



# 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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## Editorial

*This edition is a joint July/August issue, featuring cross-cutting issues that affect intra-regional trade in West Africa, including gender-related and HIV/AIDS issues.*

*We also take a closer look at the shea sector, an area where rural women have a vital role, and are improving their lives by improving their business and technical skills.*

*In the picture above, participants who attended a three-day ICT training in Kaduna, Nigeria gather for a group portrait. In conjunction with the ICT training, MISTOWA provided an HIV/AIDS workshop as part of its ongoing effort to integrate important health and gender issues in program activities, because as producers and traders expand their businesses, men and women in the agricultural sector face greater risks as well as benefits.*

## Gender, Health Issues Affect Trade in West Africa

**A**mong the many challenges faced by producers and traders in West Africa, important issues concerning gender and health cut across all areas. The MISTOWA project seeks to include these “cross-cutting issues” in its programs, to benefit men and women throughout the sub-region. To find out how MISTOWA integrates these issues, Regine Dupuy, MISTOWA’s Communication & Public Relations Consultant, spoke with Gisèle Dovi, the project’s Regional Coordinator for HIV/AIDS and Gender-Related Issues. In this interview, Ms. Dovi explains the importance of incorporating gender and other cross-cutting issues in MISTOWA’s programs.

HIV/AIDS and Gender Related Issues. I am responsible for ensuring that gender and HIV issues are considered in all of MISTOWA’s programs. My background is in sociology, communication and administration. Prior to my appointment, I received research grants on two occasions to examine gender, science and technology in West Africa, and conduct an analysis of the usage of ICT by Togolese women to enhance their professional lives. Last year, I had the opportunity to participate in MISTOWA’s study on women’s informational needs conducted by a consultant, Dr. Nancy Horn.

► **What is your role and responsibility in MISTOWA?**

Since January 2006 I was appointed as MISTOWA’s Regional Coordinator for

► **What is meant by gender?**

When most people think of gender they think of women, but gender is actually the way society believes men and women’s roles should be. This is why gender roles

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are different depending on every society and even within the same country. Understanding gender is important for an organization to appropriately design its programs, implement them and also monitor and evaluate them. Incorporating gender into their activities helps institutions to effectively achieve their goals.

► ***How does MISTOWA incorporate gender in its programs?***

With each activity we undertake, we are trying to see how our project beneficiaries are affected—we look at both men and women. We want to make sure that both men and women benefit by taking into account their gender specificities.

Where we believe the commodity sector is dominated by women or women are disadvantaged in a particular sector, we may choose to focus a program on women. This is the case for the shea nut sector. MISTOWA's shea program is administered by Marie Laurentine Ilboudo, who also works on gender and HIV. Another example is in the Sharia-ruled northern Nigeria, where the need for special ICT training for women was found necessary and addressed by the project. Fatima Mohammed, coordinator for the northern region in Nigeria, and a Muslim woman herself, played very important role during that session, especially as concerns sensitive issues like HIV/AIDS.

But MISTOWA's effort to address gender issues cannot be totally effective if its staff are not sensitized about what gender is, why it is important and how it can be integrated into the project activities. So, staff training and sensitization are also an important component of our mainstreaming strategy.

► ***How do you do this?***

By advising staff, mainly national coordinators, on the activities they are planning to undertake so that both men and women are equally positively impacted. Also by undertaking gender analysis of our project activities in order to determine the gender impact of a particular activity. It is not just about making sure that 50% of women are included in each activity, but rather that the project has a really positive impact on both men and women. For example, an activity may have 50% of women receiving ICT training but I need to evaluate whether this contributes to MISTOWA's ultimate goal of increasing agricultural trade in the region. It is possible that an



*Giséle Dovi, on left, discussed MISTOWA's work on cross-cutting issues with participants at a project workshop.*

ICT class is composed of 50% women but very few women end up making trade deals on account of the training they received. My job is to evaluate what impact such an activity has on each gender. For example, I may need to examine why, despite the training, trade deals for women have not increased as compared to the men who received the same training. It is at this point that I can evaluate the situation and then make recommendations to MISTOWA as to what other external factors may be limiting their success and how they can be overcome.

