



# 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

Due to changes in funding priorities, USAID has announced that it will implement major budget cuts to the MISTOWA Project and end funding in September 2007, one year earlier than originally scheduled. In their notification to MISTOWA, USAID West Africa stated that these cuts had nothing to do with the Project's performance, emphasizing that the MISTOWA had exceeded all expectations. Due to its commitment to the project ideals, MISTOWA is determined to maintain the program beyond 2007 by identifying new funding sources and by increasing its efforts

An International MIS training was held 4-8 September in Cotonou, Benin to strengthen MIS capabilities and enhance provision of market information services. About forty people from eight countries in West Africa attended the event.

to assure sustainability.

This month's edition will review the last fiscal year's accomplishments and will also discuss MISTOWA's strategy for adjusting to the budget cuts for Fiscal Year 2007. Please note that in order to dedicate more funds towards program implementation, MISTOWA will move from producing a monthly newsletter to a quarterly one.

## MISTOWA's Accomplishments: A Look Back

When USAID, our primary donor, announced significant budget cuts, affecting not only MISTOWA's operating budget but also curtailing the project's duration, we realized that our project needed to use its final year to support activities that will allow our work to continue. Fortunately, since its inception, the MISTOWA project was designed to be genuinely sustainable so that our activities could outlast the duration of our project. For this reason, we are impelled to examine our last year's accomplishments within the three key integrated project areas: market information systems, trader and producer skills, and the West African trade environment. Although this article focuses on MISTOWA's major accomplishments, many of our other important achievements are detailed in the list of achievements on page 2.

### Market information: creating, gathering and sharing

Throughout the year MISTOWA has worked with both the public and private sector to improve the quality and availability of market information. We have also supported the development of reliable regional and national public market information systems in conjunction with developing the supplemental support capacity to the private sector.

Despite MISTOWA's continued efforts to develop the regional trade portal [www.wa-agritrade.net](http://www.wa-agritrade.net) ([www.tradenet.biz](http://www.tradenet.biz)), easy access and widespread availability to market information for producers and traders has been MISTOWA's most challenging front. In light of this, the provision of support to producer organizations and

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# NEWSLETTER



trade associations for the establishment and functioning of Agribusiness Information Points (ABIPs) can be said to be this year's greatest breakthrough.

Nearly one year ago MISTOWA organized a study tour to Kenya for West African public sector MIS officials that proved instrumental in the conceptualization of the ABIPs.<sup>1</sup>

Thus far, the project has identified 150 potential ABIPs, of which 63 are determined to be "priority ABIPs" in locations throughout the ECOWAS countries. Although every ABIP is suited to its own environment, it is generally a center where information is available to assist association members in making commercial decisions and in improving business. Similarly, MISTOWA has targeted 50 cyber café managers and with other Internet access or information centers (e.g., AGOA resource centers, SIGOA-TOPS focal points, community information center etc) to provide technical and trade information to users.

The development of ABIPs is currently at the forefront of MISTOWA's work, not only because it helps disseminate market information, but also because of its proven capacity to be sustainable. "Over the last several months the Mile-12 ABIP [in Lagos, Nigeria], has been able to generate funds by providing market information, business and computer training services to both association members and non-members. They have been able to generate funds which cover much of the operating costs. This is very encouraging and serves as an example to other ABIPs that are working towards sustainability," said Claudia Lalumia, MISTOWA's Business and Trade Advisor.

By the end of March 2006, a three-module ICT training manual for ABIPs was completed allowing for the training of 309 information officers and potential managers in the following months. These trainees worked with major producer, trader and MIS partners from many West African countries..

### Building skills strengthens associations and increases business

Throughout the year, MISTOWA has supported skills development, including strengthening the organizational management skills of producer organizations and trade associations, developing producer and trader skills to access market opportunities through the use of the Internet, email, cellular phones, broadcast and print media, and participation in face-

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Artist's illustration of how an "ideal ABIP" might look.

