



# 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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An aerial view of the GAPTO grand opening and ABIP launching, which took place in the heart of Agboghloshie market in Accra on 31st January, 2007. Local traders joined community leaders, government officials, and representatives of USAID, BusyLab, and MISTOWA to celebrate the event.

## Editorial

A few years ago Mark Davies, BusyLab's CEO, wanted to help improve the life of farmers but knew nothing about agriculture. About the same time, MISTOWA, a USAID/WA-funded project of IFDC, knew a lot about agriculture and needed help leveraging technology to achieve their aims. This issue showcases two exciting markers of this successful partnership of a private company and an agricultural development project—the official launch of the TradeNet portal at [www.tradenet.biz](http://www.tradenet.biz) and the launching of the GAPTO Agri-Business Information Point (ABIP) in Accra, Ghana. These important innovations are helping farmers and traders use their mobile phones and the Internet to get the market information they need.

# NEWSLETTER

## GAPTO Launches New ABIP in Agboghloshie Market

Agboghloshie market was abuzz on the afternoon of January 31st, 2007. Loudspeakers blared with music, announcing to everyone that something out of the ordinary was taking place. A large banner proclaimed the official launch of GAPTO's Agribusiness Information Point (ABIP) in the heart of the Agboghloshie market. The MISTOWA-supported GAPTO ABIP is but one of 20 in Ghana and 150 in West Africa, currently being established to provide traders access to TradeNet, a web site designed to facilitate agricultural commodity exchange.



Agboghloshie trader Mary Owusu tested how to use her mobile phone to get real-time prices off TradeNet.

By early afternoon, the market area directly in front on the GAPTO office and the new ABIP was cleared for a stage and podium. Colorful stands were erected to show off the market's varied commodities, including yam, onions, tomatoes, beans, plantains and even meat. Hundreds of traders assembled in front of the stage to learn what the commotion was all about.

### A true community event

The guest of honor for the launching ceremony was the Honorable Clement Eledi,

Deputy Minister for Food and Agriculture. Among the dignitaries were The Deputy Minister of Trade, Industry, Private Sector Development and Presidential Special Initiative, the Honorable Kwadwo Afram Asiedu, Dr. Jeffrey Cochran of USAID West Africa Mission, and the Chiefs and Elders of the Ga Traditional area. Four traders from Nigeria's Dawanau market in Kano and the Lagos Mile 12 market, who





The GAPTO grand opening and ABIP launching was attended by traditional and religious leaders from across the community. Giving their blessings and support to the event and future success, are (from left) Naye Wulormor, Pastor Menu, and Alhaji Baba Panah.

## Tradenet Launches!

TradeNet ([www.tradenet.biz](http://www.tradenet.biz)) an internet portal two years in development, was officially launched by BusyLab on January 30th, 2007, the day prior to the Agboglobhie ABIP launching. The ABIP would not be possible but for the partnership between MISTOWA and BusyLab in developing and promoting the TradeNet portal, which currently operates in 12 countries and 300 markets in Africa, allowing farmers and traders to use high-tech to trade in agricultural commodities.

The launching was especially impressive because Mark Davies, the architect of the website, not only convened stakeholders for the official launch but also showed off his amazing team of more than a half dozen young Ghanaian developers. The team, wearing black TradeNet T-shirts, captivated the audience as each of them stood up and confidently explained his/her area of expertise using an overhead projector to guide participants. Each presenter comically ended their presentation with a reminder of the "free" features.

TradeNet lets producers and traders:

- access prices for specific commodities and markets throughout West Africa;
- have a profile and website at no cost on TradeNet, to display commodities, prices, locations and contact details;
- use SMS messaging on mobile phones to buy, sell, and receive alerts on commodities and markets they choose.

In his presentation, Dr. Kofi Debrah, MISTOWA's Chief of Party clearly outlined the "mutual benefits and shared responsibilities" of the MISTOWA/BusyLab partnership. He recognized BusyLab's role in investing



Xose Ahlijah, a BusyLab developer, explained how to use TradeNet features.



Mark Davies, CEO of BusyLab, discussed the importance of the MISTOWA-BusyLab partnership to developing TradeNet's many features.

\$600,000 to develop the software and TradeNet services and its continuing provision of technical assistance and software support. Dr. Debrah delineated MISTOWA's role of financing many activities such as the software licensing and provision of equipment and technical training to 60 associations.

Also attending the TradeNet launch was Hugh Dake, an official of ECOBANK, who assured traders that the bank was aware of the many concerns producers and traders had in regards to the transfer of funds and much-needed access to microcredit. ■

have benefited from their associations' own ABIPs, came to share their experiences with other traders in the Agboglobhie market.

