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Enabling poor rural people to overcome poverty

Agriculture Can
Lead Poverty
Reduction **3**

.....
4 Rural Women
Confront Hunger
Gap

.....
Small Farms **8**
Fertile Ground For
Investment

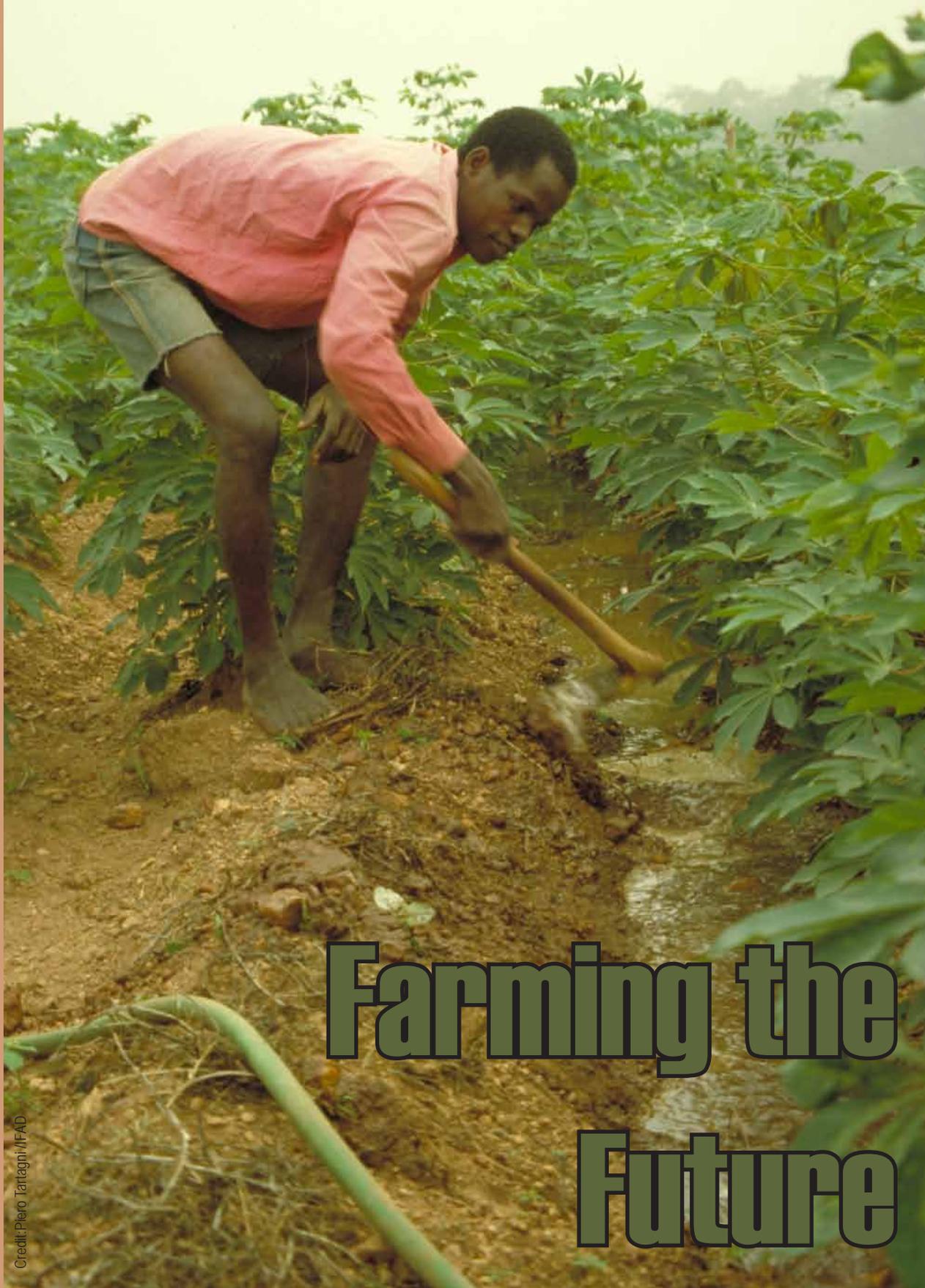
.....
12 Cultivating
Rural
Prosperity in
Cameroon

.....
15
New Dawn for
Small Farmers ?

17 L'entreprenariat
féminin
s'active dans la
production des
fruits et légumes

.....
18
Quand la météo
lutte contre
la faim!

.....
24
Column:
Kanayo Nwanze



Farming the Future

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Enabling poor rural people to overcome poverty

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AGRICULTURAL NEWS BRIEFS

Livestock Herders Plan Ahead

HAMDALLAYE, Niger - The cows Djibo Hama looks after belong to someone else, but he is diligent. Anticipating a severe shortage of good grazing in 2010, he secured cattle feed for the 35 that remain.

"I have purchased a large quantity of feed for my cattle, with the proceeds from selling two cows from the herd I take care of - with the owner's consent," says Hama, a Fulani herder from the rural commune of Hamdallaye in Western Niger.

According to statistics from the Ministry of Livestock and Animal Husbandry in Niamey, the Nigerien capital, the fodder deficit this year in Niger reached 16 million tons of dry matter, posing a threat to the survival of roughly two-thirds of Niger's livestock.

Hama says the suggestion to stockpile food for his herd came from the Niger Association for the Revitalisation of Livestock (known by its French acronym, AREN), a non-governmental organisation based in Niamey, which seeks to develop new initiatives to enable farmers to adapt to climate change.

Weather Changes Turn Farming into Gamble with Nature

DAR-ES-SALAAM - Changes in weather patterns have turned agriculture into a gamble with nature for Tanzanian farmers. Prolonged droughts and floods have made the lives of small-scale farmers, who don't have access to irrigation, extremely difficult.

In Tanzania, where the economy is largely driven by agriculture, the largely poor, rural population has become even more vulnerable.

According to the national Ministry of Agriculture (MoA), agriculture accounts for up to 60 percent of the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP). More than 80 percent of the population works in the sector, which makes up 60 percent of the country's exports.

A 2009 report by the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) warns that Tanzania has two decades to adapt its agriculture to climate change or risk major dents in its GDP. Otherwise, GDP loss could amount to one percent within the first 20 years and rise to between 5 and 65 per cent over the next 75 years, says Muyeye Chambwera, who co-authored the report.

Small-scale Farmers Say They Just Need Land

KINSHASA - The more than 800 small-scale farmers belonging to co-operatives around the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) capital, Kinshasa, could produce enough rice and vegetables for the capital's estimated eight million inhabitants, according to the country's agriculture ministry.

However the farmers say they cannot effectively work the land without any long-term prospects or stability. The land is being steadily being taken away from them and sold off for new construction, especially in Mimoza, Maluku, Mpsa, Bandalungwa, N'Sele and Kingabwa, which are rural areas around the capital.

The situation is especially sad for Françoise Makulu, a vegetable farmer. "For over five years, I produced more than 200 kilos of vegetables each season on just 100 square metres of land, at the nursery across the road from the Kinshasa Higher Institute of Commerce," she said.

"But a year ago, the nursery was sold to Lebanese traders who, in a matter of weeks, have put up four buildings there," she tells IPS.

"My annual harvest allowed me to meet all the food needs of my family, to pay rent for the house we live in and to pay all my children's school fees," says Makulu.

To survive, she now sells fish bought from wholesalers at the market in Selembao, a Kinshasa district.

Yet according to Norbert Bashengezi, the minister of agriculture, fisheries and livestock, "the government is ready to help these small-scale farmers produce more crops at a cheaper price, especially as over 80 percent of them are women."



Credit: Horst Wagner/ IFAD

>>> Mauritania- Agricultural Rehabilitation Programme II ... A women's co-operative in Mitkay, 25 km from Rosso, work on their garden by planting trees for wind breaking.

Agriculture Can Lead Poverty Reduction

Sabina Zaccaro interviews MOHAMED BEAVOGUI, IFAD director for West and Central Africa

Agriculture is vital to the economies of West and Central African countries, but poverty remains a reality in the region's rural areas.

The urban population has grown significantly over the last 30 years, creating new market opportunities as well as new challenges for agricultural production. Despite this, 41 percent of the overall population in West and Central Africa is classified as poor. Seventy-four percent of these – roughly 90 million - live in the rural areas.

According to the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) small farmers have little say in the major decisions affecting their lives, and they are rarely consulted on key policy orientations or investments.

Mohamed Béavogui, Director Western and Central Africa division at IFAD spoke to IPS about the uneven economic growth in the region and how to address the problem of agricultural production.

IPS: What are IFAD's priorities in West and Central Africa?

Mohamed Béavogui: Much of the population in Western and Central Africa - about 60 to 70 percent of the population - lives in the rural areas. Agriculture is the main activity and income source for them. The role of IFAD in this region is extremely important in terms of supporting the areas that can have real impact on poverty reduction. It has long been demonstrated that agriculture can contribute three to four times more to poverty reduction than any other sector.

For us, supporting agriculture means allowing these people to produce more, and producing more means having better lands to produce, controlling water, having good access to technology which is seeds, inputs, fertilisers.

But in order to do this you need financial resources and you need to be organised very well. Supporting them in having their own institutions to get together, being stronger in the market and asking government for better policies is our aim.

IPS: West Africa has a stronger market culture - specifically around agricultural production - than does the rest of the continent. What's IFAD's assessment of this market system?



Credit: Abdulliah Yawda / IPS

>>> Reducing poverty ... Mohamed Béavogui, Director Western and Central Africa division at IFAD.

How do you interact with farmer networks?

MB: There has been a long debate over the possibility to concentrate on large farms because of their better access to market. Our response is that the majority of farmers are small holder farmers, we cannot ignore them. And now there is evidence coming out that at farm gate (the net value of the product when it leaves the farm) these farmers are very competitive.

In fact they are competing without policy support and with many barriers. Any small farmer in any of the West African countries - when he gets out of his farm to go to the town has so many road blocks to overcome, and this contributes to the cost of his product before he even gets to the market.

But despite the apparent success, there are lots of problems - packaging is a problem because it is not easy to find materials. Transportation is also very big problem, the quality of the roads is very bad. Very often the lorry that comes to the village to collect your product is so old that it then breaks down along the road and you lose your whole consignment.

The other challenge is farmers' ability to organise themselves in order to be able not only to sell and to transport but also to have negotiation capacities with the buyers out there in town.

IPS: Land tenure is considered a key factor for credit, security of investment, control of labour, gender inequality. How is IFAD addressing that?

MB: We have a lot of programmes on

land tenure and its connections – gender, deforestation, irrigation, policies, traditions. We are conscious that unless the land tenure problem is at least controlled you cannot improve agricultural production. Nobody will come and plant a tree in a land if it's not sure that the land is for him and he can use it.

Almost all IFAD's projects include land issues. In Burkina Faso, for example, we are helping the government on land tenure policies at country level and we are also helping African Union to support the thinking about land tenure.

IPS: What has been the concrete result of these activities?

MB: In many countries until few years ago, all land belonged to the government, without questioning. These things are changing.

In Mauritania, in the Maghama area, 100,000 hectares of land - part of the land is not usable because there is no water: here we help the community to develop irrigation.

And part of IFAD's negotiation is to give every farmer who works on that land a portion of it. This is negotiated in advance through an agreement signed by the owners and the governments. Based on that, the owner of the land keeps the bigger part and the remaining portion is distributed among farmers, even those who did not have even land before.

It is happening, and we make sure that also women get their own share of land, particularly in the areas where food production is completely dominated by them.

LIBERIA

Rural Women Confront

By Rebecca Murray

ZWEDRU - Three brightly-clothed women walk slowly around the fallen, charred trees strewn haphazardly across the blackened clearing, each carrying snail shells filled with indigenous rice seed to bury in the rich soil.

The women belong to a local cooperative, Women and Children Development Secretariat (WOCDES), and wake early for the 5-km hike down the dirt road to their farm near Zwedru, Grand Gedeh County, in Liberia's vast forest region on the Ivorian border.

Their day is spent in hard manual labour, hunched over and digging at the soil with small spades. Between them they plant three hectares of seed under a blazing tropical sun, stopping only for a staple meal of rice and cassava leaf.

Jeanet Gay is one of the farmers. A 35-year-old mother, she fled the civil war's fighting to Monrovia, the Liberian capital, only for her husband to be murdered by militiamen on the city's main bridge. Her mother, father and nieces were all killed at home. Neither of her work companions have husbands to support them and their children.

The women's 'upland' rice crop will take up to six months to grow and harvest, and as much as 40 percent of the crop may be lost to birds, groundhogs and other vermin. Meanwhile, the farm's 'lowland' or swamp area, which is naturally irrigated, is reserved for

introducing one hectare of rice breeder seed called Nerica. Short for 'New Rice for Africa', Nerica is an Asian-African hybrid, which is heavily touted by Liberia's Ministry of Agriculture for its short three-month growth period and, according to a United Nations Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO) study, it has a 25 percent increase in yield over non-hybrid strains.

Liberia's two commercial rice ventures, including a Libyan-backed 30 million dollars, 17,000-hectare rice farm in fertile Lofa County, are well-suited for the Nerica brand, with financial means to replenish the seed every two harvests, efficient machinery, fertilisers, and irrigation and transportation systems.

Thirty kilograms of Nerica breeder seeds were recently donated to WOCDES by the local branch of the international development charity, German Agro Action, and will be planted within two weeks.

Nerica is promoted as an antidote to the West African country's painful 'hunger gap', which runs through the rainy season from April to July. This is when the 75 percent of Liberia's rural population who live by subsistence farming begin to exhaust their food stores before the new crop is ready for harvest.

"This is a dream for me," says WOCDES founder, Betty Doh, about the organisation's activities on her family's 275-hectare plot of land.

Although Liberian law bans women from inheriting land, Doh's brothers, who received the property when their father died, encouraged her farming initiative wholeheartedly.



Credit: Rebecca Murray/IPS



>>> WOCDES founder, Betty Doh.

>>> Manual labour ... Liberia's new farmers like Jeanet Gay (above) do not have husbands to support them and their children.

the Hunger Gap

"We see there is a need for food. Especially for women. We have to help them," says Doh. "Some of them are trying to find a place to help themselves. Their husbands are gone, either died in the war or gone, and their children are left unattended. The women have a lot of troubles."

Originally from Zwedru, Doh spent her career working at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Monrovia during the decades-long civil war that devastated the country. "I came back briefly in 2003 just to see - I saw a lot of empty land and empty houses," she says sadly.

For Liberia's subsistence farmers like Jeanet Gay, however, the Nerica may not offer such a ready solution to their annual hunger gap - indeed it may ultimately threaten their livelihoods.

"To achieve good results, farmers must have easy access to fertilisers, pesticides and extension services, which the vast majority of them simply do not have," says GRAIN.

