladesh have shown very positive results in terms of farmer involvement and participation. This has led to higher yields, to new varieties being grown, or to stronger organisations. Most important, however, is that the approach they have been following has resulted in the empowerment of small-scale farmers, women or minorities. This document is the result of a thorough documentation process, in which these organisations have not only described, but also analysed their experiences in following a people-led development process.

More on learning

Many interesting books have appeared in the past few years, some of which can already be labelled as classics. One of this is "The fifth discipline fieldbook: Strategies and tools for building a learning organization" (Peter Senge et al., 1990), aimed specifically at "people who want to learn". Another useful publication is "Participatory learning and action: A trainers' guide", by Jules Pretty et al. (1995) – an easy to read, complete and very detailed guide for practitioners. It includes insights on adult learning, group dynamics, facilitation skills, and more than 100 practical exercises. A more

recent publication is "Social learning: Towards a sustainable world", edited by Arjen Wals (2007), in which different authors show how interactions between people provide the possibilities and opportunities for learning. "Shared learning" (ActionAid, 2007) points at the advantages of viewing learning as a social process, while in "Innovation Africa: Enriching farmers' livelihoods" (edited by Pascal Sanginga et al., 2009), the different contributions make a very strong case for the innovation systems approach, stressing the importance of linkages between stakeholders and organisations. Another



document worth reading is FAO's "Education for rural people" (D. Acker and L. Gasperini, 2009), a synthesis of lessons learned by the Global Partnership. Readers can also find much other interesting material on FAO's Education for Rural People (ERP) website, or also others summarised in the GTZ's "Thematic readers".



Teaching teachers

Agroecology in secondary schools in Argentina

A group of university researchers has been working on an agricultural education model designed to meet the many challenges facing Argentinean agriculture. Rather than just adding “green content” to the existing curriculum, working with the teachers in rural schools in the province of Buenos Aires is showing very promising results.

Text and photos: Santiago J. Sarandon and Claudia C. Flores

Agriculture makes a significant contribution to Argentina's national economy. In recent decades, both large and small farms have managed to increase output, but this has come with serious side-effects. Farmers, researchers and policy-makers now face the challenge of increasing yields and outputs, but in an economically viable, environmentally sound and socially acceptable manner.

Meeting these aims requires professionals who are trained for this purpose. But for several decades, Argentina's agricultural education model has focused on approaches that increase reliance on external inputs, and has ignored the social and environmental costs of this. As a result, the profile of those currently finishing their studies seems largely inadequate. While environmental issues are being considered in many universities, there is much less emphasis on them in technical institutes or in secondary schools. Agricultural schools in Argentina play a twofold role: they serve as secondary education institutions and prepare students for later life, often working in agriculture. The Province of Buenos Aires has more than 50 agricultural schools, with approximately 17,000 students. As only a small percentage of them go on to university, their agricultural understanding (and future activities) are shaped by the perspective and focus presented in school.

A new approach Several researchers at the Universidad Nacional de La Plata came to the conclusion that a new and comprehensive approach to agricultural education is needed, focusing on a new way of thinking and of understanding reality. This approach needs to go beyond incorporating "green content" in the school's curriculum. Rather, courses should follow a comprehensive vision that includes biological, physical, chemical, ecological and social aspects, including an economic, political and cultural perspective. We realised that this could only come by working together with all those involved – in particular with those in charge of the classes in these schools. So the Faculty of Agricultural Sciences and Forestry of our university decided to design and implement a course to train teachers for this role.

Since 1998, this course has focused on analysing the problems resulting from the predominance of conventional agriculture practices; providing alternatives on the basis of a holistic and systemic perspective; and providing methodological tools for diagnosing, assessing and monitoring farms and ecosystems. We are especially interested in building an innovative pedagogical approach, involving teachers – and, via them, students – in the process of

understanding rural issues and finding solutions to them.

