



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



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ABIPs in West Africa 1

RECAO & MISTOWA 3

Upcoming Events 4

NEWSLETTER



Editorial

This month's issue calls attention to the rise of ABIPs (Agribusiness Information Points) and the important work of RECAO, the Regional Network of the Chambers of Agriculture. The emergence of ABIPs similar to the Techiman e-Commerce Center shown above, in market-places throughout West Africa, is evidence of the ever-increasing professionalization of producers and traders, as well as the continued expansion of available market information throughout the region. The RECAO story illustrates the many accomplishments of West African producer and trader organizations and their networks in partnership with MISTOWA.

'AgriBusiness Information Points' spring up all over West Africa

Once limited to only a few buyers and burdened by middlemen eroding his profits, Mamadou Djaouga helped to found a livestock breeders association in Benin, the Departmental Union of Professional Organizations for Livestock Breeders (UDOPER). "Our association was created out of necessity since we had no systematic way to communicate to breeders on things like building institutional capacity, or learning about feeding techniques and overall animal health," said Djaouga. In April 2006, he represented UDOPER at the MISTOWA AgriBusiness Information Points (ABIP) training for managers. "Creating our own organizational website will let everyone know who we are while also exchanging information within the region to our members and others,"



Tharzia Akwetey of Koforidua e-Commerce Center, discusses a point raised during a recent "Training of Trainers" class in Accra.

explained Djaouga. "This training is of the utmost importance to my organization because having direct access to buyers eliminates the middlemen who reduce our profits," he continued.



An idea whose time has come

The ABIP concept evolved during the development stage of the MISTOWA project and was largely modeled after a market information sharing program in Kenya called KACE (Kenya Agricultural Commodity Exchange). However, MISTOWA adapted the KACE concept to address West African needs and popularize market information sharing. This will largely be achieved by also popularizing the West African Agricultural Trade Web Portal (www.wa-agritrade.net) as an online market information management tool. The portal is powered by software developed by Tradenet (www.tradenet.biz).

The identification of over 100 potential ABIPs among MISTOWA's network of partners in the region marks the beginning of an important new phase of the MISTOWA Project, intensifying its efforts to reach out to its end users. ABIPs will provide access to information communication technology (ICT) and market information systems (MIS) to farmers, traders and related agricultural organizations at designated service centers. They also provide local, national and regional agricultural business sectors an additional opportunity to build their individual or organizational capacity, by providing a high-tech alternative to organizing and exchanging information and data, as well as providing information for transparent business transactions.

Three types of partnerships

ABIPs are possible through three MISTOWA partnerships. First, MISTOWA identified trader and producer organizations in need of support to either create or develop existing service centers. The second type of partnership is the Internet Access Points (IAPs), such as privately owned cyber cafes permitting additional accessibility and convenience to the agribusiness community. Thirdly, MISTOWA will assist sub-regional organizations, already serving as information points, to provide ABIP services to its constituency.

Additionally, MISTOWA has concentrated on improving the quality of already existing public MIS service providers, especially the RESIMAO network (www.resimao.org), ECOWAS' SIGOA-TOPS [Trade Opportunities Management System], or AGOA (African Growth and Opportunity Act) service centers.



When MISTOWA participated in a study tour to Kenya, they saw notice boards like this one at Machakos market, which were updated daily by KACE to show wholesale prices, offers to sell and bids to buy. MISTOWA encourages ABIPs to provide similar notice boards.

Sustainability is key

"Our aim is to help existing trader and producer organizations strengthen the services to their members," explained Patrice Annequin, Deputy Chief of Party and responsible for the MISTOWA MIS Unit. "Aside from providing a source of income for the provision of services, ABIPs will indirectly contribute to the sustainability of agribusiness organizations; many farmers and traders currently do not feel compelled to pay membership dues because they have never received beneficial services." According to Annequin, if agribusiness organizations can provide their members with important market information, the benefit of organizational membership will be apparent and also encourage others to become members. Ultimately, additional membership dues increase organizational coffers. This in turn builds the capacity of the organization with increased funding to develop management skills, purchase equipment and contribute to the overall vitality of the organization.

Support MISTOWA provides

MISTOWA assists POs and TOs not only to conduct a preliminary membership needs-assessment for information services, but also directly involves its partners in the collection, analysis and dissemination of data and information. MISTOWA will guide service providers to select, use and acquire the most appropriate tools to meet their needs. After the completion of this process, MISTOWA can provide eligible candi-

dates 'equipment' and 'competitive' grants. The equipment grant provides regional and national partners funds to acquire and update equipment needed to improve information management (e.g., IT equipment, mobile or internet connectivity and related trainings and skills). Competitive grants can be used for the establishment and management of ABIPs, however, an applicant must be able to contribute a cost-share of least 25% of the value of the support provided by the project. MISTOWA provides guidance on the types of contributions that can be allocated to the cost-share.