"Perhaps the most serious concern with Nerica is that it is being promoted within a larger drive to expand agribusiness in Africa, which threatens to wipe out the real basis for African food sovereignty - Africa's small farmers and their local seed systems."

In Grand Gedeh County, Betty Doh's WOCDES, the South Eastern Women's Development Association (SEWODA) and the Grand Ge-

deh Rural Women's project are a few of the farming collaboratives initiated by women hoping to transform from subsistence farming, and into small profitable agricultural businesses.

But they have a long way to go. In an impoverished nation where unemployment hovers around an estimated 85 percent, all are looking for funds. Doh financed the farm's upland seed purchase herself, but lacks the machines, fertilisers and effective pest deterrence to farm her rice crop efficiently.

She is unsure where she will get another batch of Nerica grain for the low lands, when what was given to her runs out.

For ordinary subsistence farmers, the annual cycle of harvest and hunger threatens to continue, committing them to a lifetime of relentless labour to satisfy their basic needs.

less labour to satisfy their basic needs.

"When I got back, I cried every day for some time, because I saw Zwedru destroyed, and it was empty for me," remembers Jeanet Gay. "My husband, mother, father, and brothers all lost. But I adjusted after some time, and haven't left since."

"I want to make some money, and take care of my children. After this work I just try to forget and go to bed and feel fine the next day."

"To achieve good results, farmers must have easy access to fertilisers, pesticides and extension services, which the vast majority of them simply do not have."

>> Rice For Development

Rice is the largest staple food for Liberia's 3.5 million people, and provides a quarter of the daily domestic diet.

But, lacking essential tools, fertilisers and the vital infrastructure to access markets, many subsistence farmers view rice cultivation as too labour intensive. Their efforts can reap greater reward through planting alternative cash crops and buying imported rice instead.

According to the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), Liberia produces only 40 percent of its total annual rice requirement domestically, and relies heavily on international imports for the remaining 60 percent. Liberia is not alone. Like many West African countries, its years of brutal conflict drove much of its rural population to urban centres. In January 2009, the Barcelona-based agricultural watchdog, GRAIN, reported, "Partly because of the rapidly increasing urban population, sub-Saharan Africa has gone from producing more rice than it needed (112 percent of domestic consumption) in 1961 to importing 39 percent of its consump-

tion in 2006." "Annual imports cost almost 2 billion U.S. dollars," they add. Meanwhile, a global food crisis, exacerbated by the worldwide economic meltdown last fall, has had a severe impact upon the price of imported rice. In Zwedru's colourful main thoroughfare, food suppliers display only the most widely available variety, Chinese butter rice, which has virtually doubled its local value of a 50kg bag to 40 U.S. dollars since 2006.

In 1979, President William Tolbert's plan to encourage local rice growth backfired among a hungry Liberian population. In his efforts to promote domestic rice production, heavy tariffs were imposed on the cereal's import. The price of rice soared, sparking violent riots, which many believe led to the violent overthrow of Tolbert's regime the following year, igniting the long civil war. The Ministry of Agriculture hopes to avoid similar unrest, promoting domestic Nerica rice production as a major development component in Liberia's immense post war reconstruction effort under President Ellen Sirleaf Johnson.

"We are importing Nerica breeder seeds from the West Africa Rice Development Agency (WARDA), which are then multiplied into foundation seeds at Liberia's Central Agricultural Research Institute (CARI)," says Quan Dinh, the USAID-backed advisor to the Ministry of Agriculture. "These seeds will ultimately be distributed to NGOs and the private sector to modify into certified seeds."



>>> Nerica: an Asian-African rice hybrid.

Améliorer le système de financement de l'agriculture

By Brahim Ouédraogo

OUAGADOUGOU - Les mécanismes de financement de l'agriculture ne permettent pas de développer et ne favorisent pas l'autosuffisance alimentaire au Burkina Faso, affirme la plus grande association de producteurs de ce pays sahélien d'Afrique de l'ouest.

Selon Bassiaka Dao, président de la Confédération des professionnels agricoles du Burkina Faso (CPF), un système de crédit adéquat à l'agriculture devrait venir appuyer les subventions que le gouvernement accorde déjà aux producteurs.

La CPF qui compte neuf fédérations et plus d'un million de membres répartis à travers le Burkina Faso, est la plus grande organisation paysanne du pays.

Au cours des deux dernières campagnes, l'Etat a apporté des semences améliorées et une forte subvention des engrais et de certains équipements, pour permettre aux agriculteurs d'accroître leurs productions. Le gouvernement espérait aussi que ces mesures permettraient aux producteurs d'avoir accès au crédit des banques et des caisses populaires.

«Aujourd'hui, celui qui veut moderniser son agriculture a besoin d'un crédit de long terme, 15 ans pour prendre un tracteur, un équipement complet pour rentabiliser les investissements. Or, on prend le crédit pour payer les intrants en juin et rembourser dès la fin de la campagne au plus tard le 31 janvier», s'insurge Dao.

«Aucune agriculture ne peut se développer sans le soutien du secteur public. Et ce soutien-là, il doit le continuer après la subvention, en mettant en place un certain nombre de services permettant l'accès au crédit pour des organisations professionnelles», souligne-t-il à l'IPS.

Selon Dao, à défaut d'un système de financement adéquat, les organisations qui prennent des crédits ne travaillent qu'à rembourser les institutions financières en raison du taux d'emprunt élevé dans les banques classiques.

Dao suggère pour le crédit que l'Etat mette en place un fonds de roulement qui permettra aux organisations professionnelles d'accéder au crédit à taux bonifié; aujourd'hui, les banques classiques accord-

ent le crédit aux organisations paysannes à un taux de 12 pour cent, qui est encore frappé d'une TVA (taxe sur la valeur ajoutée) de 18 pour cent.

«Avec le taux bonifié, l'Etat prendrait en charge un certain nombre d'actions comme la TVA, et en dehors de la TVA, arriverait à mettre en place un taux de cinq, six, sept pour cent, ce qui permettrait à la profession agricole d'avoir une assise financière solide», ajoute Dao.

«En fait, depuis plusieurs années, on a attiré l'attention des autorités sur les problèmes du financement du secteur agricole», affirme Emmanuel Nikiéma, chargé des questions agricoles au bureau de la Banque mondiale au Burkina Faso.

Par ailleurs, la seule banque agricole du Burkina a été récemment privatisée et reprise par une banque commerciale.

Selon Nikiéma, le statut actuel de la caisse nationale de crédit agricole ne prend pas en compte «les intérêts d'un producteur agricole qui n'a pas de garantie, qui a des besoins réels, et qui doit développer des activités dans un domaine où il y a beaucoup d'aléas».

«Il y a eu cette évolution de la caisse nationale de crédit agricole qui devait appuyer le secteur agricole, mais son statut fait qu'elle doit répondre aux exigences du système bancaire, et ce n'est pas toujours facile de lier cette vie de banque commerciale avec celle de banque agricole», explique Nikiéma.

Selon Nikiéma, le banquier ne veut pas prendre des risques car les producteurs travaillent dans un domaine aléatoire qui dépend des pluies.

«La question de l'accès au crédit a toujours été une doléance forte des producteurs. Cet accès au crédit devrait faciliter l'accès aux équipements agricoles et aux intrants comme les semences, les engrais et les pesticides», admet Robert Ouédraogo, le directeur des productions végétales au ministère burkinabé de l'Agriculture, de l'Hydraulique et des Ressources halieutiques.

«Un système de crédit assorti de faible

taux d'intérêt permettrait sans nul doute d'accroître l'efficacité du soutien gouvernemental à l'effort de production», ajoute Ouédraogo.

Sans cette aide financière, les agriculteurs craignent un échec des mesures du gouvernement visant à accroître la production agricole et à réaliser la sécurité alimentaire en distribuant seulement des engrais et des semences améliorées.

Pour la saison agricole 2009-2010, près de 7.300 tonnes de semences ont été distribuées dans les 351 communes du Burkina et 1.824 tonnes d'engrais ont été subventionnées à hauteur de 50 pour cent pour les cultures de riz et du maïs. Une année plus

«Aucune agriculture ne peut se développer sans le soutien du secteur public. Et ce soutien-là, il doit le continuer après la subvention, en mettant en place un certain nombre de services permettant l'accès au crédit pour des organisations professionnelles.»

tôt, des subventions de 50 pour cent avaient été accordées aux producteurs qui voulaient acquérir des machines.

Selon Dao, si certaines branches du secteur agricole peuvent trouver leur compte dans ces subventions, les petits producteurs, qui sont les plus nombreux, ne peuvent pas prétendre au crédit.

Pour la même saison, par exemple, malgré la subvention de 50 pour cent, l'engrais NPK et l'urée qui coûtaient respectivement 16.000 francs CFA et 16.500 FCFA (environ 35,5 dollars et 36,6 dollars), restent inaccessibles pour la majorité des petits producteurs.

«Or, tant que ces petits producteurs, plus nombreux, ne pourront pas améliorer leur situation, cela tirera les efforts (de l'ensemble) vers le bas», prévient Dao.

Par ailleurs, affirme Dao, «en distribuant aux plus vulnérables, il n'y a pas de suivi car les plus vulnérables qui reçoivent les semences, ne font que les faire passer à la casserole» en les consommant simplement.

«Donner les semences aux plus vulnérables signifie que le gouvernement puisse mettre en place un certain nombre de services, c'est-à-dire, dans un premier temps, un service d'accès au crédit adapté aux conditions de production. Car aujourd'hui, rien ne sert de donner des semences améliorées à quelqu'un qui n'aura pas accès aux engrais», explique Dao.

>>> Côte d'Ivoire-Marketing and Local Initiatives Support Project ... Women carry wood along the newly improved road between Boniere and Kadiehoule.



Credit: Christine Nesbitt / IFAD

>>> Côte d'Ivoire-Marketing and Local Initiatives Support Project ... Korotoumou Troaré, president of a women's agricultural co-operative, weeding a groundnut field in Foro-Foro village, 35 km north of Bouaké. They sell their produce in the local market and use a portion of the profits to buy insecticide and fertilizer. Troaré believes that being part of the co-operative helps her to feed her family.

Without Better Storage, We Are Farming to Feed Insects

By Fulgence Zambé

BONDOUKOU, Côte d'Ivoire - Every year, Robert Assalé, a farmer at Tangamourou in the Bondoukou region in east-central Côte d'Ivoire, produces an impressive amount of yams. He harvested 30 tonnes in 2007, 42 tonnes in 2008 and has almost surpassed 50 tonnes this year.

However, he's managed to sell only half of his 2009 harvest on the market and the rest is now under attack from parasites. Some tubers are rotting.

"It's a constant worry. When the produce is slow to leave the field, I'm likely to lose a great deal of it," he explains to IPS.

At the edge of his field, Assalé has built a shelter with a thatched roof held up by tree trunks and covering 150 square metres. His harvest is stored there, waiting to be taken away by private transporters and sold on the market. Each truck load costs between \$225 to \$270.

"Our storage methods are very outdated, but we have no choice. Things have been this way for years and I have to say I'm working at a great disadvantage," he says, glumly surveying an assortment of bacterial, fungal and other problems afflicting his yams.

Of the roughly 7,800 dollars his yam harvest would be expected to fetch this year, Assalé says he realistically doesn't expect to get more than \$4,500 - a shortfall of 43 percent - as many of his yams get to market in such poor condition, they can no longer command top prices. "The years pass and the losses build up. Ultimately,

I lose more than I make," the 55-year-old laments. At the small agricultural cooperative in Tangamourou, Assalé has got plenty of company. Fifty year-old Florent Kouadio tells IPS, "We produce a lot, but profit little from our yam harvest. Adequate storage simply does not exist. And let's not even discuss issues around local processing."

He says that aside from traditional dishes such as foutou (mashed plantain and cassava) and fried or boiled yam which the locals eat, nothing is done on-site with their harvest.

As the country's main yam-producing area, the Bondoukou region produces 700,000 tonnes of the crop each year for Côte d'Ivoire, according to the country's National Agency for Rural Development. This makes the West African country the third-largest producer of yams in Africa, after Nigeria and Ghana.

The Interprofessional Fund for Agricultural Research and Advice (known by its French acronym, FIRCA) is an agriculture research and support initiative involving government and private agricultural experts. Pierre Ackah, FIRCA executive director, says in spite of this output, which supports self-sufficiency of yams in Côte d'Ivoire, there is a genuine food security problem. This is because for a large part of the year, there are no yams available.

"This unavailability is linked to post-harvest losses amounting to approximately 30 to 40 percent of total production. It is also the result of poor access to major production centres, inferior packaging and the difficulty of conserving the product," said Ackah, presenting a study on the state of farms and techniques around the processing and post-

harvest storage of yam and plantain in Abidjan in August.

At some farms in the Boundoukou area, IPS found harvested yams packed in sacks and stacked on the ground, but not protected from direct sunlight. These tubers are already showing new buds. "Heat is the primary enemy of yam. If it is exposed to heat for a long time, wastage can only be expected," says Kouadio.

The lack of adequate storage methods puts farmers at a disadvantage. With 35 tonnes of yams produced in the current season, Kouadio has managed to sell only 20 tonnes.

"I basically sold it very cheap. The buyer offered me 150 CFA francs (about 33 cents) per kilogramme and I agreed immediately because I'm under pressure," he says. A fairer price for yam would be between 45 and 56 U.S. cent per kilo.

He still hopes to sell some of what remains of his harvest and keep a portion to feed his family. "We often manage some sales in the border communities of Burkina Faso, going through the town of Bouna (in northeastern Côte d'Ivoire). The prices are very low, but we have to do it to avoid excessive losses," says Kouadio.

"We must urgently find effective ways to address the problem of storing agricultural produce," says Lucien Tapé, an analyst based in Abidjan, the Ivorian economic capital. "Producers are experiencing huge losses and as such, new techniques must be developed to assist them."

Small Farms Fertile

By **Zahira Kharsany**

As Africa's economy continues to feel the impact of the global financial crisis, there are growing calls to look to the rural areas for a solution.

A large majority of poor people in Africa live in rural areas yet face enormous obstacles in producing the necessary amounts of food as well as accessing cash incomes.

The International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) president Kanayo F. Nwanze, speaking to Inter Press Service (IPS) in Johannesburg, South Africa, maintains that Africa's smallholder farmers hold the key to riding out the recession.

"Throughout history agriculture has played a prominent role in advancing economic growth, right from 18th century Europe to China to India and today to Vietnam. For Africa in particular, agriculture provides 30 percent GDP. It also provides the majority of the labour force and 80 percent of farmers in Africa are smallholder farmers," said Nwanze.

Almost 80 percent of agricultural labour in Africa is performed by women, who farm small plots to produce enough to feed their families and sell a small surplus. Secure rights to land and access to water are essential needs for these women, as well as better access to markets where they can sell their produce.

"Smallholder agriculture is the largest private-sector activity in many African countries. It not only feeds families, it provides jobs and catalyses the growth of rural businesses and broader development," said Nwanze.