► ***Do women and men face the same problems in agribusiness?***

Yes, they all face the same general constraints but these constraints are normally more extreme for women. In the case of women, they generally have less access to information than men. There is also greater vulnerability in their mobility. Between the two genders, women are therefore more vulnerable.

► ***What do you mean that agribusiness requires great mobility?***

In West Africa to be successful in agribusiness, traders and even producers need to move from place to place. Although all traders are affected by road harassment, women traders are often harassed even more, not only sexually but in other ways. Women are not just harassed by customs and police but also by the transporters themselves, who may take advantage of their dependence. This is especially true of small traders.

► ***Why do women have less access to information than men?***

Some women are very successful and

have as much access to information as men do, but as a general rule, this is not true. There are many reasons that women have less access to information. For example, generally lower literacy rates are one factor. To use a computer or SMS, a person needs a certain level of literacy. This also takes us back to the mobility factor because in certain societies women cannot operate independently. What I mean is that for cultural reasons, a woman traveling alone is frowned upon. In addition, sometimes, the demands of being a wife and mother limit her capability to access information. In many cases, it is difficult for a mother and wife to leave home in the evening after housekeeping, to go to an internet café to obtain information. Finally, communities often view women who use the Internet negatively because they have private access to communicate with anyone they wish.

► ***Are there any other issues that women face?***

Because of the system of inheritance in many African societies, women often have less access to land. Lack of information, collateral and contacts also makes it more difficult for women to obtain loans or even access microcredit lending institutions.

► ***What special gender programs does MISTOWA have in place?***

I would not call it gender programs. MISTOWA doesn't have a specific gender program. Through a process called 'gender mainstreaming,' we are trying to consider gender in all our activities, throughout the project cycle life.

► ***What is gender mainstreaming?***

As we have said earlier, we examine all the activities with a gender lens and we try to make sure that men and women benefit equally from the project. We first need to sensitize our own staff to that fact that gender mainstreaming is not about women fighting men but whole community benefiting from our programs. Sometimes we come to realize that certain women may need special intervention on our part. For example, this month in Northern Nigeria MISTOWA carried out a special ICT training for women. This training included a session on HIV/AIDS in relation with agricultural production and trade. In other situations we may not need specific training but ensuring that MISTOWA activities includes women's

## MISTOWA Addresses Shea Butter Production to Improve Women's Lives



*Women traditionally process shea nuts by hand, crushing the kernels before they are dry-roasted and milled.*

Shea butter has become an important ingredient for various food and beauty products throughout the world. The trees on which the shea kernels or nuts grow are naturally present throughout the Sahel region and are traditionally harvested by rural women, often for processing into 'butter'. Shea butter production has great potential for providing a more lucrative livelihood for agribusiness women in the Sahel. However, according to the Food and Agricultural Organization, issues of product quality greatly impede the development of this important resource. The persistently low quality of shea butter has resulted in lower prices and reduced returns to primary producers.

Marie Laurentine Ilboudo, Sociologist, Gender and AIDs Specialist and MISTOWA's Shea Activity Coordinator, is striving to implement programs to help primary producers attain skills and resources necessary to enable them to produce high quality shea butter and improve their access to essential market information. "By producing a better quality commodity, producers can increase demand for their products," said Ilboudo. "If women can gain access to market information, they are not limited to their local markets and can eliminate the middlemen that share in their profits."

### MISTOWA's contribution

According to Ilboudo, "MISTOWA has two strong assets to bring to the table: expertise in market information systems and providing capacity-building training for members of shea associations." "Shea

is among the 15 commodities supported by MISTOWA," she explained. "We are currently working in the shea sector in Burkina Faso and Mali and will eventually expand to Ghana, Senegal, Niger, Benin and Guinea," added Ilboudo.