With the support of MISTOWA, in the past year GAPTO staff have prepared for the launching of the new ABIP. MISTOWA provided GAPTO with the necessary computer equipment and training to use the West African trade portal Tradenet and other high-tech applications available for traders and farmers. Inside, the ABIP appears to be just another cybercafé with six computers lined up against the wall in an air conditioned room. However, in contrast to a regular cybercafé, the ABIP also provides access to market information from all over West Africa so that farmers and traders can make more lucrative trade deals. Also in contrast to the average cybercafé, specially-trained assistants are available to provide support to traders. To ensure sustainability of the ABIP, appropriate GAPTO staff also received business management training. "Many of Agboglobhie's traders have access to mobile phones and will now be able to register for SMS service at this ABIP for access to TradeNet," said Gertrude Adu-Yebo, GAPTO's Chairperson.

In his speech, Honorable Clement Eledi commended the U.S. government's support for the MISTOWA project, stating that, "As Ghana celebrates its 50th anniversary of independence this year, we are also proud to lead the sub-region in technological advances whereby the TradeNet platform provides a means for traders and farmers to contact each other quickly at the touch of a button." Dr. Kofi Debrah, MISTOWA's Chief of Party emphasized this point, explaining, "Because of lack of real time infor-



Dorothy Quaye, a GAPTO member, told the audience how learning to use TradeNet services ensured successful buying trips for her business.



A delegation of Nigerian traders from Dawanau and Mile 12 markets shared their experiences of TradeNet, encouraging others to use its services.

mation, our petty traders often incur unnecessary and avoidable cost in their transaction. They then pass on this added cost to customers.” “Situations where gluts exist in one part of the country while there is scarcity of a commodity elsewhere are a common phenomenon all over Africa and will continue as long as buyers and sellers do not have accurate and timely information on what is available, where, at what price and who to contact,” he stated.

### Taking advantage of TradeNet

Indeed, whether through the internet or via their cell phones, Agboglobshie traders can now obtain real time market information from over 300 markets in West Africa. Holding up a TradeNet flyer, Haruna Agesheka, GAPTO's Secretary General, took the opportunity to demonstrate to the mesmerized crowd how to use their mobile phone for trading. “Just text buy or sell... then the commodity code... then the quantity and price... and your offer is posted and sent to thousands of other mobile phones.” explained Haruna. “To get current prices, it’s just as easy. Text the commodity code... then the country code. You’ll get a reply in seconds!”

However, the audience was most



Haruna Agesheka, GAPTO's Secretary-General, walked the audience through the steps needed to receive commodity prices by SMS from TradeNet.

intrigued by traders who told their own personal success stories. Dorothy Quaye, a tomato trader and member of GAPTO, passionately testified about trade deals made by GAPTO members as a result of the training they had received from MISTOWA on how to access TradeNet. “Before we came into partnership with MISTOWA and TradeNet, we were using word of mouth for market information, but after we were introduced to the new software we were able to make our business more profitably than ever before.”



Dr Kofi Debrah, MISTOWA's Chief of Party, thanks participants for their support of the project's goals.



The new ABIP in Agboglobshie offers Internet-enabled computer stations for its members and the public to access online agricultural information, including prices, contacts and more from TradeNet.

Several testimonies were also provided by representatives of producers and traders associations who had traveled all the way from markets in Nigeria. Usu Phoebe Mbasounn, a widow and cassava trader, who introduced herself to the audience as “Mrs Cassava,” is a member of the Dawanau Market Development Association in Kano, Nigeria. “When I heard about MISTOWA training I was very reluctant. Another training, what for? I could not imagine that my life could have changed so drastically. Now, with my mobile phone I can check prices on several markets. Then I text the current prices to potential buyers saying that I am willing to sell at a discount price. And it works! With what I



GAPTO's 13 different commodity groups set up booths around the event grounds to display the great variety of produce and products they trade.

[now] earn I can support three of my children who are pursuing their university degree.”

Abdul Mohammed, Secretary of the ABIP in Mile 12 International Market, Lagos, Nigeria, emphasized the importance of documenting data and operations, noting that the market handles a significant quantity of tomatoes: “We had no knowledge of it because there was no data available. As of now we have real data and keep records to analyze. Some students come to ask for these data. Lenders also are coming to us. And when they see that the market is getting organized, they start offering support and assistance to help set up business,” he explained.

The Deputy Minister of Trade, Industry, Private Sector Development and Presidential Special Initiative, Honorable Kwadwo Affram Asiedu, was impressed by these testimonies: “The testimonies your trading partners from Nigeria have given today give me hope that smallholder producers and traders will be able to tap trading opportunities in Ghana, the sub-region and in the global market. We are encouraged to see such an impressive trade and information facility right in the centre of the Agboglobshie market.” ■



The Honorable Kwadwo Affram Asiedu was proud to recognize the significance of TradeNet to the advance of trade and technology in West Africa.