Modular courses This course is structured so that teachers in rural areas are able to attend. Run once every year, each course lasts for approximately 4 months, and normally has between 20 and 35 school teachers as students. Continuous presence is not required: the course involves a one-day session every month, in one of the schools where the students work. All participants receive the documents in advance so they can come prepared, and discuss the ideas during the session. Each literature pack includes a guide and a questionnaire that students must complete and hand in. The sessions are used to discuss the ideas and theories, to clarify doubts or to respond to specific questions. Participants are encouraged to compare the theories with their own experiences. The main objective of every session is to provide a forum for discussion. To this end, students are divided into groups, trying to integrate different backgrounds and experiences. When possible, field trips are made to allow students to look at and assess local production systems, their scope and limitations, and then prepare



Field visits complement the reading material and enrich the learning process.

a report which is used in the group discussions. The modules encourage the active participation of all students. At the end, all of them must submit a proposal, showing how they plan to introduce an agroecological focus in their own school.

Main achievements Having worked with 150 school teachers since we started offering this course, we are very pleased to see a high degree of motivation and a lot of interest in following this course. The structure of the course has proved to be flexible and adaptable to the needs of those

participating in it – all of whom continue working as teachers. As one of them said, “We do not have to go to university, but rather the university comes to us.” This structure has made it easier for them complete the course. The course provides students good reading material and relevant information that is written in Spanish, and which all relates to Argentinean rural areas. And, in addition to the literature, all participants value the opportunity of going out into the field with the whole group (or hosting the group in their own schools) to look at and discuss real concrete problems. This makes it much easier to understand the concepts within agroecology. Quoting another student, “This course has given us the tools to understand the problems we were seeing in our area and to see the logic of an agroecological alternative.” Overall, the results of our work with school teachers have been positive. In some cases, such as in the schools in Bavio and Abasto, we have seen teachers adding practical activities to their day-to-day programmes. In others (e.g. Tres Arroyos) a group of teachers succeeded in changing the entire curriculum and the mode of education in their school, taking the agro-ecosystem rather than the farm as the point of departure. And we have also seen changes in the communities where the schools are located. A very clear change has been seen in terms of the “demand” for information on agroecology and sustainable agriculture. Three schools asked us to repeat the course the following year.

Highly rewarding But while the achievements have been encouraging, this approach to training teachers, and of mainstreaming agroecology among secondary schools, still faces difficulties. One of the main drawbacks is the preference that students have for “content”, disregarding other skills or attitudes (such as critical thinking or analytical skills), which are just as important. Another difficulty is the lack of experienced lecturers for this kind of courses, or a lack of good examples at the local level.

One of the aspects that have hindered implementation of these ideas in school curricula is the general idea that agroecology is limited to growing crops without chemical inputs, and that it is a recipe which can only be followed in very small areas. This can be a serious drawback in, say, the Argentinean pampas. Despite such limitations and difficulties, developing and teaching it has been a highly rewarding, enriching and motivating experience. We have been able to narrow the distance between the university and the rural areas and, in this way, contribute to the development and dissemination of concepts and ideas about sustainable agriculture.

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What’s going on in Brazil?

A recent survey carried out in Brazil found out that, throughout the country, there are 110 courses on agroecology available at different levels – including several which are part of MSc or PhD programmes. This seems to be good news, as it is probably a world record. But ABA-Agroecologia (the Brazilian Agroecology Association) is also somewhat concerned. The main reason is the fear that the teachers running these courses may be following the same pedagogical and methodological approaches that are prevalent in other formal education and extension departments. ABA-Agroecologia has started asking several questions. How do these teachers prepare themselves? Do these new courses follow a systemic and holistic perspective? Is sufficient attention given to the relationship between different disciplines? Do they pay attention to local knowledge, or to local innovation processes?