Each ABIP addresses local needs

MISTOWA's Business Unit is currently developing standards defining the 'ideal' ABIP, according to producer and trader's organizations. "Each ABIP should meet the unique needs of its community, however, as trade increases, needs will also change," said Claudia Lalumia, MISTOWA's Business and Trade Advisor. Determinative factors in an ABIP's service capacity include: the size or the objective of the association; whether it is local, national or regional in character; whether it is based on one or several sub-sectors; and the locality of the ABIP or its access to communication networks (internet, mobile phones or radios). Due to these factors, ABIPs will vary in the services they provide.

Training trickles down

During the last few months, three sub-regional ABIP-related trainings

Dr. Gagny Timbo shares his thoughts with MISTOWA...

Since May 2001, Dr. Gagny Timbo served as coordinator for the Regional Network of Chambers of Agriculture (RECAO). Dr. Timbo recently announced to MISTOWA that he made the difficult decision to leave RECAO and provide the opportunity for someone else to continue his work. In a recent interview, Dr. Timbo recounts his experience of building the RECAO/MISTOWA partnership. Looking back at the last few years, he describes this relationship as an exemplary one and sheds light on how in the face of adversity, the two organizations managed to build a strategic partnership during his tenure.



RECAO officials and members participated in a workshop held by MISTOWA in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso in January, 2006.

RECAO's objectives of representing farmers' interests at national and sub-regional levels and building their skills to become efficient and competitive in the agricultural sub-sector fit in very well with MISTOWA's," explained Dr Timbo. He also attributed the successful partnership to the frequent interaction with RECAO and the other partner networks including RESIMAO, ROSEAO, FACIA, ROPPA and RECAO. Dr. Timbo described a partnership whereby all the partners needs are taken into account and each network is permitted to best fulfill their respective role. At the same time, he noted that the partner networks need support because they have only recently emerged and need time and resources to flourish. "This is where we appreciate the MISTOWA support for organizational management training, ICT skills development and grants to purchase equipment, and the opportunity to get connected to the Internet" he continued.

According to Dr Timbo the MISTOWA's various forms of support including the equipment grant award of \$150,000 to RECAO, has enabled his organization to carry out four (4) major activities that have directly contributed to the strengthening of members' capacity, better governance and an improved understanding of the socio-economic environment of West Africa.

The first activity was related to MISTOWA's support for the third General Assembly of RECAO held in October 2005 in Cotonou, Benin. The convening of the meeting provided a much-needed opportunity to discuss critically important issues of self-governance, including recently adopted and

revised regulations and procedures. The General Assembly also developed an activity program and an operation plan for the coming year, focusing on priority areas such as governance, capacity building, advocacy and networking. This meeting was instrumental in developing a structured, vibrant institution able to more effectively fulfill its mission and help coordinate the activities of Chambers of Agriculture throughout West Africa.



Dr Gagny TIMBO

The second activity was a training workshop jointly organized with MISTOWA in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso whereby RECAO officers and in-country Secretary Generals and Information and Communication Officers received additional training in institutional governance and on information management. Participants of the workshop developed a much needed action plan, providing a solid foundation for the establishment of RECAO's information and communication system. Such a foundation encourages members to envision a modern, technological network for the Chambers of Agriculture.

The third activity involved equipping RECAO's regional office and each national Chambers of Agriculture with computers and accessories to support their ability to develop optimal information management. This type of support from MISTOWA permitted RECAO to enter into the modern information era.

The last activity was a workshop held in April 2006 in Accra, Ghana whereby information and communication officers had a hands-on training on the use of information communication technology. This training opened the door to several opportunities including the creation of a RECAO website, and the establishment of Agribusiness Information Points (ABIP) to relay, strengthen and diversify existing information services.

The activities described by Dr. Timbo have been the building blocks not only for the RECAO/MISTOWA partnership but ultimately for the transformation the Chambers of Agriculture into a more effective, responsive institution. ■

RECAO Facts

- ▶ **Mission:** Representing farmers' interests and serving as a consultative body for decision-makers.
- ▶ **Objectives:**
 - represent the interests of farmers;
 - improve professionalism of farmers;
 - provide members with education, communication and information.
- ▶ **Founded:** 9 May 2001 in Bamako, Mali
- ▶ **Membership:** Chambers of Agriculture in Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, Mali and Togo
- ▶ **Regional Headquarters:** Bamako, Mali

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Yachina Dete, Database Manager for the MISTOWA project, leads a training session for ABIP managers on how to use the Trade Portal.