The UN's rural poverty agency reports that agriculture accounts for about 30 percent of sub-Saharan Africa's GDP; at least 40 percent of its exports and up to 80 percent of employment. Nwanze noted that Africa's 80 million smallholder farmers were far from realizing their potential.

"An increase in investment in smallholder farms – which represent 95

per cent of agriculture in Africa – can return the continent to a path of high growth," said Nwanze, urging African government to put money into agricultural development in order to stimulate growth.

Economic growth in Africa is expected to be only 2.8 per cent in 2009, according to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) Regional Economic Outlook for 2009, less than half of the 5.7 per cent estimated for 2008. The IMF forecast for growth in sub-Saharan Africa in 2009 is just 1.5 per cent – below the rate of population growth.

Nwanze called on governments – particularly African governments – to be faithful to the commitments made in Maputo in 2003, when heads of states agreed to spend 10 percent of their national budgets on agriculture.

"Less than a dozen countries have met that target," Nwanze said. "At the same time we are calling upon the international community to be faithful to their pledge, their pledges in Gleneagles. The developed countries, particularly the G8, committed themselves to doubling aid to Africa. Our understanding is that target is about \$20 billion short."

Nwanze pointed out that there is a "silver lining" to the food crisis that occurred 18 months ago, with agriculture back on the agenda. "Our concern is that the current financial and economic crisis is already eclipsing the food crisis. We are calling on governments, African governments in particular that do not have stimulus packages, not to neglect investing in agriculture."

"We are calling on governments, African governments in particular that do not have stimulus packages, not to neglect investing in agriculture."

Mohamed Béavogui, Director of IFAD's Western and Central Africa Division said: "Economic uncertainty prevails in Africa, as elsewhere. A growing farm economy can

counter that uncertainty by creating off-farm jobs, agro-processing and small-scale manufacturing, and generating domestic resources for governments."

"Investment and infrastructure go hand-in-hand. And it must be seen

Ground For Investment

as a business," said Nwanze.

"Agriculture also provides job opportunities. Agriculture is the largest sector of employment for the youth. Investment in capacity building is needed."

Ruth Hall, a senior researcher at the Institute for Poverty, Land and Agrarian Studies (PLAAS) at the University of the Western Cape, South Africa, welcomed calls for more investment in Africa's small farmers. "Since governments across the continent withdrew subsidies and extension services for farmers as part of structural adjustment programmes in the 1980s and 1990s. Now, in response to food price crisis, we see widespread agreement that it is time to reverse this," she said.

Hall argues that food insecurity in Africa is a challenge not only in production, but in distribution. "Focusing on improving seed varieties and technology is not an adequate response. Rather, more attention must be given to enabling small farmers to sell small surpluses in local markets, and to add value to their produce so as to get higher returns."

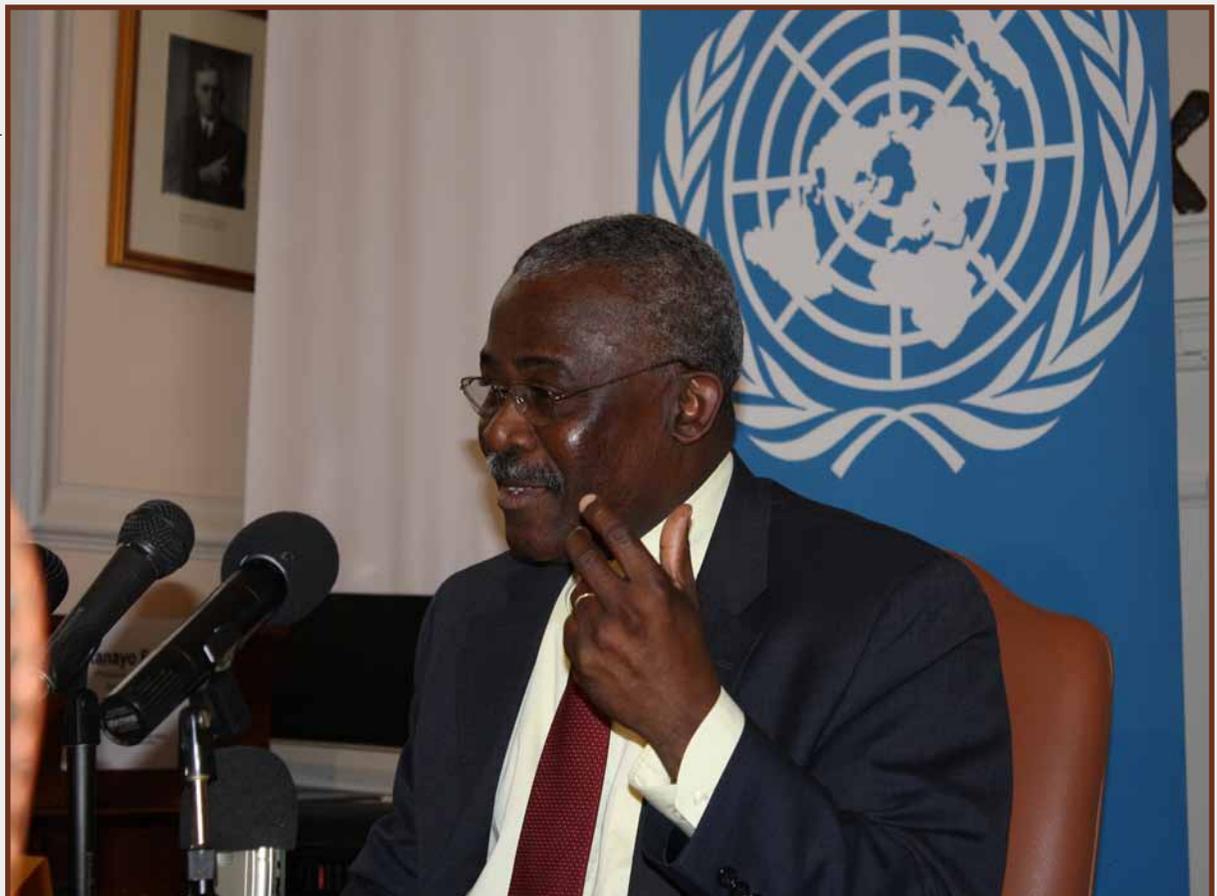
Recent success stories show that smallholder farmers can produce efficiently and can improve their own households' food security and while contributing to national food stocks.

A case in point is the successful fertiliser subsidy in Malawi, where targeted public support enabled

improvements in smallholder crops. "But this requires public intervention in the value chain, from provision of inputs (such as seeds and fertiliser) to processing and marketing," Hall said.

"There is also the potential for a 'virtuous cycle': investments in smallholder farming help directly to reduce poverty and hunger by improving their ability to consume what they grow; their improved outputs and profits can help to fuel local economies and to provide much-needed local produce for urban consumers; and rising food prices in turn can help small farmers to become more sustainable over time."

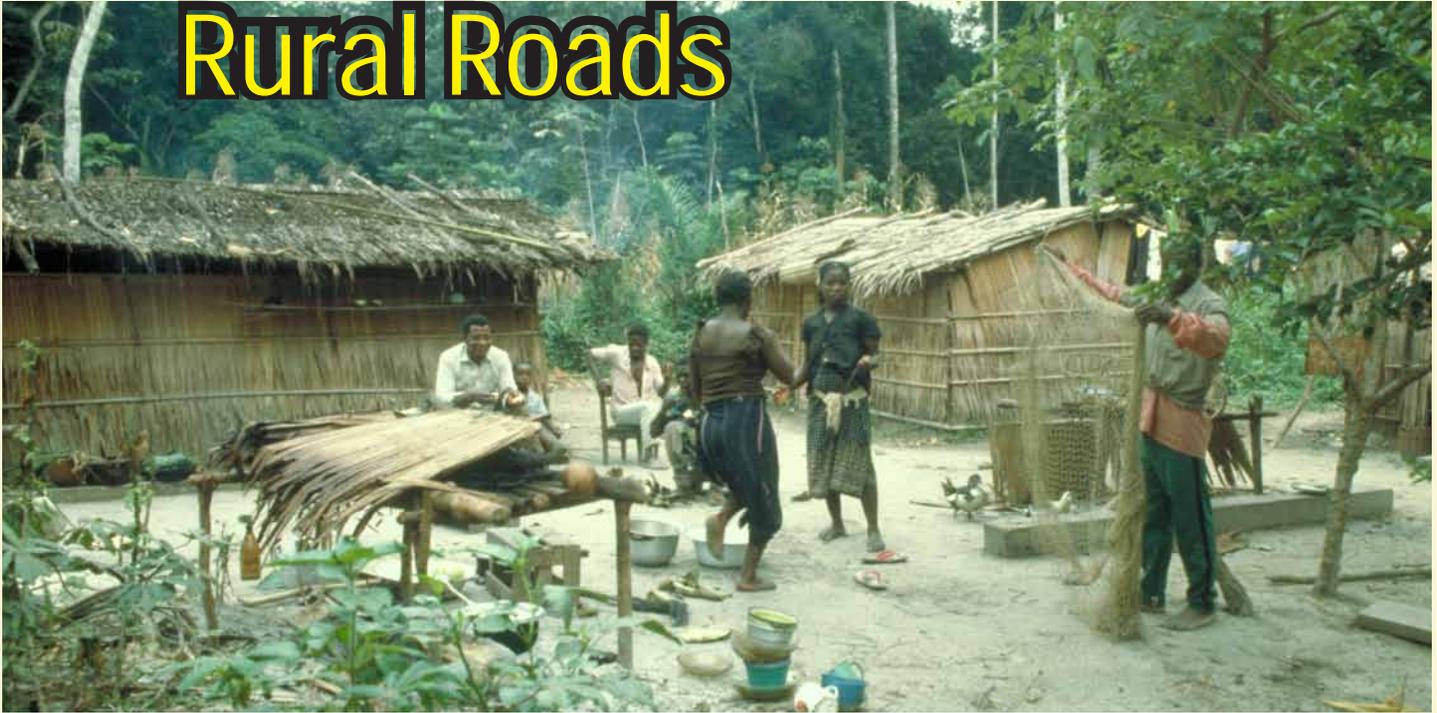
Nwanze believes agriculture's contribution goes beyond the balance sheet: "[Agriculture] is not only the engine of economic growth but investment in smallholder agriculture is the most sustainable safety



>>> Beneficial ... IFAD's president Kanayo F. Nwanze tells IPS that investment in agriculture is the key to riding out the global recession

All Hands On Deck to Repair

Rural Roads



Credit: L. Rosa / IFAD

>>> Inaccessible ... A fishing village on the Sangha river in the La Cuvette region.

By Arsène Severin

NGOUHA II - Two kilometres from the village of Ngouha II, a party of villagers are busy repairing an old bridge made of logs, and filling in a massive pothole.

"If we don't do it ourselves, no one will help us, and our agricultural produce will spoil. That's why the whole village is mobilised to carry stones, wood and earth. It's an effective solution," says the village chief, Pierre Ngoro. The chief has organised a day of work to fix the road and allow vehicles to reach the weekly farmers' market.

Singing, the peasants work throughout the day to fill the hole and repair the old bridge, constructed by a logging company here at Kolila, two kilometres from the village, a decade or more ago. Faced with the deterioration of rural roads, small farmers have to take the initiative or see their harvest rot in the fields or in storage in the villages.

"There, it's done! The last time, we had to transport squash, peanuts, taro root, fruit and vegetables, and cassava - all of it on our heads to this point, as the bridge was broken," says Pierre Mavinda, a farmer.

A few dozen kilometres away, in Ndiba, a village not far from the railway station at Bouansa, also in the southwest region, young men have taken a similar initiative to repair a rural road, following multiple complaints by farmers who are watching their crops rot in the fields. Armed with shovels, hoes and picks, they fill potholes and gullies, especially bad where the road crosses the river Loua; the bridge there has been gone for several years. Jean Louamba, a major producer of fufu, cassava flour, potatoes and maize at Ndiba, has struggled to get his produce to the station. "All vehicles refuse

to come because the road is very bad. My only hope is what these kids are building here," he says.

But in other areas, the transport situation is worse. Gilbert Koumba, a banana grower near the Les Saras rail station, is facing ruin. "I've been here a week waiting for the train to take my bananas to Pointe-Noire. The train is the only means of transport. I'm afraid of losing everything here," he laments, squatting in front of this stock of rip bananas. At Kibangou, the bridge over the Niari river, built under the colonial administration in the 1950s, was broken by a logging truck, cutting off the agricultural region of Divenié from the market provided by the 100,000 people in the area's major town, Dolisie.

"Regardless of what we're willing to do, I can't see how we can rebuild the bridge," sighs the local member of parliament, Serge Victor Igoumba Maliga. In Congo, in place of the government, it is routine for members of parliament to support construction of roads for their constituents. The MPs spend money from their salaries to pay locals to carry out public works, or to rent heavy equipment to fix a road; this expense is not repaid.

Nor is it enough.

"The isolation is the rule rather than the exception in Congo. There are no roads leading to the major agricultural centres. The complaints everywhere are the same," declares Irène Mboukou-Kimbatsa, who is in charge of evaluation and follow-up of the Agricultural Development and Rural Roads Rehabilitation Project.

"The government is not indifferent (to this issue)," says Jean Isben Moukoubu, coordinator of multilateral cooperation at Congo's ministry of agriculture and livestock, "because if there are no roads, there

will be no agriculture and we will die of hunger in the big cities.

"Even if the government doesn't buy the produce, private business will be interested in this production once there are roads. But with the current state of the roads, I can't see who will risk destroying their vehicles."

Elsewhere, the Rural Development Project (known by its French acronym PRODER) financed by the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) plans to build 400 kilometres of roads.

"Of the 400 km to be built, we have already completed planning for half of them and the call for tenders to begin work has already been issued. The selection of roads for repairs was made taking into account all the major areas," explains Paul Bizibandoki, responsible for PRODER Sud.

"The plan is not to construct kilometres of contiguous roads. The IFAD strategy is to fix the bottlenecks, such as bridges, culverts, potholes... but where things are okay, we will leave it. The priority for IFAD is to allow farmers to get to market," says Dominique Kenga, responsible for PRODER 3.

However, the roadwork has not yet begun on all sites, despite the eagerly awaiting farmers. "In 2009, we imagined we'd have already built 123 kilometres of roads. But the assessment, procurement and financing made us late," says Mboukou-Kimbatsa.

"At whatever pace, fixing the roads is essential for us. In the past, many roads were built in rural areas, but farmers were not involved in their maintenance. And when it rains, it's no longer practical," observed the agriculture ministry's Moukoubu.

New Agriculture Plan Sprouts

By Mohamed Fofanah

FREETOWN - When in power, the Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP) promised that thanks to its pursuit of a pro-agriculture agenda, no Sierra Leonean would go to bed hungry by 2007. But the appointed date came and the people were still hungry. Unfortunately for the SLPP, it was an election year.

