



## Priority actions on agricultural markets? Not easy at a market of ideas!



*The answer is clear: it is not going to be a single idea or initiative that will spark off the revolution we are all looking for in agricultural markets. Rather it will probably be combinations of many different ideas, pilot cases, innovations and experiences (to use a loose term) that will result in African agricultural markets accelerating the pace of development and the alleviation of poverty in Africa. So, honestly, was that answer clear? At first sight, probably as clear as mud to an innocent bystander at the recent AGRA sponsored markets conference! But read on.*

As author after author presented their insights, experiences or analyses of different interventions aimed at improving the functioning of rural input, output or service markets at the May 13-15 conference so much was clear: there were 'riches' in abundance to deploy for investments. Rich experiences and lessons in delivering fertilizers or improved technologies into rural markets, providing credit to small holders, or mitigating risk through index-based insurance schemes. The conference, organized by ILRI on behalf of AGRA, had set itself the challenge of identifying priority actions that would support market development for African farmers. Did it succeed? As this story goes to press, a week after the conference, one would have to say that jury is still out on this.

On a continent as heterogeneous as Africa, where it is clear the 'Green Revolution', when it comes, will actually be made up of several, different, smaller revolutions, no single set of priority actions is likely to work. The conference organizers know they will need to bear this in mind as they sift and sort through the riches on view. The CGIAR's Collective Action group (which consists of many more than the CGIAR Centres it takes its name from!), which supported the conference, were aware of this. Meeting after the conference to chart possible ways forward for research on markets, the group agreed that the first step would be to help to identify what had worked best and under which conditions.

The papers, presentations, case studies and analyses presented at the conference will shortly be available at <http://www.agmarketsafrica.org/>. Whether you are interested in the challenges that face market development - concisely and elegantly articulated by Chris Barrett - or on the possible contribution of markets to agricultural development (Andrew Dorward) or indeed how infrastructure development might be better targeted to assisting markets (Maximo Torero) or improving the performance of staple food markets (Thom Jayne and colleagues), it will all be found on that website. For us at *Collective Action News*, it was the several parallel sessions that gave the conference its riches: community mortgage banks, index based insurance, the experiences of Equity Bank and Rabobank in getting credit to small holders, the role of agro-dealer networks like the Uganda National Agro-Input Dealer's Association (UNADA), warehouse receipt schemes, setting standards along a value chain, or appropriate agro-processing to generate additional value, were just a few of the issues presented for the interested listener.

Policy makers and development investors may have to wait a bit while the dust settles and the priorities and options are matched to contexts and needs. Informed readers can get a head start and start drawing up their own lists of priority actions!

Summaries and abstracts of papers and presentations related to the conference "Towards priority actions for market development for African farmers" held in Nairobi from May 13-15, 2009 can be accessed from June 15 onwards at <http://www.agmarketsafrica.org/>

**The collective action underpinning the initiative:** The review of all papers and presentations at the conference, as well as the moderation of the 10 parallel sessions was undertaken by the Collective Action group on markets consisting of representatives of seven CGIAR Centres, FANRPAN, Commonwealth Secretariat, Kenya Institute for Public Policy Research and Analysis, and John Lynam, who generously donated his time. The engagement of the Collective Action team was supported by the International Development Research Centre.

## Newsbytes

### Supporting agricultural research in Mozambique

Mozambique's national agricultural research institute – IIAM – is finalising its ambitious 10 year research strategy. Research leaders from nine CGIAR Centres joined colleagues from IIAM on May 18-19 to strengthen this strategy and improve coordination. The broad based strategy covers crops, livestock, trees, forests and other natural resources. Markets and value chains figure prominently in the strategy. The CGIAR Centres profiled their current and future work in Mozambique as a basis for discussions. These profiles are available at: [http://www.ilri.org/regionalplan/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=79&Itemid=62](http://www.ilri.org/regionalplan/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=79&Itemid=62)

### Two Collective Action posters win prizes in international competitions

[http://www.ilri.org/regionalplan/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=78&Itemid=116](http://www.ilri.org/regionalplan/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=78&Itemid=116)

### NaturallyAfrican: Bringing together Africa's natural products sector

Recently established by the World Agroforestry Centre (ICRAF), the NaturallyAfrican platform provides a regional forum and global community of practice for networking and technical exchange between stakeholders of the African natural products sector, a growing and high-value presence on global markets.

Working through existing national networks, NaturallyAfrican brings together a full range of stakeholders from the rural producer to the end consumer, generating a confluence of interests on aspects of product quality, science and marketing which add value to the natural plant products of agroforestry systems.

With support IrishAid, ICRAF brought together over 70 natural products sector stakeholders from 5 countries of the eastern Africa region on key aspects of specific product value chains including baobab, shea butter, desert date, gums and resins frankincense, myrrh and gum arabic. Further sub-regional consultations are planned during 2009 across the African continent.

More: <http://www.naturallyafricanplatform.org/index.php>

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