(i.e., number of trade deals facilitated, types of information required and supplied).

Business Management Training

Getting ABIPs prepared to provide technical services is but one aspect of sustainability. MISTOWA also realizes that managers require business skills to assure the growth, adaptability and long term survival of ABIPs. In the coming months, ABIP managers will receive training on basic business skills for managing, actuating and marketing agricultural information centre. Other business skills such as book-keeping, assessing service provision, facilitating trade deals and negotiations, generating revenue, and maintaining business records.

ABIPs help increase intra-regional trade

The development of the ABIPs will allow the MISTOWA project to fulfill its mission of promoting the sub-regional agricultural market and improving food security in West Africa. By advancing existing market information services and strengthening the capacity of agribusiness participants to generate, disseminate and commercialize market information, ABIPs will enable agri-business actors to make informed business decisions, increasing trade deals and thereby raising their incomes, and contributing to regional economic growth and integration in West Africa. ■

MISTOWA on the Web
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Contact us
info@mistowa.org

The West African
Agricultural Trade Portal
www.wa-agritrade.net



A platform powered by



Receive prices by SMS
of agricultural products
in West Africa by
sending your request to our
toll-free number
+233 244 708 185
(list of codes available at
www.mistowa.org/sms)



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have already occurred in West Africa, including "Training of Trainers" for MISTOWA staff and trainers. Training is provided primarily to information and communication personnel, according to their existing skill levels. Programs range from training in basic computer skills, market information management to website development. They are tailored to meet the identified needs of their members and exchange information relevant to their activities: technical and business meetings, internet browsing, newsletter production, SMS or telephone calls, radios, etc. "Our trainers are already conducting dozens of in-country trainings for ABIP managers," reported Annequin. As ABIP partners, associations exchange information with MISTOWA based on agreement terms

Upcoming Events

5- 7 June - Bobo Dioulasso, Burkina Faso: ICT & Agribusiness Information Point (ABIP) Management Training for IT Officers & market enumerators. Contact: Sami Traore straore@ifdc.org

9-13 June - Abuja, Nigeria: IFDC's Africa Fertilizer Summit. Contact: afs.secretariat@ifdc.org
Website: www.AfricaFertilizerSummit.org

19- 23 June - Bamako, Mali: Strengthening Agricultural Trade Organizations Workshop. This workshop focuses on making trader and producer organizations more effective and financially self-sustaining. Contact: Manon Dohmen mdohmen@ifdc.org

22- 23 June - Bamako, Mali: Organizational Management Meeting with ROESAO and official opening of ROESAO headquarters' office in Bamako. Contact: Ibrahima Toure itoure@ifdc.org

10-15 June - Kayes, Mali: Joint MISTOWA/Afrique Verte mission to Kayes to meet local partners and identify ABIP possibilities. Contact: Ibrahima Toure itoure@ifdc.org

20- 22 June - Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso: ICT & Agribusiness Information Point (ABIP) Management Training for IT Officers & market enumerators. Contact: Sami Traore straore@ifdc.org

20-23 June - Lagos, Nigeria: ABIP training for agricultural producers and traders in the southern Nigeria. Contact: Henry Ekpiken ehenry@ifdc.org

21- 23 June - Abeokuta, Nigeria: ABIP training of TOs/POs at the Community Resource Center. Contact: Henry Ekpiken ehenry@ifdc.org

23-25 June - Sourou, Burkina Faso: Local Rice Promotion Day. Contact: Sami Traore straore@ifdc.org

25-29 June - Koforidua, Ghana: ABIP training for market enumerators and selected service providers. Contact: Musa Taylor mtaylor@ifdc.org

26-29 June - Kaduna, Nigeria: Nigerian Agricultural Market Information Network (NAMIN) meeting. Contact: Henry Ekpiken ehenry@ifdc.org

25-29 June - Accra, Ghana: Stakeholders' follow-up advocacy workshop on national efforts to reduce road harassment and faking of agro chemicals. Contact: Musa Taylor mtaylor@ifdc.org

26-30 June - Accra, Ghana: MIS training for ROPPA Information and Communication Managers. Contact: Patrice Annequin pannequin@ifdc.org

18-22 September - Abuja, Nigeria: Second Annual 2006 Crop Outlook Conference. Contact: Patrice Annequin pannequin@ifdc.org

More details on MISTOWA can be found 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.