The party was booted out and replaced by the All People's Congress. The APC government promised in turn to make agriculture a top priority. And in September, Sierra Leone became the fifteenth African country to sign a compact in the framework of the Comprehensive Africa Agricultural Development Programme (CAADP).

CAADP is an African Union initiative agreed in Maputo in 2003 which aims to ensure Africa's agricultural development as a catalyst for socio-economic growth. Overall, CAADP's goal is to eliminate hunger and reduce poverty through agriculture.

The finance minister has announced that in 2010, government will increase the budget allocation to agriculture from the present 7.7 percent to 9.9 percent, towards meeting one of CAADP's principles that ten percent of national budgets be devoted to agriculture.

"We inherited a 1.7 percent agricultural budget, and since last year we have increased it to 7.7 percent. This is a huge commitment to agriculture," said Dr Sam Sesay, minister for agriculture.

Sesay told IPS that the overall programme objective of government's National Sustainable Agriculture Development Plan (NSADP) is to increase the agriculture sector's contribution to the national economy.

He explained that the programme will facilitate and strengthen the productive capacities of small- and medium- scale farmers, as well as provide an enabling environment to promote large-scale farming and promote the development of agri-business. The plan is also intended to facilitate access to markets and value addition for selected commodities like rice, oil palm, cocoa and fisheries.

The plan, he continued, has started off with "sub-programme one: commodity commercialisation - to increase productivity (through) appropriate technologies and providing access to markets of selected commodities."

The minister explained that farmer-based organisations are being supported with a 50 percent subsidy on fertiliser and seed for selected crops. These farmers are also gaining access to tractors and pesticides.

Other components of the NSADP include the development of agricultural infrastructure such as storage facilities, better roads, irrigation, markets, processing and packaging facilities, and the rehabilitation of research centres. Sesay revealed that, 241,000 hectares of irrigable swamps across the country have been earmarked for development.

A final sub programme, he explained, will take

care of coordination and management of the agriculture section.

"We are only starting now with the implementation of NSADP. By 2010, we will have started the implementation of all the sub programmes," Sesay disclosed.

Food sovereignty

But what is the assessment of NSADP by the very people whose lives are directly impacted by this national plan?

Brima Babo, the secretary general of the country's largest coalition of farmers, the National Federation of Farmers in Sierra Leone (NFFSL) says, "NSADP is a step in the right direction for the development of agriculture in Sierra Leone.

"The national agriculture plan will uphold the principles of food sovereignty, the fundamental right of West African people to produce for themselves and by themselves the needed foodstuffs, which is also demanded by (ROPPA)," he adds. Food sovereignty is a key demand of regional farmers' organisation ROPPA (Reseau Des organisations paysannes et des producteurs agricoles de l'Afrique de l'ouest) with which the NFFSL is affiliated.

Alongside the East African Farmers' Federation, ROPPA is demanding that agriculture in Africa should ensure stable income and decent livelihoods to family farmers; the associations of small farmers back the principles of the AU's comprehensive plan to achieve Millennium Development Goals, especially on hunger and poverty.

They also stress the importance of sustainable food security and sovereignty, preserving the dignity of African producers and citizens and of a development process that is more respectful of African culture and values.

Babo said that the ministry of agriculture under the national plan is now organising farmers into viable groups in a programme called the Sierra Leone Agricultural Commercialisation Strategy.

"Before now," Babo said, "there has been a lack of entrepreneurial skills, and capital in the sector. Even the people that studied agriculture in universities do not come back to the soil, Agriculture was looked upon as work to sustain poor peasants."

"But with NSADP there are plans to inject loan capital into agriculture and make these loans accessible to small farmers. There would be training for these farmers and a forum to exchange research information and there will also be a system for agribusiness."

"I think the main focus of the Ministry of Agriculture under the NSADP is to enhance the capacity of FBOs so that they will be able to better assert themselves in the national and international market. In other words to get them to move from subsistence to commercial (marketable surplus) agriculture."

Gassimu Sheriff, a member of the Massa Agricultural Unit, a FBO in Pujehun District observed that

it is too early to measure the success of the NSADP which has just started.

"But gauging from the fact that we have been fully involved in the whole process leading to the CAADP compact signing and the development of NSADP, and we have also been engaged in consultative and sensitisation process on all aspects of NSADP and CAADP, I am optimistic that we are looking at a revamp in the agricultural sector of this country," he said.

Agricultural activities support 90 percent of the rural population of Sierra Leone and improvement in the sector will increase incomes and purchasing power of the vast majority of the people with the potential to uplift the rural population more than any other sector of the economy.

Sierra Leoneans are hoping that the new government keeps the promises outlined in the CAADP agreement, that in the near future none of them will go to bed hungry.

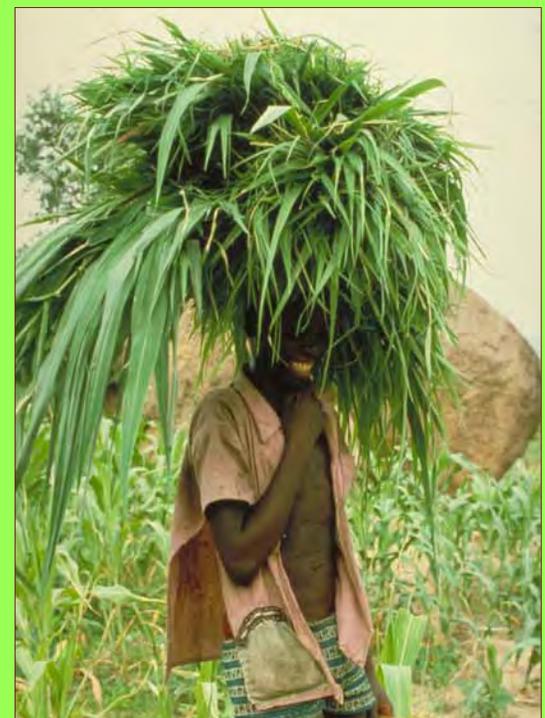
CAADP's Four Pillars

Pillar 1 aims to extend the area under sustainable land management and reliable water control systems.

Pillar 2 to increase market access through improved rural infrastructure and other trade-related interventions.

Pillar 3 aims to increase food supply and reduce hunger across the region by raising smallholder productivity and improving responses to food emergencies.

Pillar 4 aims to improve agricultural research and systems in order to disseminate appropriate new technologies.



Credit: G. Maurette / IFAD

>>> Cameroon-Second Western Province Rural Development Project ... A boy collects vegetation and transports it on his head.



Credit: Piero Tartagni / IFAD



1 >>> Nigeria-Multi State Agricultural Development Project ... Farmers clear the irrigation canal for the preparation of the cassava plantation.

(2) At harvest time the farmers physically pull out cassava tubers from ground.

(3) The cassava is then taken to the women in the community who will peel the cassava whilst at the roadside markets.

(4) When the cassava is peeled it is given to the men who will help grind the cassava to make flour.

(5) Finally the cassava flour is then sold at the road side market.

Cultivating Rural Prosper

By Tamfu Hanson

YAOUNDE - Emilie Nyate has a two million CFA smile on her face these days. She's one of the beneficiaries of the Roots and Tubers Market- Oriented Programme, known better by its French acronym of PNDRT, which is transforming the lives of small-scale farmers in Cameroon.

Launched in September 2004, the PNDRT is a joint programme of the Cameroon government and the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD). Its main objective is to boost farmer incomes through increased production, better access to markets, organising cooperation amongst farmers, and improving rural infrastructure such as roads and bridges.

More than 550 hectares have been set aside to produce improved seeds and cuttings for distribution to farmers at subsidised rates: farmers in 221 villages have received 5.5 million improved cassava cuttings from by PNDRT. In 2004, Emilie Nyate was typical of women in the village of Ngam - living with her husband and six children in their four-roomed house. Her husband had lost his job as fire fighter with the now-defunct Cameroon Airlines Company, in the IMF-imposed privatisation schemes of the 1990s, and the family fortunes had declined steadily since then.

Paul Nyate offered me a wooden chair before disappearing behind the house. He soon reappeared with some fresh palm wine, as Emilie tells me the life before the PNDRT.

"I used to make 200,000 CFA (\$400) a year, but today I can boost of 2,000,000 CFA in my account," she says. She points proudly to a new bungalow under construction and other innovations on their old house as signs of her farming success.

Later, showing me round her cassava farm, Nyate describes how using high-yielding, fast-maturing cassava cuttings, she increased the planted acreage of her farmland from one hectare to five hectares. The PNDRT stresses women's participation in the programme and she has seized the opportunity with both hands. Her husband generously allowed her access to his share of the village land, and working along with her two sons, a brother-in-law and her husband, she quickly accumulated experience, becoming one of the village's largest producers of cassava.

Her skills have not gone unrecognised: she is president of the local coordination committee and PNDRT secretary general for the whole district. "I am sometimes hired by the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development and other groups as a trainer in workshops for women groups involved in roots and tuber cultivation.

"I am highly respected today because of my role in cassava business. I sponsor all my children in school - two of them at the university level," she stresses proudly. Nyate's story is a shining example of the impact of this programme on its 7,500 beneficiaries.

PNDRT has significantly boosted the production of cassava and other crops in the regions where it is active. Ninety-three percent of the programme is dominated by cassava; a root crop which is benefiting spectacularly as a result of intensive research. Cassava grows very well in almost all regions of Cameroon due to the many improved varieties and adaptation to many soil types.

The PNDRT Programme has organised previously-isolated farmers into Village Coordination Committees (CVCs). The 250 CVCs are involved in the construction and management of rural infrastructure such as markets, bridges and road maintenance, all financed by the programme.



Security in Cameroon

"It was necessary to discourage individualism and inculcate a spirit of enterprise through training," says Benjamin Bidjoh, the South Cameroon Regional Coordinator of PNDRT which has some 50 CVCs. This region borders Gabon and Equatorial Guinea, where farmers have found an expanding market for cassava in all its forms.

"I think we have concretely translated into practice the spirit behind PNDRT - that of organising and facilitating life for farmers through the creation of infrastructure and out-reaching for marketing of produce," he concludes.

In addition to cassava, potatoes are also doing quite well under the PNDRT project. In the western region of Cameroon, many farmers have virtually abandoned other crops to concentrate on potato production according to Gilbert Focachouet, the traditional ruler of Latchouet village.

"Gabonese traders come right to this village to buy potatoes and that is what gives us the inspiration," Focachouet told IPS by phone. He says potato cultivation has been transformed from a subsistence activity to mass production, thanks to improved seeds and the use of pesticides.

"Before the arrival of PNDRT, we used to plant potatoes in smaller quantities and side by side with other crops but today we plant hectares of potatoes only," says Tsakeu Daniel, a potato seed producer in Latchouet village.

"From 2005-2009, we have attained 40 percent of our targeted objectives in terms of the activities: production, transformation, capacity building", says Ngué Thomas Bissa, the National Coordinator of the PNDRT. "I think we have sufficiently laid the base. By 2012 when the programme is expected to end we should have covered the remaining 60

percent," he adds.

According to Ngué, the execution of the project has radically improved production of cassava from 8-10 tons per hectare to 25-30 tons per hectare today. "Increased production has provoked other needs. We have constructed two warehouses for cassava at the cost 17 million FCFA (34,000 dollars) and five drying facilities for those producing cassava pellets for eventual processing into flour."

On the whole, the PNDRT will be producing about 24,000 tons of cassava in 2009. "This year, our objective is to put 800 hectares improved cuttings at the disposal of farmers for this programme which is impacting 250 of Cameroon's approximately 6000 villages," concludes Lydie Ngiumbous, the programme's evaluation expert. In the process broadening the smiles - and confidence - of women like Emilie Nyate.

What to do with all that cassava?

Cassava is widely eaten across the West and Central African sub-regions.

Garri: grated, dried and fried into a coarse flour that can be eaten in many forms. Soak in cold water and eat with sugar and roasted peanuts, or add hot water and stir to a thick consistency to eat with spicy vegetable soup.

Water fufu: grind cassava into a finer flour for a markedly different consistency when mixed with hot water.

Miondo: mix fine-ground cassava flour with cold water, and wrap the resulting paste in plantain leaves and steam. Delicious with roasted fish.

Small-scale Pineapple Growers Want More Support

By Fulgence Zambélé

BONOUA - Karim Diabaté, looks questioningly at his vast 20 hectare pineapple plantation in Bonoua in south-eastern Côte d'Ivoire. "I'm asking myself if I'll get the money I need for in time for the inputs I need and keep my plants going."

For two months, 35-year-old Diabaté has made several trips between his plantation and the local office of the Central Organisation of Producers and Exporters of Pineapples and Bananas (known by its French acronym, OCAB) in Bonoua, 50 kilometres from Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire's economic capital.

"I was lucky enough to get some initial funding through the organisation's pilot project, but it isn't enough. I still need around one million CFA francs (just over \$2,000) to get inputs and ensure a good yield from my plants," he tells IPS.

His friend Arouna Konaté is in much the same situation.

"In 2003, I stopped growing pineapples because we were getting no assistance and we were heavily in debt. Today, I'm back here hoping things have improved but it seems they haven't," he said.

"When the prices of inputs go up 300 percent and the price of a kilogramme of pineapples on the international market goes down, how are we expected to get any kind of return on our investment?" asks Konaté. "For a long time now the wolf has been at the door."

Seven years ago, Konaté tells IPS, treating a hectare of land with pesticides cost between \$225 and \$680; today he spends \$680 and \$1100. To this he must add the cost of buying cardboard boxes for storing the pineapples, transportation costs to the city and finally, employee wages. OCAB says the Ivorian variety of pineapple fetch between 79 and 86 cents per kilo on the

international market.

The Bonoua district, the main growing area for pineapples, today has just 1,500 producers, compared to 30,000 in 2000. It produces 80 percent of the pineapple exported from Côte d'Ivoire, according to OCAB. The country has seen its exports decline steadily due to high production costs and falling prices.

According to OCAB, some 214,000 tonnes of pineapples were exported in 1999. Last year this figure was down 70 percent to 60,000 tonnes. One of the reasons for this steep decline in production is the discontinuation of funding from donors, following the 2002 political crisis in this West African country.

Mario Adiko, president of the United Pineapple and Banana Planters of Côte d'Ivoire, tells

"When the prices of inputs go up 300 percent and the price of a kilogramme of pineapples on the international market goes down, how are we expected to get any kind of return on our investment?"

IPS, that Ivorian growers lost their place in the international market.

"When we attend meetings, we are told that our production capacity is now meaningless, because 60,000 tonnes for a market demand of around one million tonnes, is just insignificant."

A few months ago, pineapple producers received a delegation from the European Union and the Ivorian Ministry of Agriculture.