## Additional MISTOWA Achievements for Fiscal Year 2006

### Activities towards MIS Development:

- ▶ **Trade portal hits:** As of September 20th, 2006 there have been over 118,742 hits on the project's trade portal [www.wa-agritrade.net](http://www.wa-agritrade.net) ([www.tradenet.biz](http://www.tradenet.biz));
- ▶ **Building a regional market information system:** Supported establishment of NAMIN (National Agricultural Market Information Network (NAMIN), a consortium of 7 public and private sector market information system organizations in Nigeria;
- ▶ **ICT & MIS Training:** Training of Information officers of RESIMAO/SIGOA-TOPS/AGOA Resource Centers (other public market information institutions);
- ▶ **Regional database development:** Finalized and operate its database and information exchange platform [www.resimao.org](http://www.resimao.org);
- ▶ **Website development:** Developed RESIMAO website and trained their national affiliate web managers;
- ▶ **Regional Workshops:** Organized a regional workshop on 'Adapting information collection methods to the evolution of markets' for RESIMAO;
- ▶ **Website creation:** For regional producer organizations (ROPPA, RECAO), regional trader organizations (ROESAO, FACIA), and commodity-based producer organizations and trader associations.

### Increasing Business Skills:

- ▶ **Capacity-building skills:** Trained over 1600 West African producers and traders;
- ▶ **Sustainable associations:**
  - Trained 121 participants, belonging to 15 different producer and trader associations in managing sustainable associations from Ghana and Nigeria.
  - Supported APFOG Apex Farmers' Organization of Ghana (APFOG) in several organizational management, managerial skills development, financial sustainability, record keeping and ICT use for business development.
- ▶ **Organizational consultations:**
  - Supported GAPTO (Ghana Agricultural Products & Traders Organization) consultative organizational partner meetings by hosting a General Assembly meeting for 58 delegates in March 2006.
  - Supported a ROESAO three-day consultative meeting that brought together Board Members to discuss vital issues relative to the networks' overall organizational and strategic concerns.
- ▶ **Supply chain:** Co-sponsored the three day 4th edition of the Annual Shea Butter Forum held in Bobo Dioulasso, Burkina Faso and supported several shea nut/butter supply chain trainings occurred in Burkina Faso, Mali, Benin and Ghana throughout the fiscal year.
- ▶ **International training workshops:** Supported 14 representatives from Benin, Burkina Faso, Ivory Coast, Ghana, Guinea, Niger, Nigeria, Togo and Senegal to participate in workshops on sustainable management for agricultural trader and producer organizations held in Bamako, Mali.

### Improving the Trade Environment:

- ▶ **Equipment grants:** Provided equipment grants to trader and producer organizations totaling \$900,000 USD.
- ▶ **Crop Outlook Conference:** Co-sponsored Annual Crop Outlook Conference in Burkina Faso, attended by 144 producers, traders and other stakeholders from 14 West African countries in March 2006, including, commodity exchange forum which resulted in 289 offers for sale and 46 offers to buy and provided the opportunity to evaluate agricultural and food conditions in the Sahel.



Dr Debrah talks about the funding cuts and the subsequent challenges to MISTOWA with Régine Dupuy, MISTOWA's Communication/Public Relations Consultant.

were required to train others, over 300 are now trained in advocacy through MISTOWA interventions. That group now forms the thematic group for the WACSOE. It is within this pool that any advocacy group will be drawn. We feel these are very remarkable achievements.

► ***How will the budget cuts affect us in the coming year?***

Despite USAID budget cuts, we will endeavor to continue the activities in all three areas. In the area of the MIS, we will concentrate on sixty out of the 150 ABIPs, to coach them to be able to use the facility to increase trade, to make analysis for decision making, to improve communication among the members and to use as meeting point for association members. To this end, we've developed a business training manual, to guide the ABIP managers to be able to generate revenues that will lead to financial sustainability.