In an attempt to answer these questions, we have started a process that aims to describe and analyse all these courses and programmes. The intention is not to control, or compare courses, but rather to generate a nation-wide debate which can help us define the best way to support universities, schools and institutions, and improve our work. Our idea is to follow the same model which brought together many different experiences during 2009, which culminated with the VIIth Agroecology Congress held in November in Curitiba. This process involved a series of meetings that took place in different regions, and a detailed documentation and analysis of each experience. With financial support from the federal government, we are sure that this process will be successful.

Ma. Virginia de Almeida Aguiar, Department of Education and Rural Extension, Universidade Federal Rural de Pernambuco. E-mail: mvirginia@gmail.com

Farmer Field Schools take root in Egypt

Previous articles in this magazine have reported on the Fayoum Farmer Field School (FFS) project in Egypt. In March 2003, Jaap van der Pol showed how the Asian FFS-model needed adaptation in Egypt as local extensionists were used to working with individual farmers (not with groups) and to discussing rather than doing real-life experiments. In September 2008 Hans Feijen reported how the Egyptian FFS started with a "neutral" agriculture agenda, and then slowly introduced urgent social issues. What's the situation today?

According to Maaïke van Hoeflaken, Team Leader of the Fayoum Farmer Field Schools project, most schools have now moved well beyond the original agricultural curriculum, and routinely start with a participatory needs assessment. While participants want to discuss all sorts of agronomical and livestock issues, they also want to talk about things like waste management in townships. At least 60 percent of all field schools are mixed or for women only and, in such schools, health issues such as birth control or female circumcision are high on the agenda, even if they are culturally sensitive issues. Those in charge have contacted specialised organisations for their support in dealing with these issues.

Besides training farmers, networking with authorities has become an important part of the FFS curriculum. This is particularly effective when the requests are in line with government programmes. For example, the government realises that the population in the region should not grow further because of water scarcity. An FFS that wants to discuss issues like family planning now finds it easier to access the services of a specialised government programme. But this relationship also works the other way round: when the government comes up with a specific programme, such as one to control avian flu, the FFS network provides a good vehicle to spread their message.

The National Rural Development Strategy says that rural development is about more than just agriculture.

The benefits seen in Egypt are partly due to the emphasis given to women's issues.

Photo: Maaïke van Hoeflaken

The ministries for health, education, and family and population have all approached the FFS network to make use of its outreach. Last May, Egypt's First Lady, Suzanne Mubarak, visited the programme. FFSs were included in the national extension policy and the government created a separate budget line for them. The Fayoum Agricultural Directorate has been appointed as the lead agency for spreading the methodology all over the country, for which it is creating a "FFS Centre of Excellence." Five more governorates are planning to introduce a FFS programme – showing that farmer field schools are becoming institutionalised in Egypt. (FvS)

For more information, send an e-mail to Maaïke van Hoeflaken: fayoumffs@gmail.com



Working together brings many benefits, especially in terms of new ideas. These are some of the many examples where collaboration, in different parts of the world, is enhancing learning.

Uganda

Learning around online repositories

Open to all organisations and individuals interested in sharing agricultural knowledge, experiences and information, the Uganda Exchange Group started at the end of 2009. Since then, it has attracted members from all over the country, including extension workers, researchers, NGOs, rural entrepreneurs, public



Photo: TECA

institutions, farmers, and students. It is now hosting the new interactive TECA, (Technologies for Agriculture), an online information, knowledge and communication system for

agricultural technologies and proven best practices. This is a pilot FAO initiative that provides an opportunity for researchers and end users to exchange information and learn from each other. TECA is unique in that it provides information about technologies that have been tested by small-scale farmers, and which can be easily replicated in similar farming systems. At the moment, members of the Uganda Exchange Group are interested in drawing specific lessons in relation to the use of the platform for sharing information, but one is already clear: the need to recognise the importance of sharing information. These lessons will be used to help to set up and facilitate similar exchange and discussion groups in other countries. Thematic discussions and exchange groups on issues such as beekeeping have already been started.