"We explained our difficulties to them so that they could help us," says Anassa Julien, member of a local producers' co-operative, "because banks are reluctant to give us credit."

Eugène Yocoli, a technical manager, tells

IPS, "Today, we can say that pineapple farming is still alive thanks to the pineapple pilot project we are currently rolling out in Bonoua and Adiaké."

He says the project has been funded through the balance of funds from the 7th pineapple project of the European Development Fund, totalling \$909,000.

"Earlier this year, while waiting for donors, we were hoping to hear that the government had decided to give us a boost - and fortunately this happened," he enthuses.

In July, the Ivorian government unveiled a rescue plan to boost production of pineapples. In the next two years, 300 small-scale growers will be set up, on a budget of 20 billion FCFA (approximately \$45.4 million).

Konaté says, "I do not know how many hectares these 300 growers will use, but the number seems small. They represent only a fifth of the total number of producers. Others will have to rely on themselves."

He adds, "For me, the incoming aid will not totally save the industry. It can only maintain it in its present state for a while. We need a much larger programme."

For Konaté, the fact that the programme will cover only 300 growers from over 1,000 applicants means it remains unclear whether Côte d'Ivoire will return to its former glory as a pineapple producer.

Martinien Gadou, an economist based in Abidjan, tells IPS that farmers will have to make do with the what the government has provided.

"We talk of a rescue plan because there is an emergency. The state has taken account of the industry's position as regards the international market, and has released the support it has at its disposal. There shouldn't be any complaints."

New Dawn for Small Farmers



Credit: Rebecca Murray/IPS

>>> Nerica rice.

By Mohamed Fofanah

KAMBIA DISTRICT - They call her "Marie Nerica", after a new breed of rice.

But when the new strain of rice - developed by award-winning Sierra Leonean researcher Monty Jones - was introduced in her area by the ministry of agriculture, Marie Kamara wanted nothing to do with it. She eventually tried a few bushels alongside the local varieties and she is delighted with the results.

"I am now cultivating a five-hectare plot and I am producing so much that I am selling (rice) back to government for seed for other farmers. I also sell to the public and pay other farmers that are working in my farm," Kamara says.

"We all resisted the new rice because it is coming from the white people and we were worried that we would not have the expertise to cultivate it, moreover we did not want to waste a whole planting season on a trial crop especially if it turn out to do badly."

Kamara is one of thousands of Sierra Leonean farmers benefiting from a renewed emphasis on agricultural extension work by Sierra Leone's agriculture ministry.

New plan for agriculture

The minister of agriculture, Dr Sam Sesay, is attempting to steer the ministry's work in line with the four pillars of the African Union's Comprehensive Africa Agricultural Development Programme (CAADP): agricultural research, improved market access, raising small-holder farmers' productivity and extending better land management and reliable water distribution systems.

The country recently signed a CAADP compact, formally adopting the African Union initiative, drafted in Maputo in 2003, which aims to ensure Africa's agricultural development as a catalyst for socio-economic growth. Overall, CAADP's goal is to eliminate hunger and reduce poverty through agriculture.

The ministry's implementation of CAADP, Sesay says, will be carried out through the National Sustainable Agriculture Development Plan. "The good thing about the NSADP is that it mainstreams cross-cutting themes like gender and youth." In an interview with IPS, Sesay pointed out that women are being prioritised because in Sierra Leone they are the majority of farmers, producing the bulk of the food in the country using traditional tools and methods, while their male counterparts generally control income-generating cultivation of export crops.

"This means that (women) were being disadvantaged," the agriculture minister said, "so that was why mechanisation was embedded in our NSADP sub program one, which is to increase productivity through appropriate technologies."

Brima J Bangura, the agriculture ministry's assistant director of extension and field operations, said Kamara and others in her area are not the only ones targeted by the ministry.

"We have targeted 195 farmer-based organisations (FBOs) from all over the country and these organisations are mainly women's groups. We have supplied them with tractors, power tillers, transplanters, food crops like rice, maize and cassava; export crops like cashew nuts, coffee and cocoa. And we are also giving them fertilisers and insecticide," Bangura told IPS.

Mixed reviews at this stage

Marie Kargbo, who grows rice on six hectares in the Kambia district, said she has recently started receiving full government support.

"Government sent a tractor that tilled my farm and the farms of the members in our association; they also gave us two bushels of seed rice, fertilizers and pesticides."

Kargbo is head of a 54-member FBO, and chairs the women's wing of the All Peoples Congress Women's Wing in Kambia. "Before now life for women farmers was very difficult but now rice production has been fruitful as we have been receiving supply for the government ranging from seed rice, power tillers, fertilisers and pesticides."

But although she lives in the same district, Marie Kamara's experience has been somewhat different.

"I was given a tractor last year after pressuring the ministry. By the time they came with the tractor, I had already hired people to plough, since I was of the opinion that the tractor was not forthcoming and the rain had already started coming," she explains.

"We were promised a tractor, but when the tractors came to the district I was not given, and only a few people were selected and given (use of the) tractors."

She has another complaint. "I now need a store where I will keep the rice after harvest. I also want a thresher as Nerica is difficult to thresh. There are heavy post-harvest losses which I can not continue to contend with if I am to be a sustainable commercial farmer."

Attention to detail

Kamara's observations highlight the care with which successful agricultural support must be delivered to farmers.

Maseray Conteh, a rice farmer in Makeni told IPS that in her area are indeed getting technical assistance from the ministry. Earlier this year, tractors cleared her three-hectare plot to prepare it for cultivation.

"The rice did very well, and when it was harvest time I was able to get the combined harvester machine from the ministry, but sadly the machine spoilt my rice. I was only able to save about 40 bushels of rice,

as opposed to 70-80 bushels when I harvest manually," she lamented.

"They said that if I had planted the rice in rows, the harvester would not have spoilt it. I hope that they will show us how to plant in rows."

Agriculture minister Sam Sesay says he is aware of the challenges. "All of these situations have existed for a long time and we are trying to put all of that behind us now," said the minister.

"These gaps will soon be dealt with. NSADP is just in its starting phase and when fully implemented it will take care of all the problems the farmers are now facing."

The objectives of NSADP, the minister underlined, are to enhance increased agricultural productivity, promote commercial agriculture through private sector, improve research and extension service delivery, and promote effective and efficient resource management.

In next year's budget, just under \$2.5 million dollars will be targeting an increased number of 442 FBOs as opposed to 195 currently in the project."

Sesay added that in line with the NSADP/CAADP they have already developed a smallholder commercialisation scheme, pointing out that "it is a deliberate program to get especially women farmer groups to gradually operate as limited companies and become the backbone of the private sector in Sierra Leone.

"We will soon conduct training for these women in agribusiness so they will be able to operate as legal commercial entities."

"This will have to change. We will focus on irrigation and our framers who are mainly women will be able to farm at least three times a year while we will rehabilitate storage and processing facilities."

Marie Nerica and thousands of Sierra Leone's women farmers will be looking forward to the NSADP being implemented to the letter, and to give agriculture a new face in the country.

L'entrepreneuriat féminin s'active dans la

By Koffigan E. Adigbli

DAKAR - Un projet de développement de l'entrepreneuriat féminin pour la production et l'exportation des fruits et légumes au Sénégal, a déjà généré plus d'une centaine d'emplois et plus d'une dizaine d'entreprises, selon le ministère en charge de la sécurité alimentaire et de l'entrepreneuriat féminin.

Selon l'Organisation des Nations Unies pour le développement industriel (ONUDI) qui coordonne le projet, celui-ci durera quatre ans et devrait générer 800 emplois et une quarantaine d'entreprises dans les années à venir.

Pour un projet dont le coût s'élève à plus de quatre milliards de francs CFA (plus de neuf millions de dollars), le ministère sénégalais de la Famille, de la Sécurité alimentaire, de l'Entrepreneuriat féminin, de la Microfinance, et l'ONUDI plaident pour une contribution massive des partenaires financiers en faveur de ce pays d'Afrique de l'ouest.

En dépit de leur volonté de développer la production et l'exportation des légumes, les femmes entrepreneurs du Sénégal, actives pour la plupart dans la microfinance et les petites entreprises, sont confrontées à plusieurs difficultés, selon Awa Diop, responsable d'une entreprise de transformation des fruits et céréales à Dakar, la capitale. Ces difficultés sont notamment liées à la qualité, aux ressources et aux moyens nécessaires permettant d'accéder aux marchés porteurs.

«Malgré notre forte présence dans le secteur de l'agriculture, notamment dans les produits horticoles et les produits transformés, il faut souligner que les femmes, qui

mènent 35 pour cent de leurs activités dans la transformation des fruits et légumes, peinent encore à se tailler des parts conséquentes de marchés au niveau national comme international», se lamente-t-elle.

Pour sa part, Fatou Faye Ndiaye, membre de cette entreprise de transformation des fruits et légumes, ajoute que les difficultés se trouvent aussi au niveau de la conservation des produits.

«Des fois, les tomates récoltées ou les mangues pourrissent, faute de moyens de conservation moderne. Si nos partenaires pouvaient nous aider dans ce sens, cela nous aiderait énormément. A Tambacounda, une localité à plus de 500 kilomètres à l'est de Dakar, les bananes pourrissent, faute de moyens de conservation, c'est la même chose pour les mangues en Casamance, dans le sud du pays», explique-t-elle à IPS.

Le représentant de l'ONUDI au Sénégal, Edem Koffi, estime que la mise en œuvre du projet de développement de l'entrepreneuriat féminin - pour la production des fruits et légumes - dépend de l'accompagnement des partenaires financiers. «Tout dépend des partenaires. Le système des Nations Unies au Sénégal accorde une importance particulière à l'autonomisation des femmes et à la promotion de l'égalité des sexes», déclare-t-il à IPS.

Pour booster l'entrepreneuriat féminin au Sénégal, le Bureau international du travail (BIT) a injecté pour cette année, plus de 200 millions de FCFA (plus de 454.500 dollars). Cette aide permettra de faire face aux défis auxquels sont confrontés les acteurs de l'entrepreneuriat féminin, en réduisant notamment les disparités entre les régions du Sénégal dans le financement accordé aux femmes.

Groundnut Production in Freefall

By Koffigan E. Adigbli

KAOLACK - Farmers are complaining about a lack of technical assistance and the poor quality of seeds they've planted this year in the Kaolack region, Senegal's groundnut-producing area, 200 kilometres south of the capital Dakar.

The production of groundnuts, Senegal's third-largest export product after fishing and phosphates, is in freefall. The 2008 harvest fell by over 47 percent, according to the most recent report of the groundnut producers' association, the Cadre de concertation des producteurs des arachides.

According to the report, groundnut prices are increasingly tight in Europe, its main market. Drought and soil degradation - too severe to be corrected by applying fertiliser - are the root causes of Senegal's agricultural difficulties.

Samba Ka, regional head of the National Council for Dialogue and Cooperation of Rural People, says if the countryside is plagued by problems, the fault lies with farmers who expect government assistance for everything.

"Farmers in Senegal have failed to instill a love of the land and an appreciation of livestock in their children. The earth is not tilled, it is scratched at. Livestock is no longer looked after, it is merely used," he explains to IPS.

Ka however acknowledges the urgent need to put in place new agricultural policy addressing the supply of quality seeds, which would be reviewed every four years. He also recommends providing basic varieties of peanuts,

production des fruits et légumes

Selon Marème Thiam, directrice de l'entrepreneuriat féminin, l'aide du BIT permet de renforcer les capacités des femmes dans la création d'entreprises modernes et dans l'optimisation du financement de l'entrepreneuriat. « Environ 1.300 femmes et jeunes ont été déjà formés en gestion d'entreprise et développement », indique-t-elle à IPS.

« Il est vrai que les facteurs bloquants du développement du secteur ont pour noms l'inégalité dans l'accès aux ressources, au financement et à la terre, sans oublier les difficultés d'accès à l'éducation et à la formation, à l'information économique et au service d'appui et de conseil. C'est pourquoi l'aide du BIT est un appui considérable pour faire des femmes sénégalaises des capitaines d'industries », ajoute-t-elle.

De son côté, la ministre de la Famille, de la Sécurité alimentaire, de l'Entrepreneuriat féminin, de la Microfinance et de la petite Enfance, Ndèye Khady Diop, reconnaît que l'ouverture des marchés mondiaux et la suppression des barrières économiques constituent des menaces certaines, mais affirme que l'Etat fera tout pour que les produits finis sénégalais puissent trouver des débouchés.

« Nous avons des accords de libre échange avec nos voisins du Mali, de la Guinée, de la Mauritanie et avec d'autres pays de la sous-région. Nos produits sont vendus dans ces pays-là, mais nous faisons tout pour que les produits sénégalais trouvent des débouchés aussi dans les pays européens », affirme-t-elle.

Par ailleurs, IPS a rencontré sept femmes rurales non alphabétisées et anciennes exciseuses. Elles travaillent actuellement dans l'exploitation de l'énergie solaire au profit de leurs propres communautés après avoir bénéficié d'une formation de six mois dans ce secteur en Inde, pour un programme de renforcement des capacités

communautaires.

Selon le porte-parole des anciennes exciseuses, Doussou Konaté, les formations reçues leurs ont permis de maîtriser l'installation, l'entretien des unités d'énergie solaire qui fourniront une lampe fixe, une lanterne solaire, une lampe de poche et une prise par ménage pour permettre de charger les téléphones cellulaires.

« Chacune de nous va installer une unité d'énergie solaire dans son village et nous allons également former d'autres femmes de nos différentes communautés à devenir des ingénieurs solaires », grâce un financement de l'ONG américaine 'Tostan' (qui signifie 'sortir de l'œuf' en wolof), en collaboration avec l'Etat sénégalais, explique-t-elle à IPS.

Dame Guéye, le coordonnateur du projet et chargé de programme à 'Tostan', indique que ces femmes techniciennes du solaire recevront une indemnité mensuelle de 3.000 FCFA (environ sept dollars) payée par leurs propres communautés.

Ces femmes habitent dans des villages enclavés du Sénégal et utilisaient des bougies et des lampes à pétrole. « C'est pour aider les femmes à avoir leur entreprise et en même temps aider leurs communautés en électrification rurale à avoir ainsi une activité génératrice de revenus que nous avons initié le projet de formation avec l'aide de la coopération indienne », souligne-t-il à IPS.

Le président de la Confédération des ONG d'appui au développement (CONGAD), Mor Talla Kane, estime que les dirigeants sénégalais doivent s'acquitter de leur promesse pour la réalisation des Objectifs du millénaire pour le développement (OMD) et les interpelle également pour une répartition équitable des richesses. (FIN/2009)

millet, sorghum, maize and good quality fertiliser to smallholder farmers at subsidised prices, as well as new farming aids.

Visiting millet, maize and groundnut fields in Thiaré, not far from Kaolack, IPS found that some crops have not benefited from technical support, thereby compromising yields.

