Sharing innovations to overcome rural poverty

Researchers and other development actors converged last June in Ouagadougou – Burkina Faso to see what could be done such that useful innovations are shared across development projects, programmes and actors within the West and Central African region. At the moment, many useful innovations have been developed but are unknown outside the local context, because there exist no mechanisms to identify, document and disseminate innovations which have been identified as key to rural development, poverty alleviation, addressing rising prices and promoting a green revolution.

The Ouagadougou meeting had two main activities running simultaneously: a workshop and a fair. It was organised by IFAD in collaboration with CTA, SCAO/OECD, UNIFEM, ROPPA and FRAO. The meeting falls within IFAD’s strategy which aims to ensure that innovation is systematically and effectively mainstreamed in corporate processes and country programmes to enable populations overcome poverty. This means researchers and development organisations will promote and capitalise on innovative processes, technological innovations and promising practices that have been developed in the region. There is therefore need to develop communication tools and mechanisms to share innovations and promote ongoing partnership. Dr Ann Degrande presented the innovation by ICRAF and partners on “Participatory Tree Domestication” during one of the group sessions on technological innovation. According to Alexandro Meschinelli of IFAD, the innovation by ICRAF will serve as a model for the development of Technical Advisory Notes on other innovations. In all, fourteen technology, nine institutional and four policy innovations were presented.

Participants at the Ouagadougou workshop identified among others, reinforcing farmer organisations in the innovation process, promoting financial mechanisms that favour agricultural investment, need to protect resources and innovations against bio-piracy and ensure intellectual property rights, strengthening of networks, training of staff and the need to focus more on tools, methods and approaches for scouting of innovations were identified as the way forward.
The first “Forest Connect” international workshop aimed at developing a framework for small and medium forest enterprises (SMFEs) held last July 2-4 at the National Museum of Scotland. It was dedicated to reducing poverty by better linking SMFEs to each other, to markets, to service providers and to policy processes such as national forest programmes. It currently involves active programmes of work in eleven countries plus a broader network of supporters in forty-eight countries, all linked with an international social networking site. The development of a framework for this toolkit is based on expressed needs of the country partners. The idea behind the toolkit is to spread lessons of best practice in better linking small forest enterprises.

Policy discrimination and the lack of capacity to analyse policy impact, push for effective change and the deficit in product development, basic business and financial skills in partner institutions were identified as underlying causes of the struggle by facilitators to support SMFEs.

At the end of the workshop, there was a strong commitment to support country teams over the coming years with a potential toolkit revision meeting next year. The International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) would lead in developing some basic content for the agreed toolkit modules and soliciting inputs from within and outside the alliance. The workshop was primarily funded by PROFOR and hosted by FAO. Peter Mbile represented the Rights and Resources Initiative (RRI) coalition of which ICRAF is a part following ICRAF’s work in Cameroon.

Yaounde to host regional land consultative workshop

The workshop to run from 6-8 August 2008 at the Mont Febe Hotel will bring together a wide range of stakeholders on land issues in the region including national governments, civil society, traditional chiefs, private sector, centres of excellence and development partners. It has been organized by the tripartite consortium of the African Union Commission (AUC), the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) and the African Development Bank (AFDB). In collaboration with the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) and the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD).

The workshop aims at reaching a consensus on the revisions needed to finalise the regional background document on land policy in Central Africa. Participants are expected to look at regional specificities that should be taken in account when drawing up the continental framework. Special attention will equally be given to the knowledge, institutional and resource gaps, as well as draw lessons from ongoing initiatives in the region that are critical in identifying capacity needs and development strategies. Participants will equally look at key elements necessary in the development of benchmarks and indicators, and mechanisms for assessing performance of land processes in the region. ICRAF has been invited to the workshop and is expected to play an active role.
WWF through the “Kudo-Zombo” programme contracted to ICRAF the responsibility of formulating a strategy that will ensure the conservation of the forest ecosystem and guarantee the wellbeing of the local population at the same time. This is to help prevent conflict that may arise between WWF and its partners that are working for the conservation of the Campo Ma’an National Park on the one hand and the local population living within the support zone and depending on the forest resources for their livelihood on the other.

To achieve this goal, ICRAF adopted an innovative participatory methodology that consisted of developing the entrepreneurial skills of all the stakeholders in the commercialisation of four agroforestry products: njansang (*Ricinodendron heudelotii*), andok (*Irvingia* spp), okok or eru (*Gnetum* spp) and rattan (*Calamus* spp).