To find out more, contact Estibalitz Morras, Karin Nichterlein, or Bruce Kisitu, at teca@fao.org, or visit the TECA site: www.fao.org/teca

Colombia

Peer-to-peer training

Several months ago, thirteen young women and men from the community of Palenque, in northern Colombia, travelled for ten days around the districts of Santander and Cauca, to visit four micro-enterprises. They were taking part in one of the 40 “Learning Routes” organised by PROCASUR (the Regional Programme for Rural Development Training) in different countries. These Learning Routes are an innovative approach to facilitate exchanges of knowledge and skills between farmers, development projects and private organisations. The thirteen visitors were interested in seeing how their hosts commercialised their products and how they organised themselves to increase profits. After ten days of talks and field visits, they returned

to Palenque with a set of concrete action plans for their own crops and micro-industries. Since then they have been implementing these plans, with some seeing their incomes rise by 35 percent. While those being visited “realised how much we knew”, the Palenque participants were happy to “learn from those like us, with similar problems”. Learning Routes expose participants to case-based experiences and best practices, and use peer exchange to scale up encouraging approaches.

To find out more, contact Ariel Halpern, at PROCASUR, Santiago, Chile. E-mail: ahalpern@procasur.org



Photo: Lorena Ardito

South Africa

Cherry peppers in Potshini and Obonjaneni

Looking for crops which would help them earn higher incomes, several farmers from the Okhahlamba district of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, had talks with a commercial farmer who suggested they could grow “cherry peppers” (*Capsicum*), which could be processed and sold together with his own production. With help



Photo: Manori Wijesekera

from the Farmer Support Group of the University of KwaZulu-Natal, two groups of farmers from Potshini and Obonjaneni decided to try growing it in their fields. They signed a partnership agreement with the commercial farmer, who agreed

to provide the required inputs at cost, technical advice, and to help them transport the produce to the processing unit. At the end of the season, a detailed evaluation showed very positive results, in terms of both crop performance and net incomes: “cherry pepper” proved to be a viable cash crop for this area. With different stakeholders involved, this experiment included both a technical and a social component. Farmers tried a new crop, and proved that they could produce it successfully. But, through the process, they also developed a new relationship with the commercial farmer. While interactions between them in the past had been limited to discussions (and conflict) regarding the movement of animals from the community to the adjacent farm to seek grazing, working together allowed them to try out new ideas, develop expertise, and increase their incomes.

To find out more, contact Nono Shezi, at the Farmer Support Group, Scottsville, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. E-mail: shezin@ukzn.ac.za

Ethiopia

Empowering farmers' organisations

Established in 2007, the Ethiopian Learning Alliance is a joint initiative between the member organisations of Agri-ProFocus and their Ethiopian partners, and it is designed to empower farmers' organisations in their dealings with value chains. The Alliance involves a learning-by-doing approach to value chain development, in which farmer organisations and service providers get together for a series of workshops and assignments. In the process they identify and map the main actors, establish stronger relationships and build engagements, and monitor and evaluate all their activities. Several farmers' organisations that have been through the process have subsequently developed specific business plans. They have also found different ways of containing losses or increasing incomes by working together as a farmer-marketing organisation (FMO). In 2009, for example, farmers in Maja Gero had a bad harvest due to an extremely short rainy season, so prices went up. The FMO allowed members to buy grain at a below market price, in exchange for their

share of the group's dividend. The opposite happened in Tulubulu this year. Farmers had bumper harvests of teff, which lowered prices. The FMO would have incurred a loss selling it on the open market. Farmers kept their grain for consumption and agreed to deliver the same amount of grain + 10 percent by the next harvest, thus saving the organisation from a financial blow and benefiting everybody.