Realistically, we have no other choice but to narrow the focus of our activities so that we can increase our impact on the reduced number of activities. It is also unfortunate that some of our staff, who have gained competency in such a short time, will no longer be working on the project. However, this is a result of the budget cuts, not their performance.

► ***What other activities may be reduced or end?***

Some of our traditional activities such as the Crop Outlook, will no longer be able to continue. We will also not be able to support the very useful face-to-face events such as trade fairs and commodity forums. In the foreseeable future, funds will not be available to provide partners with previously available equipment and competitive grants. We will have to, for example, reduce the frequency of newsletter and be modest on our promotional materials. Overall, it will mean more intelligent use of resources.

► ***What are the possibilities other donors might step in?***

We will also, use this period of time to seek new funding from other sources in order to continue the activities on the same scale as before. Fortunately, Agriterra will continue their funding which will be used mostly to support the producer organizations component of the project. Our work has so far interested donors other than USAID and it is quite likely that they will provide funding. ■

## USAID Funding Cuts Affect MISTOWA

USAID has announced the MISTOWA project budget will be cut back significantly as part of a larger cutback within USAID. Dr Kofi Debrah, MISTOWA's Chief of Party, discusses the recent announcement and what it means to the goals of the project.

► ***When were the budget cuts announced?***

The USAID grant for the MISTOWA Project was intended to last until, end of fiscal year, September 2008. We were notified in July 2006 that USAID funding for the project would end instead in 2007 and that the budget for the coming year would be drastically reduced.

► ***How much were the budget cuts?***

We are beginning the new fiscal year with drastic funding cuts. Our annual budget by USAID will be reduced from \$3.5 million to \$2.1 million.

► ***Do you think the cuts were a result of poor performance?***

According to USAID, this decision has nothing to do with MISTOWA's performance. In fact, USAID specifically stated that the project performed beyond its expectations. This assessment has been very important, not only to me as the project's Chief of Party, but to all the MISTOWA staff who have worked extremely hard to make the project a success.

► ***Why do you think our performance was viewed as exceptional?***

Our project is very complex and multi-faceted. With relatively small resources, we were trying to boost intraregional trade in the entire West African region. This type of change cannot happen overnight, but last year we made significant progress in all three of our project areas. First in the management information systems, we provided technical training around new technologies so that market information could be accessible to producers and traders. Altogether, we have provided training to over 1600 producers and traders. We also made a lot of progress in terms of improving professional skills of producers and traders. Many associations that were formerly only loosely organized are now registered as professional institutions. As a result of our collaborative efforts, the regional trader association, ROESAO, has for the first time opened its regional office in Bamako—fully staffed with an information officer and a fully functional bank account. Some of the national affiliates in Benin and Senegal have also registered their associations and opened their offices.

In the area of improving the West African trade environment, we succeeded in training over 120 leaders of producers and traders organization in acquiring needed advocacy skills. Because the beneficiaries

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a MISTOWA project partner:



[www.agriterra.org](http://www.agriterra.org)  
international cooperation  
between rural people's  
organizations

to-face events where they can meet supply chain actors and make business deals. MISTOWA has also provided training to help strengthen their membership structure and governance through targeted training and, when appropriate, consultative meetings to provide training for organizational leaders at regional and national levels.

In support of building sustainable ABIPs, MISTOWA developed a business training manual in August 2006. These manuals will be used for a series of regional business management trainings. The first occurred in September 2006 when MISTOWA hosted an International Training Program on strengthening market information systems for French speaking West Africa. This training was aimed at providing private and public sector participants a better understanding of how to design, operate and finance market information systems that generate effective and provide timely market information and revenue for producers, processors and traders (*See page 2 for an illustration of an "ideal ABIP"*).

### A better trading environment

MISTOWA has striven to increase sub-regional competitiveness of agricultural trade by reducing constraints that impede trade, particularly those that affect the free flow of goods, services and people across the borders of West Africa. The most effective contribution towards an improved trade environment by MISTOWA has been the provision of advocacy training to producer and trader organizations during the last fiscal year. By receiving advocacy and negotiation skills training, sub-regional associations have begun to affect legal and regulatory impediments to sub-regional trade and raise awareness around the issues.

