



MISTOWA

Networks of Regional Market Information Systems and Traders' Organizations in West Africa
Réseaux Régionaux de Systèmes d'Information de Marché et de Commerce Agricole en Afrique de l'Ouest



N° 14 - February 2006

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EDITORIAL

This month's newsletter features part one of a two part article on MISTOWA's advocacy training workshops held in six West African countries. These pioneering workshops will provide trader and producer organizations the tools to participate in the implementation of ECOWAS trade policy.

In this issue, we follow-up on last month's story about SOCAMED's negotiations with GAPTO (Ghana Agricultural Producers and Traders Organization).

Workshops strengthen advocacy skills to make free trade real (PART 1)



Govert van Oord of BBO pretends to be a minister on his way to his office when he is stopped by Lydia Sasu of the Farmers Organization Network of Ghana. In just few minutes, she must convince the 'minister' that it is worth his while to meet with her.

GAPTO makes deal with SOCAMED

Last month the MISTOWA newsletter reported that SOCAMED (The Agricultural and Market Produce Cooperative Society of Debe) and GAPTO (Ghana Agricultural Producers and Traders Organization) were in the midst of finalizing a trade agreement thanks to Bernard Ouedraogo's finding GAPTO contacts and commodity price information in the West Africa Trade Portal (www.wa-agritrade.net). The following is an update of that article.

Daoud Ayornu is fed up with the numerous stops he encounters transporting his cattle from Ougadougou, Burkina Faso to Accra, Ghana. Ayornu, Assistant Secretary of the Livestock and Traders Association in Accra, complains that on an average trip, authorities will stop his truck nearly thirty times in a single day. "They never come out and demand money; they have their own language that lets you know that if you don't pay up, you won't reach your destination any time soon," Ayornu said.

In addition to these harassing stops, Ayornu knows that his truck violates the legal maximum of three workers. He needs additional workers to protect the cattle during the long, hot journey. Authorities are quick to point out

SOCAMED's scouting expedition to Ghana reveals a change in the way business is being done in West Africa. Prior to meeting in

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NEWSLETTER



these violations, thereby assuring their receipt of additional payments. "These officials know that my cattle will not survive if I waste time trying to reason with them," Ayornu explained.

Frustrated by the situation, his organization approached a government minister for help. After many attempts, they managed to secure a letter authorizing the trucks to carry additional workers. However, when Ayornu presented the letter to the border officials, they ridiculed him and one official even tore the letter up and threw it on the ground. In spite of his association's efforts to change the situation, the harassment has not ceased. "I am not alone in this type of occurrence; this type of thing happens to all traders," Ayornu lamented. Indeed, ECOWAS has identified incidents such as Ayornu's as a significant barrier to free trade among the 15 member countries.

Trade and producer need advocacy skills for trade to increase

Despite ECOWAS' efforts to remove trade barriers, numerous impediments continue. Although producers and traders are affected most by the cross-border trade barriers, their organizations have never been a part of the implementation plan to assure that ECOWAS regulations are followed. Until recently, trade organizations were unable to acquire the advocacy and negotiating skills necessary to convince their governments to remove the numerous bottlenecks impeding their business in West Africa. "To increase trade in West Africa, government officials must be responsive to our needs but they cannot be responsive



Participants in Mali attempt to come to an agreement on their strategy for approaching other stakeholders and government officials.

if we do not know how to make them listen to us," says Gertrude Adu Yebo, Chairman of the Ghana Agricultural Producers and Traders Organization (GAPTO).

In January and February 2006, MISTOWA provided 120 leaders of trader and producer organizations - as well as transport organizations and agricultural input dealers - the opportunity to meet and discuss policies to promote hassle-free movement of goods and services across borders. The participants also received training in advocacy skills. The four-day workshops took place in Benin, Burkina Faso, Senegal, Mali, Ghana and Nigeria, with additional representatives from Guinea, Ivory Coast, Niger, and Togo. MISTOWA contracted BBO, an international, not-for-profit organization based in the Netherlands to lead the trainings. The workshop

explained advocacy concepts, but also helped participants to develop strategies for change according to the needs of each country. Resource persons from partners such as ECOWAS, WAEMU and WATH were invited to help guide the development of advocacy plans.

Four days of building advocacy skills

During the first two days of the workshop, participants received the basic tools to be effective in advocacy and negotiating. Each training session commenced with a discussion on the importance of strategizing and developing the optimal conditions for advocacy. All participants evaluated their own advocacy opportunities and discussed the limitations and risks relevant to their specific country.

On the first morning of the course, participants engaged in a 'role play' whereby each person was required to approach a 'minister' pretending to be on his way to his/her office. In this exercise, each attendee had to explain quickly the reason that a special meeting with the 'government official' was necessary. However, this seemingly simple goal proved more challenging than many had anticipated. Several leaders returned to their seats to examine why they did not get an appointment.