To find out more, contact Wim Goris and Eva Smulders, Agri-ProFocus Ethiopia, at wgoris@agri-profocus.nl, or visit <http://apf-ethiopia.ning.com>



Photo: Eva Smulders

Learning to steer differently

What do we want to learn from each other? The Belgian organisation Vredeseilanden (referred to as VECO in its partner countries) has developed a new planning, learning and accountability system with its partners in Indonesia, with the aim of learning more from their field experiences and integrating these lessons into the steering of the organisation. This has worked – although they have also found out that becoming a learning organisation requires endurance and determination.

Text: Mireille Vermeulen



"We now gather information to make sense of it, to learn and to adapt plans." Photos: Steff Deprez

Steff Deprez was working with VECO Indonesia when he was asked in 2007 to work out a new planning system with his team. What followed was an intensive year of researching and experimenting, for which he relied on Outcome Mapping, a planning and evaluation approach developed by the International

Development Research Centre in Canada as an alternative to the often used Logical Framework. Outcome Mapping starts by examining what actors within a certain sector or value chain do, and what do they wish to change. "Outcome mapping is another way of looking, based on a different theory of change," says Deprez, "but that is not enough to make it work. You can only achieve intended changes with a good

learning and monitoring system. So we also developed a new planning, learning and accountability (PLA) system for developing sustainable agriculture chains.”

Information with a purpose

A key feature of the PLA system is that it creates an organisational space so that farmers, other partners in a value chain and VECO get together on a regular basis and discuss what has been done, share experiences, evaluate the effectiveness of their activities and take decisions for the future. These chain meetings are well structured in terms of gathering information and sense making. “Instead of collecting a lot of data to satisfy donors, we wanted information for steering the joint programme”, explains Deprez, “and a shared report containing the output of these bi-annual chain meetings gives us more valuable information than all those 50-page partner reports”. Not every organisation is used, or equipped, to deal with this kind of planning and reporting, so, under the new system, VECO partners are free to use their own reporting formats internally. VECO takes responsibility for translating the PLA system reports into the language or format preferred by donors.

Clarity After a few chain meetings, partners became acquainted with the process. Adopting PLA has improved the relationship between VECO Indonesia and its partners, as it demands more clarity about the roles of all those involved. As one of the NGO partners said in relation to their experience with Outcome Mapping and the PLA system, “The new programme framework made it easier for us to see the focus of the programme. Our roles as local NGOs were spelt out, and our goals became more specific and focused.” It made all partners more aware of their own roles and responsibilities, and also gave them a new perspective on what they were doing. According to a VECO Indonesia staff member, “Under the old way of doing things, if they (our partners) did not achieve the planned outputs, it would mean they had failed. Now they can still show progress, and this has encouraged them to speak more openly with us about their weaknesses.”

Flexibility According to Steff Deprez, the best thing about PLA is that it permits real learning: “We now gather information for what it is meant for: to make sense of it, to learn and to adapt plans. It gives us all more flexibility.” Deprez admits that it is merely a question of “sitting down and asking the right questions. You can do that in every organisation or style of management. But often monitoring is lacking or inadequate, and then projects fall back on the basics of the original framework. That makes

reporting more like filling in boxes, while reality is more complex.”

The process of learning and monitoring that VECO has developed and implemented is still fragile: it requires continuous investment and being alert to make it work. Participative tools and knowledge about facilitation need to be regularly reviewed; people’s capacities need to be strengthened, the organisation and management needs to stay fully committed. But, as with all partnerships for learning, it is challenging and worthwhile. This is clear to all those involved.

More Information

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How to PLAN outcomes

The Planning, Learning and Accountability (PLA) system is a learning-oriented monitoring and evaluation system that provides a framework for systematic data collection, interpretation and documentation. It consists of well-defined procedures, reporting formats and keeping a detailed annual calendar.

The actions of all the partners within the value chain are central to the learning and monitoring process. In the agricultural value chain programme these partners are local service-providing NGOs, farmer or producer organisations and private chain actors. These partners all agree on the desired changes in behaviour, relationships and activities that will contribute to the objective of the programme, and they jointly set indicators for achieving these. During the bi-annual chain meetings each partner tells the others about what they have been doing, the intentions and the results achieved. The partners jointly evaluate the activities, share information, discuss roles and agree on joint interventions. The minutes of these meetings form the basis of a shared report from VECO and its partners. The meetings last for two or three days.