The two shea-chain activities were launched in January 2006 when MISTOWA was invited by *Table Filière Karité* (TFK, a shea sector umbrella organization composed of shea sector actors, including producers, traders and processors) and PAF (Support Project for the Bio-Foods Sector/*Project d'Appui aux Filières BioAlimentaires*) to attend a workshop to help finalize a four-year strategic plan to strengthen the shea sector. The same process occurred in March and April in Sikasso and Bamako, Mali, with two consultative workshops composed of various agricultural actors and partners in the shea sector: the Dioïla Local Union of Shea Producers (ULPK), the Zantiébougou Producers Shea Cooperative (COPROKAZAN), The Shea Project, and the Malian Association of Raw Products Exporters (AMEPROC). Participants in Burkina and Mali first identified many of the weaknesses in shea production, processing and distribution. Four areas were prioritized as needing support: organizational development of sector associations, overall professionalization of the sector, increased development of local and international markets, and promotion of appropriate technology.

To address these concerns, MISTOWA aims to improve the quality of shea butter produced, improve organization of shea associations and increase producers' access to major shea markets. By providing training on appropriate processing techniques and on organizational management, and by establishing market information points that gather and distribute valuable market information, the



*Marie Laurentine Ilboudo, MISTOWA's Shea Activity Coordinator, helps beat the milled paste to emulsify the shea fats.*

project will attain these objectives. In addition, MISTOWA will continue to sponsor the participation of shea producers and traders at the annual Shea Forum in Burkina Faso to facilitate the networking that leads to successful trade deals. By partnering with other organizations that provide technical assistance, and bringing producer organizations together to respond to large buyers' demands, the project can contribute to more effective linkages among various stakeholders involved in the shea sector.

In partnership with the regional shea project "ProKarité" managed by IRSAT/DTA/Burkina and IER/LTA/Mali through the PFK (*Point Filière Karité*), MISTOWA is planning to establish Agri-Business Information Points (ABIPs) in Bobo Dioulasso and Pô in southern Burkina Faso, and Zantiébougou, Dioïla and San in Mali, where shea nut production is particularly high. These ABIPs will be managed by shea production facilitators trained by IRSAT/DTA in Burkina and IER/LTA in Mali and supported by the MISTOWA project.

Additional training related to improving shea nut butter production has been ongoing and will increase during the next several months. Training workshops, facilitated in collaboration with partner organizations, have focused on the three main technical aspects of shea butter production: shea collection technique, storage and treatment of the nuts, and quality shea nut butter production. Other workshops will examine trade aspects of shea production so that producers are familiar with quality assurance measures, traceability, certification processes and packaging techniques.

TFK will partner with MISTOWA to begin the planning process for the Fifth Annual Shea Forum. ■



*The emulsion is then clarified by repeated boiling, until a liquid remains which is left to cool: the creamy shea "butter".*

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participation whenever possible. In the livestock industry, it would be impossible at this point in time to expect that women could constitute even 10% of a program benefiting that sector. But nonetheless, we know that women will benefit in other ways from the men who receive benefits in that sector.

### ► *What are your future plans for MISTOWA?*

We are currently in the planning phase for the upcoming fiscal year, but I have many ideas that I will be proposing. I want to

include more information on the MISTOWA website targeted at enhancing the capacities of women and any other vulnerable group among our project beneficiaries. I will also discuss with our partners and other networks so that this information is linked to their website and other information channels. I hope to use the ABIP as a laboratory for MISTOWA gender and HIV/AIDS mainstreaming strategy. I also plan to work more closely with key staff in MISTOWA and strategic partners to ensure a successful integration of gender equity in the project. ■