Informal doesn't mean unprepared

While several attendees were comfortable approaching a government official informally, they had to learn that 'informal' did not mean they were unprepared. A BBO facilitator, Govert van Oord, explained to participants the importance of strategizing, cautioning them to "always be systematic; even though it's informal, you need to plan



Participant in Nigeria workshop explains his vision for his commodity sector until the year 2020.

and think out what you want before approaching a government official. Show that you are really representing something, but at the same time don't be so absorbed by your own agenda that you forget [their] needs." The facilitators also reminded the group that "legitimacy and credibility are very important elements of good advocacy; you must explain who gives you the right to say what you are saying."

Participants develop advocacy plans

On the third day of the training, the attendees formulated their long-term objectives as traders, producers and input dealers, and identified their common concerns. After much deliberation, the top three advocacy issues identified as affecting all participating countries were:



Imam Ahmed, Secretary General of the Dawanau Market Development Association (DMDA) explains his advocacy plan.

- 1) non-tariff barriers to trade, such as formal and informal road harassment along the major trade corridors;
- 2) proliferation of fake agro inputs; and
- 3) lack of access to timely information on prices and market opportunities.

During the last two days of the workshop, participants focused on a plan of advocacy activities and acquiring the necessary skills and tools. This portion of the training focused on their actual problems, constraints, or obstacles impeding free agricultural trade. Each participant developed a plan by consulting with the experts in panel sessions. The experts helped participants formulate strategies to overcome the constraints for their particular sector or country.



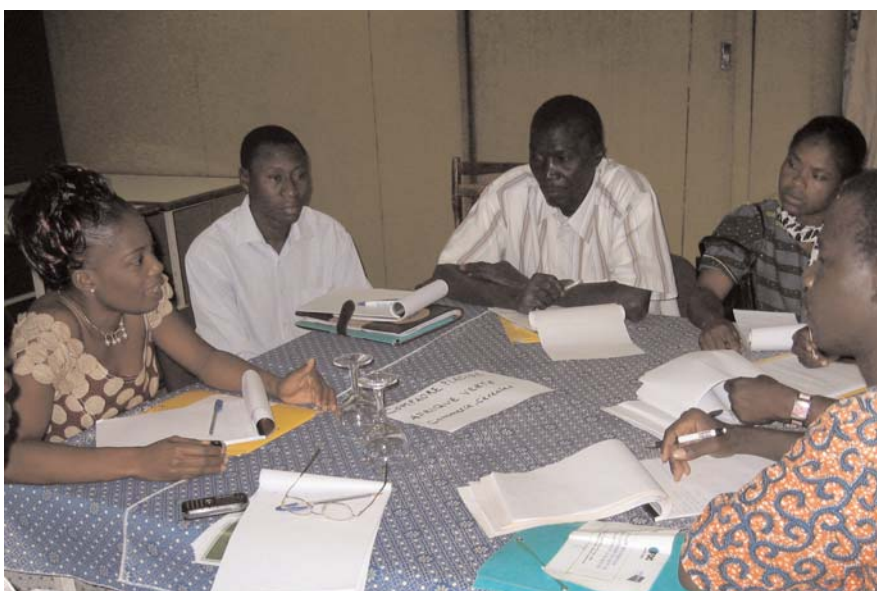
Members of GAPTO, Mohammed Ahmed, Comfort Quashie, Gertrude Adu-Yebo and Haruna Agesheka plan and develop their action plan for group presentation.

Aboubacar Fofana, President of ROESAO in Abuja, Nigeria from March 27-31, 2006. The workshop will assemble previously trained representatives of producer and trader organizations and experts from WAEMU, ECOWAS, USAID, WATH, A BBO trainer remarked that "People go home and find out that advocacy is difficult to implement, but you only learn by trying." Kofi Debrah, MISTOWA Chief of Trade associations not allow themselves to become an instrument of political parties because [that] affiliation...can ultimately be harmful to the organization."

Regional meeting scheduled for March 2006

The next step will be to bring all stakeholders together to develop a regional work plan at the Regional Advocacy Workshop

The group will formulate an advocacy strategy and implementation plan to address the constraints to regional trade. If the plan is well developed, it will have the support of ECOWAS and can guide producer and trader organizations throughout the region. Read about the outcome of this conference in our next edition of the newsletter. ■



Resource person, Compaore Placide, discusses action plan with participants at the Ouagadougou, advocacy training.