The theory behind Outcome Mapping rests on the idea that monitoring and evaluation should be focused on the level of partners’ activities (their sphere of influence). But VECO also wants to monitor changes in the value chain (the sphere of interest) in order to understand the impact of the programme, the effectiveness of the support it provides to partners and its internal organisational practices (the sphere of control).

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Creative solutions,
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Almost 50 years ago a UN goal was formulated that still hasn't been realised today: clean drinking water for all. By contrast, in less than 10 years, the corporate world has succeeded in rolling-out wireless networks and cell phone technology all over the planet. Stories of people, rich and poor, becoming dependent on, and even addicted to, cell phones are plentiful. In South Africa I was recently told stories of young women with HIV/AIDS who get an extra government allowance to support their children, and use it to feed their phone before they feed their children. In the meantime, about 425,000 cell phones are discarded everyday in the United States alone!

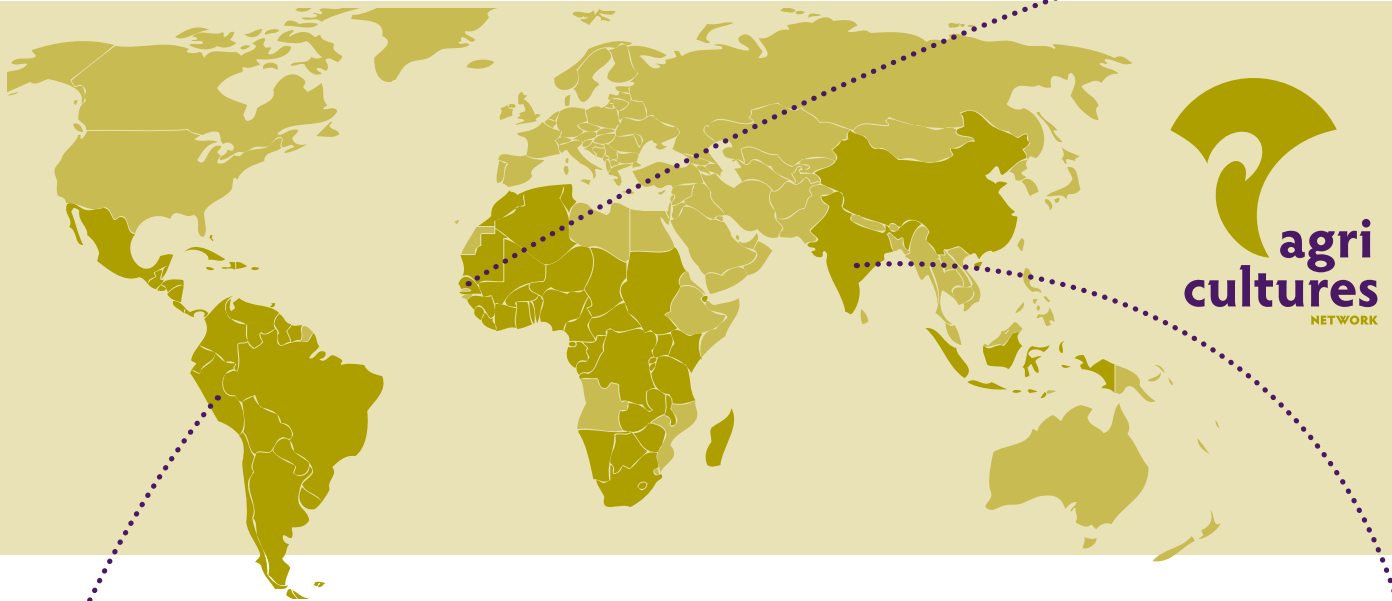
I am using the cell phone as a metaphor for non-sustainability, an illustration of the impact of the high-speed train of economic globalisation that we all seem to be riding. But is there a way out? The nature of the sustainability crisis – which involves high levels of complexity and uncertainty – suggests that people will need to develop capacities and qualities that will allow them to contribute to alternative behaviours, lifestyles and systems, both individually and collectively. "Learning", rather than consuming, is increasingly seen as the key in the transition towards a more sustainable world. Learning-based change, anticipatory learning, collaborative learning, community problem-solving and social learning, represent just a few related concepts that are connected to our quest for sustainability. It is through various forms and blends of learning in formal, non-formal and informal settings, that a more resilient society can emerge: one that has both the desire and the capacity to challenge existing systems, routines, norms and values, and to create alternative and more sustainable ones.