## Agri-Business ICT Training Incorporates HIV Training

Participants who recently attended MISTOWA ICT training sessions were expecting to gain only basic computer skills during the three day workshops, but to their surprise they also took part in an additional session on HIV and AIDS. In Kpalimé, Togo, both men and women truck farmers and cereal growers, participated in the session. The other session held in Kano, Nigeria was made up of women members of producer and trader organizations. Vincent Agbovi, an HIV/AIDS consultant, facilitated the session in Kpalimé, while Gisèle Dovi, MISTOWA's Regional Coordinator for HIV/AIDS and Gender Related Issues, and Fatima Mohammed, MISTOWA's Country Coordinator for the Northern Region, facilitated the Kano sessions. Each session focused on participants' knowledge about HIV/AIDS, modes of transmission, prevention and development of the disease, as well as living with HIV.

Discussions centered on how agricultural production and trade can be affected by HIV/AIDS. "Essentially participants realized that as agricultural trade increases, so does the risk of HIV, the agribusiness community needs to understand this so that they can respond accordingly," explained Dovi. Some participants questioned why HIV

needed to be integrated with the ICT training. Due to the social stigma of HIV, it is surrounded by myths, avoidance and denial; this is why MISTOWA takes advantage of the opportunity to have workshops like these.

Attendees of both sessions were encouraged to speak openly and frankly about their concerns. Women from the Kano market were remarkably candid about their own experiences of vulnerability and the impact HIV has on women producers and traders. Even those who were initially antagonistic to the session eventually came to understand its importance. "The discussions made me realize the direct connection with our activities; I now see that I can also improve the situation by sharing with others what we have learned," said Appolinaire Sogbedji, a participant in Kpalimé. Each group agreed to continue similar discussions within their associations and find innovative ways to mitigate impact of HIV/AIDS on their community. "These sessions help people to understand that there can only be sustainable production and marketing when producers and traders are healthy," said Dovi.

Session documents, including addresses of HIV/AIDS counseling and screening centers, will be posted at [www.mistowa.org](http://www.mistowa.org). ■

## Upcoming Events

**30 July–9 August - Dioïla & Zantiébougou, Mali:** Training series for producers and traders on shea nut collection and processing. Contact: Ibrahim Toure [itoure@ifdc.org](mailto:itoure@ifdc.org)

**3-7 August - Bamako, Mali:** Training of Community Learning & Information Center (CLIC) managers. Contact: Ibrahim Toure [itoure@ifdc.org](mailto:itoure@ifdc.org)

**8 August - Accra, Ghana:** GAPTO ABIP training. Contact: Musa Taylor [mtaylor@ifdc.org](mailto:mtaylor@ifdc.org)

**8-10 August - Kaduna, Nigeria:** FEPSAN ABIP training. Contact: Henry Ekpiken [ehenry@ifdc.org](mailto:ehenry@ifdc.org)

**14-16 August - Abeokuta, Nigeria:** RIFAN ABIP training. Contact: Henry Ekpiken [ehenry@ifdc.org](mailto:ehenry@ifdc.org)

**23-24 August - Accra, Ghana:** ABIP training for Ashiaman and Kumasi Cattle Traders Associations. Contact: Musa Taylor [mtaylor@ifdc.org](mailto:mtaylor@ifdc.org)

**24 Aug–2 Sept - Kpalimé, Togo:** CT-ROESAO at the International Agro-Cultural Fair (FACI 2006). Contact: Raoul Klutse [rklutse@ifdc.org](mailto:rklutse@ifdc.org)

**4-8 September - Cotonou, Benin:** International MIS training workshop. Contact: Patrice Annequin [pannequin@ifdc.org](mailto:pannequin@ifdc.org)

**4-8 September - Kpalimé, Togo:** ROESAO strategic planning workshop. Contact: Raoul Klutse [rklutse@ifdc.org](mailto:rklutse@ifdc.org)

More details on MISTOWA can be found at <http://events.mistowa.org/>.

To announce an event, please send us a message before the 25th of the month to: [info@mistowa.org](mailto:info@mistowa.org).