Malick Seck from the Senegalese Union of Farmers and Vegetable Market Gardeners, says farmers do not have good seeds to sow this year.

"The state no longer helps us; the seed we received this year is not good and furthermore, there was no support. As small farmers, we go into debt to buy pesticides. After the harvest we pay the money back, but more often than not, problems arise when the harvest is not good," he laments.

Pointing to his field of groundnuts, Seck tells IPS that where the shoots are not growing densely, it means seeds were of poor quality. "Look! There is a difference between this field of groundnuts and the other. You can see the shoots there are more dense than they are here," he tells IPS.

Thiaré farmer Habib Ndiaye is more concerned with the sale of farm produce after harvest. "We are being forced to sell our harvest at low prices in the weekly markets. We just end up in deeper debt," he tells IPS.

"We sold at 100 CFA francs per kilogramme of groundnuts (about \$ 0.22) instead of at 130 or 150 CFA (\$0.29 or \$0.33) per kilogramme, which is the price needed to meet our family needs," says Ndiaye, lamenting the lack of support for the marketing of groundnuts in many areas.

To help small farmers, the World Food Program (WFP) on Oct. 7 launched a "food facility" programme. This programme has a funding of 22.6 million dollars

from the European Union and will help keep vulnerable small-scale farmers in Senegal afloat.

According to the WFP's West Africa regional director, Thomas Yanga, the programme will help small-scale farmers boost production and improve food security. He says it is a "mission of food security and social welfare."

According to the Association for the Promotion of Development (ASPRODEB), a programme to rebuild stocks of quality seed has been in place since last year and is running in most areas of the groundnut basin. Based in Dakar, ASPRODEB is an association working in private partnership with the ministry of agriculture.

"The Senegalese government, alongside its development partners supports groundnut producers in the Senegal River valley," says Cheikh Fall, a member of ASPRODEB's board.

"It seeks to ensure the availability of 79,000 tonnes of groundnut seeds before December 2010 - and these must be certified N2 seeds (new varieties suited to the local soil and climate)."

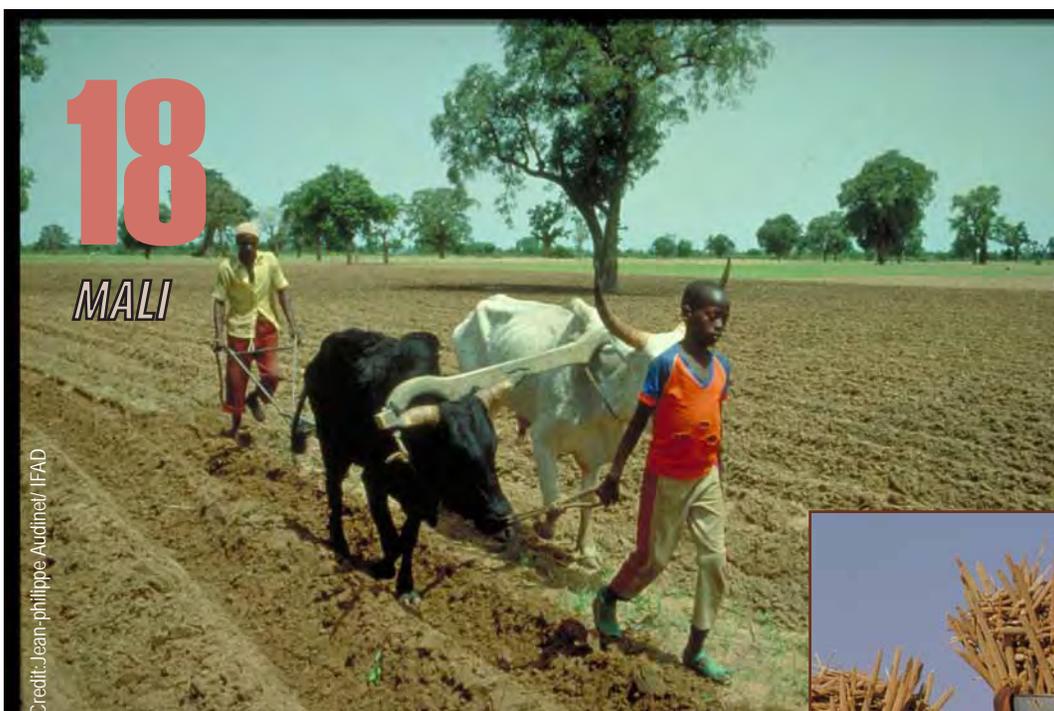
According to Macoumba Diouf, director general of the Institute of Agricultural Research based in Dakar, there is a research programme for the diversification of certified seed for cultivation in Senegal. The programme seeks to revive traditional farming practices around food production, which have either been lost or not used in 30 years.

"The programme will permit producers not only to continue using the seed and other resources they are accustomed to, but offers smallholder farmers the possibility of a higher yield - estimated at five to six tonnes per hectare in research station conditions, or between 500 kilos and 1.5 tonnes per hectare in the field."

18

MALI

Credit: Jean-philippe Audinet / IFAD



>>> Mali-Village Development Fund Programme - Phase II ... Oxen draw a plough through a field near Kondogla village.

>>> Mali-Village Development Fund Programme - Phase II ... Women carry millet after a harvest in the Kayes region.



Credit: Jeremy Hartley / IFAD

Quand la météo lutte contre la faim!

By Soumaila T. Diarra

BAMAKO - les bulletins météorologiques diffusés par les médias publics sont devenus incontournables pour la sécurité alimentaire. Et grâce à l'assistance agro météorologique aux paysans, les récoltes attendues en novembre prochain s'annoncent bonnes dans plusieurs localités du pays.

Le service météorologique national, qui émet ces bulletins météorologiques, regroupe une équipe pluridisciplinaire composée de scientifiques, de communicateurs et de représentants d'organisations non gouvernementales.

«Beaucoup de gens étaient inquiets au début de l'hivernage parce que cette année encore, les pluies sont venues en retard (juillet au lieu de fin mai). Mais par la suite, les choses sont rentrées dans l'ordre, nous attendons de bonnes récoltes...», affirme Sékou Togola, un paysan de la commune de Oueléssebougou, située dans le sud du Mali.

Perdus au milieu des champs de céréales, arrivées presque à maturité, les 44 villages de cette commune rurale partagent l'optimisme de Togola. «C'est surtout grâce aux conseils que la météo nous donne sur de nouvelles techniques culturales, que tout le monde fera de bonnes récoltes. Je ne connais pas un paysan des villages de la circonscription administrative de Oueléssebougou qui ne tient pas compte des conseils de la météo pour les travaux champêtres», dit-il à l'IPS.

En plus des températures et des précipitations, les bulletins météo comportent plein de conseils sur la bonne conduite des travaux champêtres. Sur les antennes de la radio et de la télévision nationales, hormis les traditionnels bulletins quotidiens, il y a une prévision annuelle, au début de chaque saison de pluies. Cette prévision propose aux paysans la date des semis et les variétés de cultures qu'il faut choisir en fonction des caractéristiques pédologiques des terres exploitées dans les différentes régions du pays.

La prévision annuelle est diffusée la première fois en avril-mai et est mise à jour en juin. En plus, il y a des prévisions décennales qui donnent la quantité

de pluies enregistrées tous les dix jours et des conseils pratiques aux paysans.

L'assistance agro météorologique aux paysans a été introduite au Mali dans les années 1990 à cause de la réduction constante de la durée des saisons de pluies, qui commençaient jadis à la fin mai pour s'achever en octobre.

Le problème pluviométrique date pourtant de bien plus longtemps. «Après les sécheresses de 1974-1984, le niveau des pluies a commencé à baisser de façon continue au Mali jusqu'à nos jours. Aujourd'hui, plus aucune région de notre pays ne reçoit 1.500 mm de pluie par an», indique à l'IPS, Sidi Konaté, professeur à l'École nationale d'ingénieur du Mali, basée à Bamako, la capitale.

Ainsi, la sécurité alimentaire est devenue un défi constant pour les autorités. Selon un document de l'Alliance pour la révolution verte en Afrique (AGRA, sigle en anglais), le Mali ne cesse de perdre des espaces cultivables à cause du manque continu des pluies. Le document a été publié dans 'Partnerships and Grants' à l'occasion de la conférence internationale sur la révolution verte en Afrique, organisée par l'AGRA, à Bamako du 5 au 9 octobre.

La conséquence de ce problème climatique est l'accentuation de l'insécurité alimentaire et de la pauvreté dans les milieux paysans. «Le revenu moyen par habitant ne dépasse pas 500 dollars par an, et 30 pour cent des enfants du pays souffrent de malnutrition», souligne le document.

Selon le Programme des Nations Unies pour le développement, 73,4 pour cent des Maliens en milieu rural vivaient en 2008 sous le seuil de pauvreté avec moins d'un dollar.

L'objectif de l'assistance agro météorologique est de diffuser des informations météorologiques pouvant aider les paysans à augmenter leurs productions agricoles en les adaptant au changement de la pluviométrie.

Par ailleurs, pour combler le déficit de pluies, le gouvernement a introduit, en 2005, dans le programme de l'assistance agro météorologique,

les pluies provoquées qui se pratiquent chaque année. «Cela a permis d'augmenter la pluviométrie de 10 ou 15 pour cent environ», explique Daouda Zan Diarra, le responsable national du Programme d'assistance agro météorologique.

Mais, il n'y a pas qu'aux paysans que s'adressent les bulletins météo. A la fin de chaque campagne agricole, vers février, une prévision annuelle est diffusée sur la situation alimentaire de ce pays sahélien d'Afrique de l'ouest: une sorte de pronostic qui évalue, entre autres, les stocks de sécurité, notamment pour les céréales.

«Ce système d'alerte précoce permet d'évaluer la situation alimentaire au cours de l'année jusqu'aux prochaines récoltes. Elle indique également aux décideurs politiques et aux organismes d'aide les zones à risque alimentaire», ajoute Diarra à l'IPS.

En termes de résultats, les paysans ne tarissent pas d'éloges sur l'assistance agro météorologique qui leur a enseigné, par ailleurs, de nouvelles méthodes de travail. «Avant l'assistance de la météo, nous perdions beaucoup d'énergie et de semences, car nous n'avions pas en réalité un plan de travail. Nous avions l'habitude de semer inutilement plusieurs fois le même champ et utilisions des semences non adaptées à une courte saison de pluie», témoigne Togola.

Dans un contexte climatique de plus en plus difficile, c'est une chance inespérée pour des milliers de paysans que de pouvoir compter sur l'information météorologique pour améliorer leurs productions. «Les temps ont changé, et nous aussi, nous le devons. La météo ne nous donne pas tout, mais sans elle, nos champs ne feraient pas aujourd'hui le bon rendement qu'ils font», déclare Sali Samaké, une paysanne du village de Tamala, à sept kilomètres de Oueléssebougou.

Selon le responsable national du programme d'assistance agro météorologique, 50 pour cent des paysans assistés ont augmenté leur production de sorgho de près de 500 kilogrammes par hectare à 1.325 kg par hectare. Quant au mil, son rendement est passé environ de 350 kg à 800 kg par hectare.

Small is Beautiful, But Big Has Its Place

By Brahim Oedraogo

OUAGADOUGOU - An impressive crop of sweet potatoes, yams, cabbages, cucumbers, carrots and tomatoes has spelled a good season for Burkinabé farmer Amadou Diallo, who attributes his success to a nearby water storage tank.

"Thanks to the proximity of this water point, we have a turnover of five to six million CFA francs per year (10,000 to 12,000 dollars)," says Diallo, who farms a six hectare plot in Dori, in the north of the country, together with other producers.

"But we could have produced much more if we had several water tanks, since we have land available - men too."

Over recent years, setting up irrigation systems at village level has been policy in Burkina Faso, thanks to the 1998 creation of a directorate in the Ministry of Agriculture tasked with small-scale irrigation.

The directorate provides small farmers with subsidised supplies and helps them set up water storage tanks, enabling many to have two harvests annually, even though Burkina Faso only has one rainy season.

This Sahelian country of West Africa presently has more than 1,500 water storage tanks, says Issa Martin Bikienga: secretary general of the Inter-State Committee to Fight Drought in the Sahel (Comité permanent inter-Etats de lutte contre la sécheresse dans le Sahel, CILSS).

But the success of this "small is beautiful" approach to irrigation does not mean that Burkina Faso has abandoned large-scale water projects which can support village irrigation (according to Bikienga, Burkina Faso has a long-standing policy of building big dams).

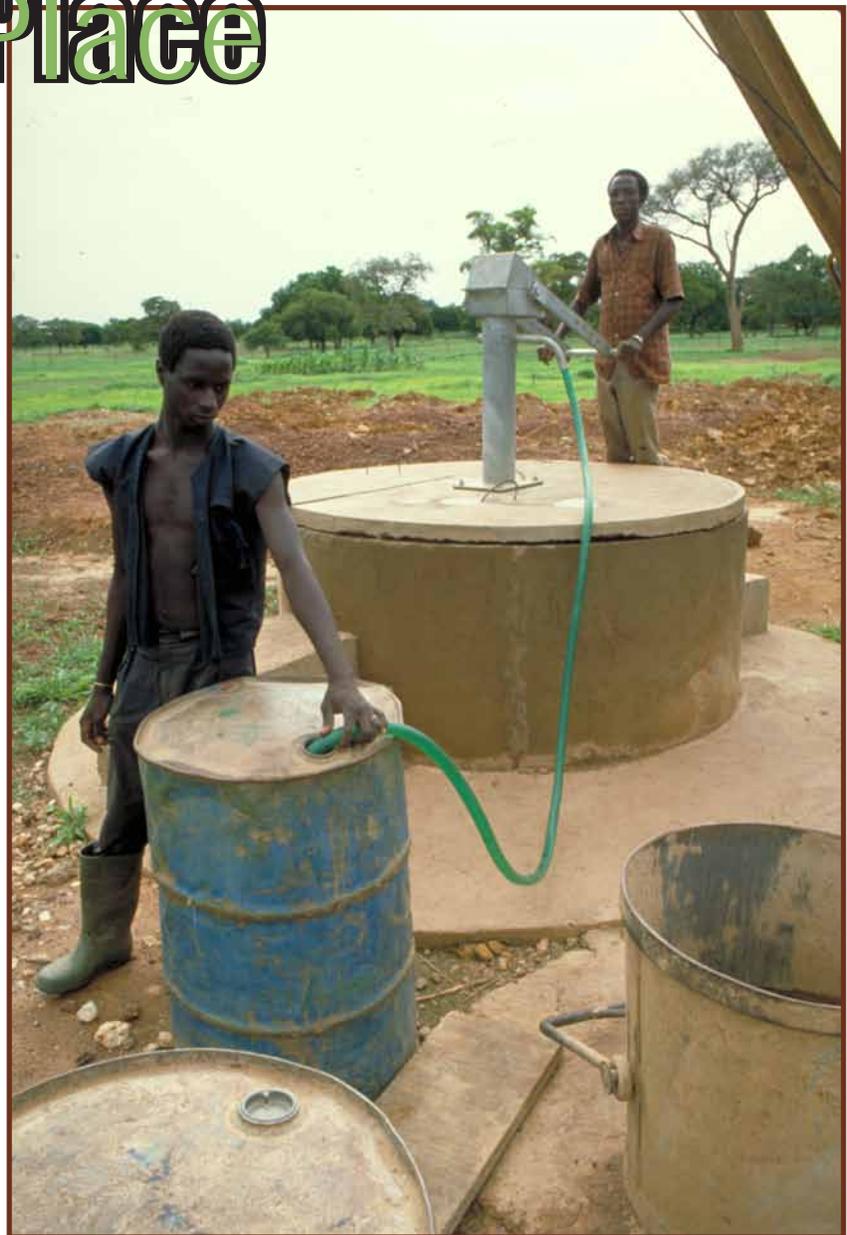
In fact, the biggest dam in the Sahel was inaugurated in Yakouta, in the north of the country, in February - and has been described as "the miracle of the Sahel". (The Sahel is the region that falls between the Sahara desert and the equatorial area of Africa. It extends across most of the continent, and is a semi-arid region.)