Social learning appears to have merit here as it emphasises the cultivation and utilisation of pluralism, including a pluralism of values. Put simply: people learn more from each other when they are different from one another than when they are like-minded. But this only happens when there is "chemistry" or social cohesion within a group. It is easy to see that the homogenising tsunami of economic globalisation which privileges one type of values - material ones - and which is supported by omnipresent ICTs, undermines the potential for this type of learning. We need to start thinking in terms of "learning configurations" consisting of multiple actors, groups, organisations and networks that may not immediately see the obvious connections that they have with each other, since each occupies its own niche and represents its own interests. Their commonalities and complementarities can be discovered by focusing on a jointly perceived sustainability challenge. Such emerging practises may offer clues and inspiration for similar initiatives elsewhere.

Arjen Wals is Professor of Social Learning and Sustainable Development at Wageningen University. A central issue in his work is how to create conditions that support new forms of learning. His most recent publications include "Higher education and the challenge of sustainability (2004), and "Social learning: Towards a sustainable world" (2007).
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Learning our way out



Just before our previous issue was distributed, the World Bank published the results of its “multi-country study on large scale agricultural land acquisition and investment”. This study responded to a “lack of reliable information”, and to “the need for good empirical evidence to inform decision makers”. What is the evidence they provide? Is this report complete? We asked different network members for their opinion.



Teobaldo Pinzas: “We’re going back in time” The World Bank’s “Rising global interest in farmland” report talks of more than 400

projects with a median size of 40,000 hectares, of which only 21 percent are found in Latin America. Perhaps as a result of the report’s global perspective, or because of the far greater number of transactions in other continents, the specific situation in Latin America is not shown in detail: in particular, that what is happening now seems to have happened before. According to Teobaldo Pinzas, director of ETC Andes, in Peru, it is important to look at the social processes which most Latin American countries went through after the 1960s to understand the dangers behind the investments and acquisitions we see today. “Greedy grabbers, neo-

liberal dummies and short-sighted or venal governments are turning their backs on the bloody history of the struggle for the right to land in Latin America, and by so doing are planting the seeds of political instability in a not too distant future.” Investments are not only focusing on agricultural land, but also on areas which should receive special protection status. Huge tracts of the Peruvian Amazon are earmarked for forestry exploitation, gas and oil drilling and large scale agriculture, and the “land grabbers” do not only come from far away countries – in fact most of them are Peruvians.

KVS Prasad: “These are short term ‘solutions’” According to KVS Prasad, executive director of the AME Foundation in Bangalore, studies like the one just finished by the World Bank should pay more attention to what is taking place in a context of industrial and economic growth. In countries like India, this is important: there seems to be a general acceptance of the fact that industries take agricultural land, as one of the necessary requisites for the country’s high rates of economic growth. State governments are lifting restrictions on the purchase



Photo: KVS Prasad

of farmland, often presenting these as “wastelands” in the hope of attracting investors. The impacts on food production are serious. But, as Prasad points out, it is also naïve to think that the millions of farmers who lose their land will be absorbed by the mainstream development processes and that they will be provided alternative livelihood opportunities. “Our authorities are only looking for short-term solutions, not for long-term development priorities, and this creates a very challenging scenario”. The authorities also seem to ignore the fact that the majority of those losing their lands farm in fragile ecosystems. Drawing on the words of the Indian food policy analyst and journalist, Devinder Sharma, Prasad says that “rather than jobs and a share of the produce, they will be left with the environmental tab

of industries and intensive farming: devastated soils, dry aquifers and an ecological system damaged by chemical infestation”. It is ironic that, at the same time, many Indian companies are looking for farmlands outside the country so as to invest there.