MISTOWA/IFDC GHANA

P.O. Box 1630
Accra
3, Orphan Crescent, Labone, Accra
Tel +233 (0) 21 780830
Fax +233 (0) 21 780829
E-mail ifdcghana@ifdc.org

IFDC

An International Center for Soil Fertility
and Agricultural Development
P.O. Box 2040 Muscle Shoals
Alabama 35662, U.S.A.
Tel +1 (256) 381-6600
Fax +1 (256) 381-7408
E-mail general@ifdc.org
Website www.ifdc.org

MISTOWA on the Web
www.mistowa.org

Contact us
info@mistowa.org

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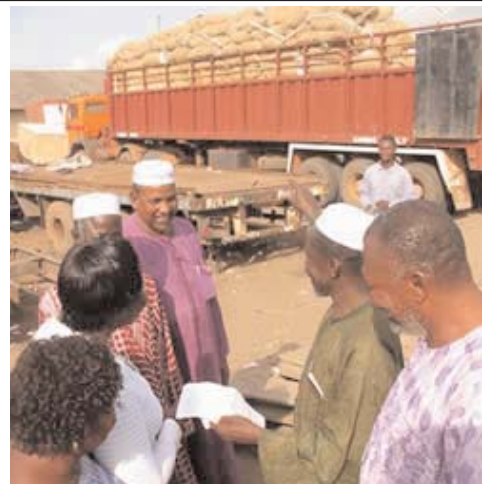
Visit www.mistowa.org, and
check out improved calendar
of events, and an easier
access to newsletters and
technical documents.

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Accra, Ghana, these two groups were not acquainted and would probably never have done business without the trade portal. However, one month after their first meeting, GAPTO members bought 55 tons of Burkina Faso onions on credit, worth \$8,700 at delivery. A remarkable accomplishment considering the degree of trust the credit deal necessitated.

Hama Al Husseine, Vice Chairman of the Onion Branch of GAPTO, and Alhaji Mahmoudou Abdoulai, a member of GAPTO, wanted to buy onions from the SOCAMED cooperative but had no ready cash. The GAPTO members' only hope was to make the purchase on credit and convince SOCAMED that they could market the onions in Accra and repay SOCAMED within a few weeks. To strike the deal, SOCAMED first had to find the GAPTO members credible and trustworthy. "SOCAMED knew that we were a serious organization because they met us in our offices and knew that we were working closely with MISTOWA," said Husseine.

On February 13, 2006, Husseine and Abdoulai left Accra and traveled by bus to Ouagadougou, arriving three days later in Nyassa. SOCAMED officers prepared a letter of credit for the GAPTO members, which promised to pay for the truckload of



GAPTO members discuss the journey from Nyassa, Burkina Faso to Accra, Ghana. onions within three weeks.

Using the MISTOWA website, a truck was prearranged for their journey home. On the return trip, the two men kept a record of all of the duties, tariffs and taxes they paid. "Before working with MISTOWA we did not pay close attention to unofficial stops, but on this trip we recorded 21 of them and the exact amount we paid at each stop-these fees are ultimately passed along to the consumer," said the GAPTO Vice Chairman. "After they pay for the onions, they would have established our trustworthiness and future deals will easily be made," says Haruna Agesheka, Secretary General of GAPTO. ■

Upcoming events

15-17 March - Tamale, Ghana:
Organizational Management Training for members of the Apex Farmers Organizations of Ghana (APFOG)..
Contact: apfogsecretariat@yahoo.com or Manon Dohmen mdohmen@ifdc.org

20-24 March - Ougadougou, Burkina Faso: Crop Outlook Conference. Contact: Patrice Annequin pannequin@ifdc.org

27-31 March - Abuja, Nigeria:
Regional Advocacy Workshop on road transport and other intra- regional trade constraints. Contact: mdohmen@ifdc.org

28-31 March - Accra, Ghana: Training of Trainers and managers of Agribusiness Information Points organized by MISTOWA's MIS unit. Contact: Patrice Annequin pannequin@ifdc.org

4-13 April - Accra, Ghana: ICT and Agribusiness Information Point management training for Information and Communication Officers of Chambers of Agric in West Africa and regional observatories members of RECAO. Contact:

[Patrice Annequin pannequin@ifdc.org](mailto:Patrice.Annequin@pannequin@ifdc.org)

15-19 May - Abuja, Nigeria:
Workshop for public and private sector specialists in MIS and agribusiness trade organizations to discuss lessons and techniques of establishing and improving national and regional market information systems. Dohmen mdohmen@ifdc.org or Henry Ekpiken ehenry@ifdc.org

9-13 June - Abuja, Nigeria:
Africa Fertilizer Summit convened by New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) and hosted by the government of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. The summit will be implemented by IFDC. Contact: mdohmen@ifdc.org or Henry Ekpiken ehenry@ifdc.org

19-23 June - Bamako, Mali:
Workshop to help participants increase their understanding of how to make agricultural commodity trade associations, producer organizations more effective and financially self-sustaining. Contact: mdohmen@ifdc.org or Emmanuel Alognikou ealognikou@ifdc.org

More details on MISTOWA at <http://events.mistowa.org/>.
If you wish to announce an event in this column, please send us a message before the 25th of the month to : info@mistowa.org