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Agricultural Trade Portal  
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## MISTOWA at FACI, SIAGRI

In 2006, MISTOWA participated in two major international events sponsored by IFDC: the FACI International Agro-Cultural Trade Fair in Kpalime, Togo in August 2006, and the SIAGRI International Agricultural Exhibition of Mali in November 2006. These events were aimed at supporting market oriented agriculture capable of providing food security and economic growth in sub-Saharan Africa. In Mali, the MISTOWA stand was visited by the Prime Minister Mr. Ousame Issoufi Maiga and the Malian President, His Excellency Mr. Amadou Toumani Touré.

The **FACI International Agricultural Trade Fair** was launched by the World Business Enterprise, a private institution based in Togo. MISTOWA sponsored the presence of 26 exhibitors belonging to the Togolese branch of the CT-ROESAO (Togolese Branch of the Network of Economic Operators in the Food Industry). The exhibitors included associations and groups of producers, food processors and traders. In keeping with MISTOWA's commitment to gender mainstreaming, 14 of the participants were women.

The **SIAGRI** event, first of its kind, was a new initiative launched by the Permanent Assembly of Chambers of Agriculture of Mali (APCAM) in Bamako. The MISTOWA display provided information about the management and organization of ABIPs. The novelty of the ABIP concept brought a lot of excitement to the SIAGRI event. To deepen participants' knowledge of ABIPs, Patrice Annequin, MISTOWA's Deputy Chief of Party, delivered an informative lecture on the benefits of new information, communication, and technology for the benefit of agricultural trade. ■

## Adu-Yebo Joins WACSOFF

Gertrude Adu-Yebo, Chairperson of the Ghana Agricultural Producers and Traders Organization (GAPTO), has been elected to the twelve-person Executive Committee of the West Africa Civil Society Forum (WACSOFF). Adu-Yebo participated extensively in a thematic group on Food, Agriculture and Environment during the December 2006 annual WACSOFF meeting to discuss, formulate and present issues of concern to the ECOWAS Heads of State. Her presence there as part of a group of 15 producers and traders from across West Africa, was a direct result of MISTOWA's Regional Advocacy Workshop held at the ECOWAS Secretariat in June 2006. Adu-Yebo has been involved in agricultural trade for many years and brings practical experience to bear on the issues facing her fellow traders and producers. ■

## West Africa & Kyrgyzstan

In late October 2006, eight executive members of West African agro-input trade organizations travelled to Kyrgyzstan on a two-week study tour hosted by the Agro-Businessmen Association of Kyrgyzstan (AAK) in collaboration with IFDC's MIR Project (Managing Inputs Regionally).

Both sides face similar challenges to develop their trade associations and provide a reliable supply of modern inputs, and the primary reason for the visit was to learn about AAK's challenges, successes and to exchange ideas and experiences on association development. Among the participating associations was AGRODIA and COCIMA of Burkina Faso, ANSEB of Benin, CropLife Ivory Coast, CropLife Nigeria, CropLife Senegal, NAIDA of Nigeria, and FACIA and West Africa regional organization. ■

## Upcoming Events

**January 30 - Accra, Ghana:** Official Launching of TradeNet ([www.tradenet.biz](http://www.tradenet.biz)), the West African agricultural trade portal by BusyLab. Contact: Caroline Sock Fall [caroline@busylab.com](mailto:caroline@busylab.com).

**January 31 - Accra, Ghana:** Official Launching of GAPTO and its ABIP in Agbogbloshie market. Contact: Musa Taylor [mtaylor@ifdc.org](mailto:mtaylor@ifdc.org).

**February 26-28 - Bamako, Mali:** CONOESAM workshop.

Contact: Ibrahima Touré  
[itoure@ifdc.org](mailto:itoure@ifdc.org).

**March 1-3 - Lagos, Nigeria:** Dried Fish Trade Fair/Exhibition, organized by Lagos State Catfish and Allied Farmers Association (LASCAFA). Contact: Kola Kuku [kkuku@ifdc.org](mailto:kkuku@ifdc.org).

**March 1 - Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire:** Official Launching of ROESAO Côte d'Ivoire Office. Contact: Rosalie Botti [rosaliebotti@yahoo.fr](mailto:rosaliebotti@yahoo.fr).

**ABIP Managers Training:** Business & ICT/Trade Website Use and Management

**22-24 January - Dakar, Senegal.** Sadibou Gueye [sgueye@ifdc.org](mailto:sgueye@ifdc.org).

**12-14 March - Accra, Ghana.** Musa Taylor [mtaylor@ifdc.org](mailto:mtaylor@ifdc.org).

**20-22 March - Bamako, Mali.** Ibrahima Touré [itoure@ifdc.org](mailto:itoure@ifdc.org).

**19-21 March - Tamale, Ghana.** Musa Taylor [mtaylor@ifdc.org](mailto:mtaylor@ifdc.org).

**End of March - Kano, Nigeria.** Henry Ekpiken [ehenry@ifdc.org](mailto:ehenry@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).