Bara Gueye: “Local investors follow national governments”

The political crisis that followed the lease of 1.3 million hectares to DAEWOO Logistics in Madagascar in 2008 sent a signal to other African countries about the need for more transparency and inclusion in land transactions. But despite this signal, land acquisitions still continue, and it is not only companies like DAEWOO but, as the World Bank’s report shows, also local investors. Bara Gueye, director of IED Afrique, in Senegal, finds it important to know who these investors are and what role are they playing. “In Francophone West Africa we call them *les nouveaux acteurs* as most of them, albeit originating from rural areas, are living in cities, are high-level civil servants or from the private sector, and all want to reinvest money earned from business or political rent into agriculture”. Some of

them invest in livestock or grow crops or vegetables, while many are engaged in bio-fuel production, a sector that is strongly supported by the government. Senegal plans to put 320,000 hectares of land under cultivation to produce more than 1.1 million litres of jathropa refined oil by 2012. The government has put forward the potential positive impact of bio-fuels on the country’s balance of payments and the reduction of vulnerability and dependence on the world’s volatile oil prices. “But nothing is said of the negative impacts in terms of the exclusion of poor farmers from the most productive lands, or the risk of jeopardising our country’s food security”. And most transactions are still not open and transparent, which makes it impossible to get an accurate figure on the total number of land acquisitions.



Photo: Fernando Bello

COLOPHON

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"IN TERMS OF LEARNING, IMPACT IS DIRECTLY RELATED TO DIVERSITY. OUR CHALLENGE IS TO MANAGE THIS DIVERSITY"

Peter Ballantyne, Head, Knowledge Management and Information Services, ILRI, at the "Share Fair" held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, October 2010.

"JUST AS WE HAVE SPENT THE PAST FEW YEARS MAKING THE CASE THAT CLIMATE CHANGE IS ABOUT PEOPLE, NOT JUST POLAR BEARS, SO WE NOW HAVE TO ARGUE THAT MEETING THE FOOD PRODUCTION CHALLENGE IS ABOUT POOR PEOPLE, ESPECIALLY FARMERS AND LABOURERS, NOT JUST CLEVER TECHNOLOGY"

Duncan Green, Head of Research for Oxfam GB, on the "From poverty to power" blog. October 18th, 2010.

"The challenge can only be overcome by working in partnership with the continent's smallholder farmers... If we stand together – governments, civil society, the private sector, the scientific community and farmers – and sustain our efforts, a unique African Green Revolution is within our grasp"

Former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, talking at the 2010 World Food Prize Borlaug Dialogue, Des Moines, Iowa, October 14th, 2010.

"Wal-Mart plans to sell US\$ 1 billion worth of food grown by a million small and medium farmers and train them to use water, pesticides and fertilizer more efficiently"

The Wall Street Journal describes the interest of the world's largest retailer in "improving its corporate image by reducing its environmental footprint". Their efforts include training farmers on sustainable ways of farming. "Wal-Mart pursues new environment effort", October 15-17, 2010.

"AS CHANGE-MAKERS WE SHOULD NOT TRY TO DESIGN A BETTER WORLD. WE SHOULD MAKE BETTER FEEDBACK LOOPS"

Owen Barder, Visiting Fellow at the Center for Global Development in Washington D.C., on the "Owen abroad" blog: "What can development policy learn from evolution?", October 29th, 2010.



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