At a cost of more than eight million dollars, the Taiwan-financed dam is 21 kilometres long, with a storage capacity of 26.5 million cubic meters and a surface area of 1,600 hectares.

It will help make up the deficit of dams in the nine CILSS member states, relative to the region as a whole. According to the CILSS, the nine countries of the committee (Cape Verde, Burkina Faso, Chad, The Gambia, Guinea Bissau, Mali, Mauritania, Niger and Senegal) only have 20 of the 110 big dams built in the Economic Community of West African States - which comprises 16 nations.

Yakouta will contribute to the irrigation of agricultural land in the region and help with the growth of vegetation that is indispensable in the fight against desertification. The area of Burkina Faso that forms part of the Sahel receives the least rain of all the country's regions: less than 300 millimetres per year.

"We are doing everything we can to develop water storage policies in our region so as to be able to farm in all seasons, especially when there is no rain," says Bila Dipama, governor of the Burkinabé Sahel region, which is home to 900,000



>>> Burkina Faso-Special Programme for Soil and Water Conservation and Agroforestry in the Central Plateau ... Pumping water from handpump on well for watering tree nursery in the Ribou village, near Yako.

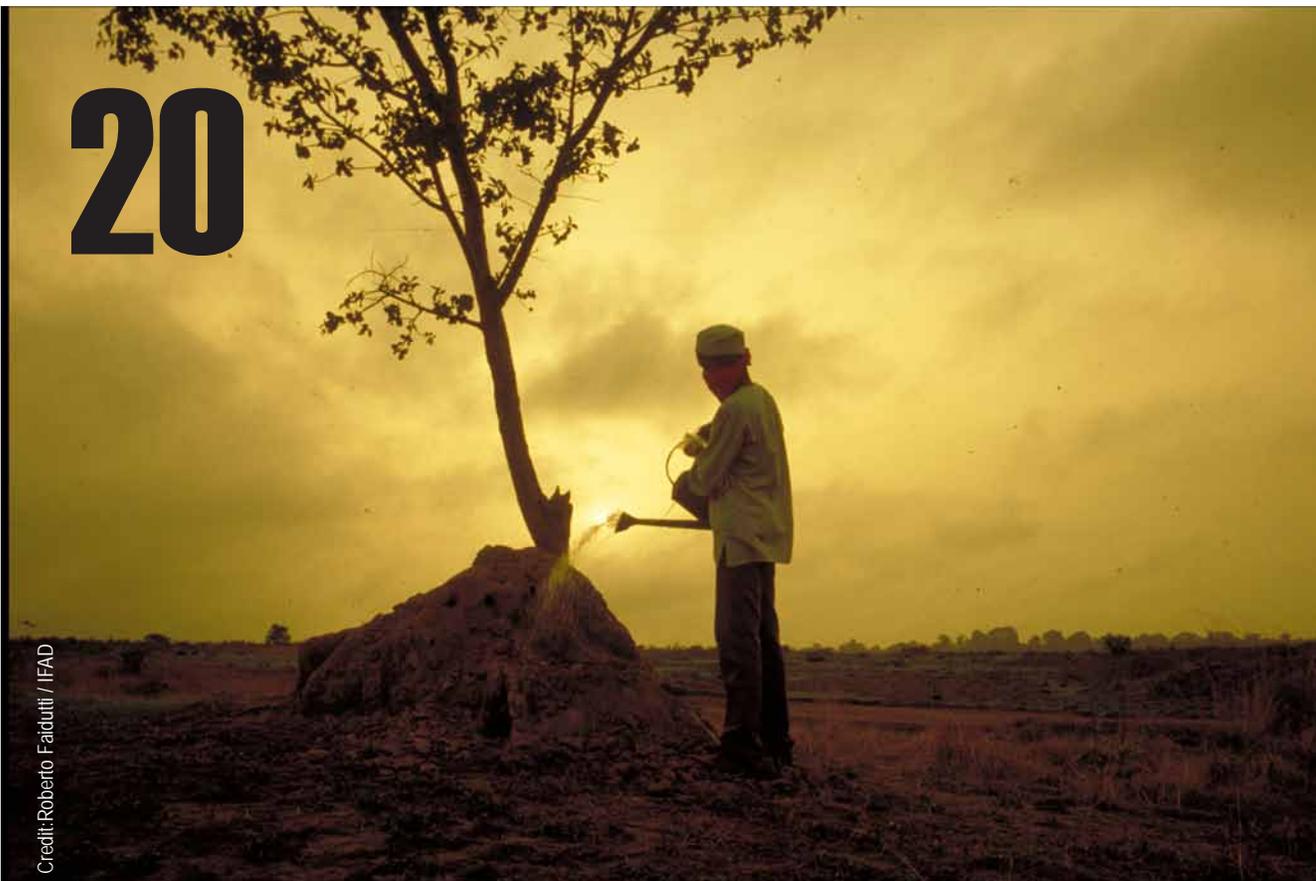
inhabitants.

Bikienga says the various water management initiatives that have been under way for several years in Burkina Faso have resulted in "islands of forests in the Sahel" - areas where vegetation has been successfully restored.

He also calls on Sahel countries to unite in stopping the advance of the desert, advising them to draw inspiration from the Burkinabé example in the matter of water management.

For his part, Alain Edouard Traoré, permanent secretary in the National Council for the Environment and Sustainable Development, cites the example of Algeria - which today has areas that are completely covered in greenery, although they are in the heart of the desert.

"Africa has to leave behind the strategy of defensive reforestation, which aims to prevent the desert from advancing, to adopt an offensive strategy - aimed more at creating forests in the desert," advises Traoré.



>>> Guinea-Fouta Djallon Agricultural Rehabilitation Project ...
A farmer pouring exterminating fluid on a termite nest in the zone of Labé.

NIGERIA

Bagging Beans Against Beetles

By Salma Ahmad Kano

KANO - Cowpeas are of vital importance to the diets and livelihood of millions of people in West and Central Africa. But the crop is notoriously difficult to store - beetles and other pests can destroy an entire granary full of cowpeas within 12 months.

Rural families in Nigeria grow cowpeas for sale, for their own consumption and feed animals on the husk of the bean.

The black-eyed beans are known to contribute to soil fertility by providing ground cover and useful plant residues, fixing nitrogen, and suppressing weeds.

Cowpeas are an important staple food in northern Nigeria and beyond. Across the country the beans are made into a deep-fried dumpling (known in Hausa as *kosai*, in Yoruba as *akara*). Another favourite is a pudding known as *alala*.

Cowpeas provide an inexpensive source of protein for both rural poor and urban consumers. Research by Ricardo Bressani in 1985 revealed that the grain contains about 25 percent protein and 64 percent carbohydrate and so it has a tremendous potential to contribute to the alleviation of malnutrition among resource-poor farmers.

A superb plant then.

Except that about twenty people were hospitalised and another ten died in just the month of September in just the northern Nigerian state of Kano, after eating beans contaminated by farmers in an attempt to protect them from pests in storage.

"We have a lot of cases of food poisoning due to chemical storage, leading to what is commonly called 'killer beans'. Because many farmers don't have functional storage facilities and do not receive the full value of their cowpea harvest," said Dr Tahirou Abdoulaye, a representative of the International Institute for Tropical Agriculture. The IITA has developed a new, safe method of storage.

It's so difficult to protect cowpeas from beetles and other pests, that farmers typically sell their harvest as early as possible to offload the risk; but this means they get a low price as they sell at harvest time, when the market is flooded.

Ahmed Abubakar, a farmer at Gabasawa village about 130 kilometres from the city of Kano who has been growing cowpeas for years told IPS that he has been storing his beans using insecticides which he admitted were poisonous when misused.

He said officials from the Kano State Agriculture and Rural Development Agency had on many occasions informed him and other farmers in the area that the pesticides and insecticides were harmful if used for food storage, but there was no alternative method to store the product.

He said that he sometimes stored the harvest in plastic bags, but that this failed to protect it.

The Institute of International Tropical Agriculture (IITA), has recently developed a new technology for storing cowpeas without chemicals. Over the last two decades, the IITA has made significant advances in improving the productivity of cowpea in sub-Saharan Africa, developing a number of varieties with different maturity periods, ability to outcompete weeds, increased resistance to diseases and pests and other desirable agronomic traits.

But storage is a problem that threatens to erase any gains in productivity. Abubakar revealed that every year, he loses more than 1000 kilos bags of his crop, which he usually seals off in the 50 kilogramme capacity bags.

Dr Abdoulaye says his institute will be rolling out a new method, known as the Purdue Improved Cowpea Storage (PICS), in Nigeria during the final quarter of 2009. The aim is to see at least half of all cowpeas stored using the new method across West and Central Africa by 2011. The PICS project will focus its activities in ten major cowpea-producing African countries: Niger, Burkina Faso, Nigeria, Cameroon, Chad, Benin, Togo, Ghana, Mali and Senegal. The project hopes to

reach 28,000 villages in the ten countries, 11,000 in Nigeria alone.

PICS is a straightforward idea: seal the bags up in hermetically-sealed plastic that does not allow air in, limiting the survival of insects that damage cowpeas.

"This simply eliminates the need to use any chemicals for storage," says Abdoulaye. Each PICS bag, which will be available from licensed vendors, consists of two high-density polyethylene plastic bags, and an outer sack of nylon that protects them.

Abdoulaye explains that any insects sealed in with the beans will quickly use up all the air in the sealed bag and then it can be stored safely for eight to 12 months without being damaged by insects.

Training on the use of the new technology will focus on women farmers, and a special demonstration would be conducted in villages just for the benefit of the women farmers, who take the lead in the most crucial phases of processing and preparing cowpeas, as well as storage.

It is expected that about 40 women technicians trained by the Institute will continue to work with women farmers across the 12 northern states of Nigeria to increase female farmers' access to the technology.

Abdoulaye also said the project was developing a distribution network of PICS sacks in Nigeria, saying distribution will provide business opportunities to sack manufacturers, distributors and vendors.

The IITA official therefore revealed that the PICS project and its partners have identified with the efforts of National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control toward helping Nigerian consumers in getting safe cowpeas to eat.

Abdoulaye finally disclosed that to protect the users from getting the fake product, the institute only gave one accredited vendor the technology for production and sale, advising that farmers must obtain from the vendors to be sure of getting authentic and effective bags.

Farming Butterflies Puts Food on the Table

SEDHIOU, Senegal - As part of a project to support community initiatives and fight poverty in South Senegal, the Sédhiou Local Development Fund received a donation of agricultural equipment worth more than half a million dollars in a bid to reverse the region's dramatic drop in agricultural production in recent years.

Thirteen tillers, three tractors, 16 mills and three machines for hulling rice were delivered by the Italian ministry of foreign affairs in late October.

Bafodé Dramé, coordinator of Sédhiou's regional fund, told IPS the project's overall objective was to improve living conditions in this part of the Casamance region in southern Senegal, by supporting investments to create jobs and improve basic services and income.

"This batch of equipment will be used to boost rice production. The arable area will be larger. The donation was due to the state's 'Big Push' for agricultural and food abundance, because we are in an area where there is enough arable land, and every year we receive plenty of rain," he said.

Robert Bassène is a 53-year-old Sédhiou farmer. In his field IPS found that the rice heads has begun to develop. According to Bassène, this is the most critical moment of production, because the field has to be watched constantly to prevent birds eating the grains.

Bassène bemoans the lack of technical assistance and monitoring from the national agriculture department's agricultural extension officers.

Farmers Anxious About Aid

DAKAR - Over the past four years, the Local Small-scale Irrigation Project has spent more than \$10.5 million U.S. dollars supporting rural communities in Senegal.

These water reserves have contributed to increased rice yields, which grew from less than one tonne per hectare in 2003 to three to six tonnes per hectare in 2009. It also allowed the development of off-season horticulture, rice cultivation and vegetable gardening. Communities in target villages of Fatick, Tambacounda and Kolda Kédougou also achieved six to eight months self-sufficiency in rice crops.

"The project has also helped increase the income of more than 6,000 farmers by over 50 percent; replenished the water table; launched micro-projects (in water supply and sanitation), and an anti-salinisation campaign," Wally Gueye, technical advisor to the Ministry of Environment told IPS.

He said more than 2,100 hectares of land that had been rendered saline was reclaimed; preventive measures were taken to protect a further 9,800 hectares of land at risk of salinity. "The activities conducted in different regions often exceeded targets," said PAPIL coordinator Amadou Baba Sy, "whether it be seedling production and reforestation, creating and maintaining fire-breaks, or cattle rangeland clearing and maintenance."

He added that a programme on water-borne diseases was implemented by regional medical centres which included information, public education and communication campaigns along with advocacy tools.

Credit: Robert Grossman /IFAD



>>> Ghana-Upper-East Region Land Conservation and Smallholder Rehabilitation Project ... Daniel Afribeh inspecting millet at Manga Station, part of the Savannah Agriculture Research Institute. One of the research objectives is to find a variety of millet that matures quickly.

Credit: Robert Grossman /IFAD



>>> Niger-Special Country Programme ... Livestock graze and water along the banks of the Komadougou River.

Will Poultry Project Live up to Expectations?

By Emmanuel Chaco

KINSHASA - For some seven million Congolese living in Kinshasa the only meat and poultry they could buy to eat since the 1980s was frozen imports from Western countries, distributed locally by a few local businessmen.

That was, until a few months ago, when government stepped in to develop the country's livestock farming industry. "The government cannot accept that (the) Congolese live on a meager diet composed mainly of frozen chicken and frozen fish imported under questionable conditions while the country has a tremendous food production potential," says Norbert Bashengezi Katintima, minister of agriculture, fisheries and livestock.