The strategy adopted by ICRAF embraced a wide range of technical issues such as looking at the movement of the products and the actors involved, as well as organisational issues. The parties involved constituted two groups: local NGOs and/or private sector on the one hand and the producers and/or consumers and buyers on the other. Each group had a roadmap drawn up in advance to be able to put in place an adapted system of commercialisation depending on the zone and product. Traders worked to make sure they consolidate achievements making way for a system with traders dealing on many products and at different regions simultaneously. For the producers, the target is to help them take the activity as a business. This is to enable them increase their chances of selling (marketing opportunities) through capacity building and improving on the production strategies.

For a beginning, three communities of one sub-division (Ma’an): Alen, Tya’assono and Nya-bessang where selected for the implementation of the strategy. After a sensitisation campaign, two training sessions were organised: first on group dynamics and sub-sector approach and the second on the basic notions of marketing.

A third training session on harvesting techniques will be held before the production of njangang begins this year and will consist of theoretical and practical sessions. A restitution workshop has been planned for the near future to help study market trends for njansang and andok.

### Farmers schooled on integrated soil fertility management

Two training of trainers workshop were organized to train extension agents and farmer leaders on integrated soil fertility management. The training was carried out by the Agricultural and Tree Products Program financed by the Food for Progress Program. According to the Capacity Building Officer Njong James, the training falls in line with the projects mandate of improving the agricultural production capacities of farmers in the western highlands of Cameroon. He says emphasis has been on the promotion of sustainable and integrated land use management. The workshops were designed to improve participants’ soil fertility techniques practices. Participants comprised experienced extension and development workers, farmer leaders and trainers from public and private sectors in the West and Northwest provinces. Their communities are faced with common land use problems to which agroforestry solutions could be the solution. The workshop took place at Riba Agroforestry Resource Center in Kumbo for the Northwest and in the APADER Resource Centre in Bangante for the West. The workshops regrouped forty-six participants from twenty partner organizations and 30% of participants were women. They were drilled on issues such as introduction to agroforestry, principles and concept of soil fertility management and practices, soil erosion control, soil fertility management with agroforestry species, establishment and management of soil fertility demonstration plots and the elaboration of action plans.
Election of staff representatives soon

According to a circular letter from the Human Resources Administrator, Edith Souop, the candidates are Crose Ngondjou, Amadou Mbouomboou and Olu Tibi for the first college and Charlie Mbosso, Bertin Takoutsing and Njong James for the second. Elections may hold between 5-7 August 2008. According to labour rules, only workers who have served for at least six months will be allowed to vote. Good Luck to all the candidates.

SOLICRAF announces general assembly

The general assembly meeting of SOLICRAF will hold on 8 August 2008 at the residence of Alain Tsobeng. Meantime, the executive will meet on 4 August 2008 to prepare for the upcoming GA.

Humour

The teenage granddaughter comes downstairs for her date with this see-through blouse on and no bra. Her grandmother just has a fit, telling her not to dare go out like that. The teenager tells her "Loosen up Grams. These are modern times. You got to let your rosebuds show!" and out she goes. The next day the teenager comes downstairs, and the grandmother is sitting there with no top on. The teenager wants to die. She explains to her grandmother that she has friends coming over and that it is just not appropriate. "Loosen up, sweetie. If you can show off your rosebuds, then I can display my hanging baskets."

Riddle

There was a green house. Inside the green house there was a white house. Inside the white house there was a red house. Inside the red house there were lots of babies.

Question: What is the green house?

Send your answer to: j.Iseli@cgiar.org and win a prize

Senior Scientists Fellowship Programme: AFORNET Programme 8th Call for Pre-Proposals

The African Forest Research Network (AFORNET) is inviting African tree and forest scientists to submit multi-disciplinary and transnational research proposals that fall under one of the following thematic areas: Woodland, Natural Forests and Biodiversity Conservation; Community-Based Forestry; Reforestation and Rehabilitation of Degraded and Arid Lands; Socio-Economics and Policy Issues; and Non-Timber Forest Products and Lesser Known Timber.

The grants are open to teams of senior scientists who are willing to undertake collaborative and transnational research in Africa. There is no age limit for the applicants to the Senior Scientists’ Fellowship Program. Grants for research may be awarded for up to three years. The total grant request should not exceed US$80,000 per project. Research teams from different disciplinary backgrounds must come from at least two countries.

Deadlines: 31st March and 30th September of each year.

UK modifies visa procedure

Henceforth, it will take more time to get a visa to UK. All visas except those applying to settle in the UK will take between 5-15 working days. The British High Commission in Yaounde has transferred the processing of visas to Accra—Ghana. The measure took effect from 28 July 2008. According to a release signed by the Deputy High Commissioner, the change does not alter the cost of an UK visa. Visa applications will be made online at www.visa4uk.fco.gov.uk

Contact the British High Commission for details.

Wisdom corner

Trees are the best monuments that a man can erect to his own memory. They speak his praises without flattery, and they are blessings to children yet unborn.

Lord Orrery, 1749

West and Central Africa