Early in the year initial workshops, national in scope, included 120 leaders of producer and trader organizations (including 35

women), from Benin, Burkina Faso, Ghana, Guinea, Ivory Coast, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Togo and Senegal. A subsequent Regional Advocacy Workshop, including experts from ECOWAS, WAEMU and USAID has held in the ECOWAS Secretariat in Abuja, Nigeria in March 2006, gathering thirty-five of the previously-trained representatives. After concerted deliberations, participants selected the three primary advocacy issues to be lack of access to timely information on prices and market opportunities, proliferation of fake agro inputs (consumer protection due to lack of protective rules and regulations), non-tariff barriers to trade (particularly road harassment). High-level ECOWAS officials invited MISTOWA and other stakeholders for follow-up discussions to help integrate their advocacy findings eventual submission to the Summit of Heads of State agenda. Likewise, by close of conference, participants formed a civil society advocacy group within the WACSOFF (West Africa Civil Society Forum).

In keeping with MISTOWA's commitment to sustainability, participants and MISTOWA's country coordinators continued their work after the Regional Workshop by developing country-specific action plans. In addition, other follow up activities, including a debriefing on the training, contacting an in-country representative of the ECOWAS parliament, WAEMU, NEPAD and other stakeholders to gain support for implementation has already occurred. In addition, MISTOWA's Chief of Party, Dr. Kofi Debrah, met with the WACSOFF representatives in Abuja to discuss the way forward. ■

1 The delegation included 3 officers from electronic commerce centers from Ghana's Ministry of Food and Agriculture, one officer each from NAMIS and IITA in Nigeria and two officers from RESMAO network affiliates in Burkina Faso and Niger. The delegation visited wholesale and retail markets in Nairobi as well as MIS institutes (the Kenya Agricultural Commodity Exchange [KACE]) The highlight of the tour was the visit to KACE's Market Information Point (MIP) at Machakos. Apart from providing market information the MIP also serves as a business center and center for disseminating agricultural extension messages and demonstrations.

## Upcoming Events

**18-20 October - Po, Burkina Faso:** Traceability and quality control training for shea producers and processors; by IRSAT/MISTOWA. Contact: Sami Traore [straore@ifdc.org](mailto:straore@ifdc.org).

**24-27 October - Accra, Ghana:** International Training Program on Strengthening MIS. Contact: Claudia LaLumia [clalumia@ifdc.org](mailto:clalumia@ifdc.org).

**Date TBA, early November - Burkina Faso:** Annual shea products promotion event

organized by Table Filière Karité with guest speakers (often large buyers), display stands, offers to buy and sell, etc. Contact: Sami Traore [straore@ifdc.org](mailto:straore@ifdc.org).

**Date TBA, November - Lagos, Nigeria:** first of three Dried Fish Trade Fairs/Exhibitions to be organized by Lagos State Catfish and Allied Farmers Association (LASCA-FA). Contact: Kola Kuku [kkuku@ifdc.org](mailto:kkuku@ifdc.org)

### ABIP Managers Training:

Business & ICT/Trade Website Use and Management

**10-13 October - Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire.** Raoul Klutse [rklutse@ifdc.org](mailto:rklutse@ifdc.org).

**11-13 October - Cotonou, Benin.** Alain Soglo [asoglo@ifdc.org](mailto:asoglo@ifdc.org).

**17-19 October - Lomé, Togo.** Raoul Klutse [rklutse@ifdc.org](mailto:rklutse@ifdc.org).

**25-27 October - Dakar, Senegal.** Sadibou Gueye [sgueye@ifdc.org](mailto:sgueye@ifdc.org).

1st or 2nd week in **November** - Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso. Sami Traore [straore@ifdc.org](mailto:straore@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).