In December 2009 with financial support from the African Development Bank (ADB), the government launched a large poultry project in N'Sele, a rural town in the western outskirts of Kinshasa, the country's capital. The project, which is entirely government-run, received funding to the tune of eight million dollars.

In an interview with IPS Juvenal Bahun, livestock advisor to minister Katintima, said that "the ministry has adopted a roadmap laying the groundwork for a serious country-wide fight against the food crisis and food insecurity." For now, he added, the ADB-funded pig and poultry farming pilot project will only cover Kinshasa, Katanga (South Eastern Congo) and West Kasai (in the South West).

"This project also aims to improve food quality for the Congolese and support small farmers with technical and practical advice in agricultural production," he said.

The challenge for the ministry of agriculture, fisheries and livestock will be to "get 15 percent of the national budget funded by poultry farming profits"; one of the goals within government's strategic policy document released in November 2009.

Freddy Nkongolo, project coordinator on

the N'Sele site - about 4,000 hectares - told IPS that the project is off to a promising start. "After three months of work, we've reached a weekly output of four batches of 12,000 chickens sold throughout the city of Kinshasa," he said. "I think there is hope that within two years, poultry farming can actually contribute to funding the national budget. But I can't estimate to what proportion."

As a result, the project initially planned to last six months has been extended for an additional eight months by government due to its positive outcomes, according to Nkongolo.

"There's been an obvious improvement of food quality. Approximately 1,800 chickens are sold every day across eight sites scattered around Kinshasa. This provides work to about 60 formerly unemployed people, (who are) paid on average 100 dollars per month," said Nkongolo.

"Besides the quality aspect, the project also creates jobs for at least 120 people including more than 60 mothers," said Mukosa Theodosius, a mother of three who works for the project as a sales representative in Matete county. Previously unemployed, she now earns the equivalent of about 90 dollars in Congolese francs.

Germaine Kitungwa, a chicken seller, says "she does good business with N'Sele chickens." Indeed, while "an imported 160 gram frozen chicken is more or less five dollars, an N'Sele chicken of same weight costs only 3,000 Congolese francs, or about 3.5 dollars. Most mothers now prefer to buy those chicken to save money but also because it is fresher."

According to Nkongolo, the low price of N'Sele chicken is a reflection of ADB policy to provide poor people access to food. The price is fixed by agreement between the ADB and the ministry and aims to stop imports of frozen meat, discourage importers and help them redirect their food industry investments with a focus on quality.

However, Nkongolo explained, prices could be adjusted within a few months but it will

be in keeping with ADB policy to which government gave its consent. Thus, even if increased, the price will not be higher than that of frozen chickens, he says.

"The government's vision is good. But the project's sustainability is in question given the high level of government instability in the DRC since 1990. Whenever a minister is replaced, the new one does away with their predecessor's programs," Lokwa Eugene told IPS. Eugene lives near the N'Sele poultry farm.

Julie Mambueni, an economist resident of Kingasani, a county of Kinshasa, is equally skeptical. "The project is very good, but the country does not have a reliable management system," she said. "The National Bank is dysfunctional and doesn't grant credit. The ADB will remain the only source of financing, which is not obvious. The credit unions have become unviable, especially in Kinshasa. This is why the project will fail."

For Stephanie Kapuko originally of North Kivu province in eastern DRC, and a temporary resident of Kingasani, "a 4,000 hectare concession is far from enough to implement an ambitious national plan. And the DRC is not just Kinshasa. The government should put in a little more effort to implement pilot projects in each of the 11 provinces of the country."

"The country hasn't had a coherent agricultural policy since the 1980s. This created a gap which businessmen took advantage of, sometimes even abused, by importing all kinds of foods including frozen chicken, turkey rumps, chicken wings, pig tails... all the by-products Westerners refuse to eat at home," Jean Kalunga said indignantly. Kalunga is a lawyer and advocate for economic and social rights within Congolese civil society.

The activist told IPS that "it was time for the government to realise that the DRC had already become a dumping ground for businessmen exporting these commodities, supported in this by Western countries that allow this shameful commerce."

Le projet d'aviculture à N'Sele sera-t-il à la hauteur des attentes?

By Emmanuel Chaco

KINSHASA - Depuis les années 1980, pour accéder à la viande de volaille, les quelque sept millions de Congolais vivant à Kinshasa, capitale de la République démocratique du Congo (RDC), n'avaient pour seul choix que les poulets surgelés importés des pays occidentaux par certains hommes d'affaires.

Mais, «le gouvernement ne peut plus accepter que des Congolais soient soumis à une alimentation rudimentaire essentiellement composée des poulets et des poissons surgelés importés dans des conditions peu fiables pendant que le pays regorge d'énormes potentialités dans le domaine alimentaire», déclare Norbert Bashengezi Katintima, ministre de l'Agriculture, Pêche et Elevage.

Le gouvernement a donc lancé, depuis décembre 2009, avec l'appui financier de la Banque africaine de développement (BAD), un vaste projet avicole à N'Sele, une commune rurale située à la sortie-ouest de Kinshasa. Ce projet, qui est contrôlé entièrement par le gouvernement, a reçu un financement de huit millions de dollars US.

Interrogé par IPS, Juvénal Bahune, conseiller chargé de l'élevage au cabinet du ministre de l'Agriculture, Pêche et Elevage a indiqué : «Le ministère vient de se doter d'une feuille de route qui jette les jalons d'une véritable lutte contre l'insécurité et la crise alimentaires à travers le pays». Pour l'instant, a-t-il ajouté, le projet pilote financé par la BAD et qui concerne l'élevage des porcs et l'aviculture, ne touchera que Kinshasa, le Katanga (sud-est du pays) et le Kasai occidental (sud-ouest).

«Ce projet vise également l'amélioration de la qualité alimentaire des Congolais et à encadrer les petits fermiers par des

conseils techniques et pratiques dans le domaine agricole», a-t-il souligné.

Le grand défi pour le ministre de l'Agriculture, Pêche et Elevage est d'«arriver à financer le budget national à hauteur de 15 pour cent, des ressources financières provenant de l'aviculture», comme l'affirme le document stratégique de politique agricole élaboré par le gouvernement en novembre 2009.

Freddy Nkongolo coordonnateur du projet sur le domaine de N'Sele - environ 4.000 hectares - indique à IPS que les débuts sont déjà prometteurs. «Au bout de trois mois seulement de travail, on est à une production hebdomadaire de quatre lots de 12.000 poulets de chair vendus à travers la ville de Kinshasa», a-t-il dit. «Je crois qu'il y a lieu d'espérer qu'après deux ans, l'aviculture contribuera effectivement au financement du budget national. Mais je ne peux pas estimer à hauteur de combien cela sera possible».

Ainsi, le projet qui devait durer six mois, vient d'être prorogé de huit mois supplémentaires par le gouvernement grâce aux bons résultats qu'il semble donner, selon Nkongolo.

«L'amélioration de la qualité alimentaire est évidente. En moyenne 1.800 poulets de chair sont vendus par jour à travers huit sites éparpillés dans la ville de Kinshasa. Ce travail occupe environ 60 personnes, naguère sans emploi, payés en moyenne 100 dollars US le mois», affirme Nkongolo.

«A côté de l'aspect qualitatif, le projet permet aussi l'embauche d'au moins 120 personnes dont plus de 60 mères des familles», déclare Théodose Mukosa, une mère de trois enfants, engagée au projet comme chargée des ventes dans la commune de Matete. Naguère sans emploi,

elle gagne désormais, en francs congolais, l'équivalent d'environ 90 dollars US.

Germaine Kitungwa, revendeuse des poulets affirme «faire de bonnes affaires avec les poulets de N'Sele». En effet, alors que «le poulet surgelé importé d'environ 160 grammes coûte plus ou moins cinq dollars, le poulet de N'Sele de ce même poids ne coûte que 3.000 francs congolais, soit environ 3,5 dollars. La plupart des mamans préfèrent désormais acheter ce poulet pour des raisons d'économie mais aussi parce qu'il est plus frais».

Selon Nkongolo interrogé par IPS, le bas prix du poulet produit à N'Sele entre dans la politique de la BAD de donner accès à la nourriture pour les populations pauvres. Le prix fixé de commun accord entre la BAD et le ministère a pour objectif de casser les importations des surgelés, de décourager les importateurs et de les aider à orienter leurs investissements dans des secteurs alimentaires en fondant leur action sur la qualité.

Toutefois, explique Nkongolo, les prix pourraient être réajustés d'ici quelques mois, mais toujours dans le sens de la politique de la BAD à laquelle le gouvernement a adhéré. Ainsi, ce prix, même s'il croissait, ne pourra pas dépasser celui auquel sont vendus les poulets surgelés, affirme-t-il.

«L'ambition du gouvernement est bonne. Mais personne ne peut être sûr qu'elle sera pérenne puisque depuis 1990, tous les gouvernements de la RDC sont caractérisés par une forte instabilité. Chaque fois qu'un ministre est remplacé, le nouveau balaye toutes les initiatives de son prédécesseur», déplore à IPS, Eugène Lokwa, habitant voisin du domaine avicole de N'Sele.

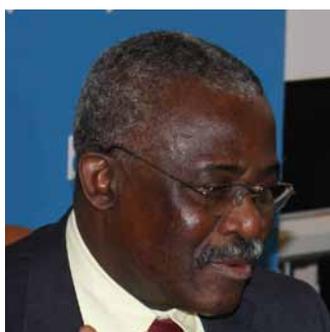
Tout aussi sceptique, Julie Mambuene, économiste, habitante de Kingasani, une commune de Kinshasa, estime que «le projet est très bon, mais le pays n'a pas un système de gestion fiable. La banque nationale dysfonctionne et n'octroie aucun crédit. La BAD sera ainsi considérée comme la seule pourvoyeuse des finances, ce qui n'est pas une évidence. Les coopératives d'épargne et de crédit sont devenues peu viables, surtout à Kinshasa. Voilà ce qui fera échouer le projet».

Pour Stéphanie Kapuku de la province du Nord-Kivu, dans l'est de la RDC, en résidence provisoire à Kingasani, «une concession de 4.000 hectares seulement ne peut pas suffire pour abriter un ambitieux projet national. Et la RDC ne se limite pas à la seule ville de Kinshasa. Le gouvernement devrait faire un peu plus d'effort de mettre en place un projet pilote dans chacune des 11 provinces du pays».

«C'est depuis les années 1980 que le pays n'a plus eu une politique agricole cohérente. Ce qui a permis aux hommes d'affaires d'exploiter, parfois abusivement, cette brèche, en important toutes sortes de denrées parmi lesquelles des poulets surgelés, des croupions de dindes, des ailes de poulets, des queues de porcs..., tout ce que les Occidentaux refusent de consommer chez eux», s'indigne Jean Kalunga, avocat et défenseur des droits économiques et sociaux au sein de la société civile congolaise.

Cet activiste a indiqué à IPS qu'il «était temps que le gouvernement prenne conscience que la RDC était déjà devenue une poubelle pour les hommes d'affaires exportateurs de toutes ces denrées, appuyés en cela par des pays occidentaux qui permettent cette honteuse importation».

All roads lead to rural agribusiness: a pathway out of rural poverty



By Kanayo F. Nwanze

Agriculture is a business no matter its size or scale, and it is a powerful tool for eradicating extreme poverty and hunger. Providing a handout that might just double the income of a smallholder farmer who scrapes by on less than a dollar a day is simply poverty management.

But supporting that smallholder to launch an agribusiness to increase their income five-fold, that is poverty eradication.

History has shown that agriculture is the driver of economic growth. The vast majority of today's developed countries grew out of strong agricultural foundations, where surplus production generated wealth and prosperity. Taking a page from 18th century England or 20th century China, strengthening agriculture is one of the best investments any African country can make today.

With some 80 million small farms in sub-Saharan Africa that produce 80 per cent of the agricultural goods, smallholder farmers can become engines of economic growth that can serve to unleash the continent's potential to feed itself. But this can only happen when we start to invest, just as we would any business opportunity, in the tremendous potential of smallholder farmers and the rural institutions and structures that support them.

Vibrant rural economies need private sector partnerships

Smallholder farmers in Africa constitute the largest group of economic actors. A vibrant rural sector generates local demand for locally-produced products and services. This can spur sustainable off-farm employment growth in services, agro-processing and small-scale manufacturing. This is not only crucial for rural employment, but also crucial for feeding a growing urban population. With support, such as irrigation and fertilizer, the amount of arable land available in sub-Saharan Africa could be increased four to five times.

But turning this potential into increased profits and creating a better bottom line for small farmers and their rural communities, requires investment along the entire value chain.

The private sector, including buyers, can improve the ability of smallholder farmers to access local, regional or even global markets through the right investments that incorporate rather

than exclude smallholders. In addition, partnerships with the private sector can leverage investments, while also bringing about knowledge, technology, strengthened institutional capacities and infrastructure to rural areas in developing countries.

The experience of the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) has shown that investing in rural development provides additional momentum for growth in the agricultural sector. But these investments must include simultaneous development of the non-farm sector, rural institutions, and governance structures in order to build a better future for rural communities. Because without available jobs, poor rural young people in Africa will be driven away from rural areas in search of work in the cities, and then who will feed the world in 2020 or in 2030?

Investing in tomorrow's farmers: an investment in our future

Seventy-five percent of the world's poorest people – more than 1 billion men, women and children – live in the rural areas of developing countries and depend on agriculture. We must ensure that farming is profitable so young women and men are drawn to it. Rural education systems need a massive injection of investment, institutional development and innovation if today's young people are to build successful lives and not turn away from their rural communities in search of work in the cities.

Governments, donors and private sector operators need to act – individually and collectively – to make rural agribusinesses viable, particularly for women and youths who shoulder the future of African rural agribusinesses.

An investment in agriculture is an investment in economic development, in rural areas, in young women and men and in food security. In Africa, if agriculture fails, no amount of investment in other sectors will compensate.

People in rural areas can overcome poverty if they have the opportunity to cultivate land, and have access to jobs, credit, technical assistance, water, roads and markets for their products. It is important that we strengthen the capacity of smallholder farmers and their organizations to deliver what large businesses require, and encourage businesses to adapt their models to be inclusive and supportive of small-scale agricultural producers. By accomplishing this, we can achieve a world without poverty and hunger – a place where agriculture is the pathway out of poverty.

Kanayo F. Nwanze is the President of the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD).

IFAD works with poor rural people to enable them to grow and sell more food, increase their incomes and determine the direction of their own lives. Since 1978, IFAD has invested over US\$11 billion in grants and low-interest loans to developing countries, empowering some 350 million people to break out of poverty. IFAD is an international financial institution and a specialized UN agency based in Rome – the UN's food and agricultural hub. It is a unique partnership of 165 members from the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), other developing countries and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).