

Beyond Subsistence Farming.

107 farmers from 13 countries met in Western Kenya for an East African Farmers' Dialogue, to plan how to take farming beyond subsistence to feeding the continent.

Presentations at the Dialogue demonstrated that Africa has the resources, both technical and human, within its borders to feed its people and lift the continent out of poverty. The following emerged as a road map to reach this goal.

- To publicise examples of initiatives being taken by individuals.
- To raise the profile of conflict resolution.
- To equip people with the technical skills required.
- To develop servant leadership qualities that result in resources being used effectively.



Julius Khakula

Julius Khakula, one of the hosts, in his opening remarks said, "The biggest challenge for Africa this century will be how to create people who are unselfish, trusted, incorruptible, visionary, self confident, courageous, inquisitive, innovative and committed. This conference is organised to challenge the farmers of Africa to look beyond subsistence farming and self-interest, to look at the potential of their continent."

Jamil Ssebalu, Principal of a business college in Uganda, opened the Dialogue with his presentation on the resources of Africa, its needs and opportunities. "Africa needs more than food aid, we need to be trained to benefit from our resources." He urged that Africa should become a partner rather than a beneficiary. "To improve local markets, human skills, infrastructure and quality of goods in the market, use biotechnology along with traditional food products. End corruption that has eaten deeply into our ways. Go for programmes that play a supportive role in accessing information technology, markets and finance. Stop intra and inter state battles and put those resources into health, industry, agriculture, transport and other development sectors."



Jamil Ssebalu



Rose Namatsi

We heard from Rosemary Namatsi, senior lecture at the Manor House Agricultural Centre near Kitale in Western Kenya, which trains people from around the world in sustainable organic farming methods. She spoke of the increase in understanding of organic farming methods since the centre first opened in 1984. She gave examples of companion planting, crop rotation and composting which is especially relevant with fertilizer prices now being so high.

One of the areas affected by violence in Kenya last January was the Mount Elgon region. A group came from this area who are committed to heal the divisions and restore agricultural production and the forest cover that is badly in need of attention. They linked up with Richard Ince of the International Tree Foundation and are in the process of developing a strategy which will help them fulfil both of their aims.



Richard Ince



Duncan Nduhiu

Duncan Nduhiu who has attended many Dialogues, reported on the growth of the Nyala Milk collection scheme which in the last year has grown from 6,000 to 12,000 members, with plans to start adding value to their product within five years through yoghurt and cheese making. Duncan has helped lead this group since it started eight years ago with 210 members. It continues to grow through the steady commitment of people like himself and TechnoServe which helps entrepreneurial people in poor rural areas of the developing world.

George Kamau, known for spreading best practice in tree planting, spoke of the way the intensive use of his small farm was acting as a demonstration being copied by others - even those with farms of only a quarter acre. He spoke of two areas of priority. 1. For farmers to maximise the use of their land so they become self-reliant. 2. To have an environmental management plan that reduces the use of chemical fertilizers and sprays, an important part of this being the use of trees.



George Kamau Kirru



Marie-Louise Mary and Pascal Gallard

Marie-Louise Mary, aged 88, a farmer's wife from France, made a lasting impression on all who heard her speak. She talked of her and her late husband's involvement in agriculture since the 1930s, the development of government policy and of the cooperatives in France, to developments relating to the EU. Her fighting spirit demonstrated that age should be no barrier to tackling agricultural issues. Her talk was followed by Pascal Gallard who spoke in detail about issues facing French agriculture today.

Symon Kitur from Eldoret led us through the process of healing the sociological wounds inflicted during the conflict in Kenya; we heard from a lady who farmed near Eldoret who had lost everything she owned. Another lady who had stood as a candidate in the recent elections described how she and friends formed a protective ring round a group of people who were being threatened, shepherding them to safety. The minister of a church that was burnt down in Eldoret related how he had been knocked unconscious when going to the defence of people who lost their lives when his church was burnt down. All these people were determined that tribalism should end and the conditions that had led to the violent outbreaks be dealt with.



Symon Kitur

Three people from Rwanda told the meeting of new developments in their area, and their hope that one day soon there could be a Farmers' Dialogue in their country where their farmers could be introduced to farming methods from other African countries.



Jean Bosco Mbabanjimana, Ndahiro Evalde and Laurent Munyandikirwa from Rwanda

Two men from Democratic Republic of Congo talked of the conflict that prevents development in their country, and how conflict was affecting farming through the breakdown of infrastructure, preventing farmers from marketing their products. They talked of the work they were doing on farms, launching schemes that helped farmers rear guineafowl and pigs, and also of the benefit they had gained through their participation in the Farmers' Dialogue in Tanzania two years ago.



Alphonse Bisusa and Bahati Bagalwa

Juliana Swai from Mheza in Tanzania spoke of her work with women's groups and her wish to reach out to other groups in her area. She spoke of women who had been destitute a few years ago and now had totally new ideas for their and their families' future, some having progressed from one to five dairy cows, to having funds to send their children to school and well as being proud owners of an adequate home for their family.



Juliana Swai

Abhay and Sunita Shaha from India made many friends and their stories of agricultural developments that they are involved in caught the interest of all. One training programme for rural farmers and villagers is Grampari. Abhay explained that Gram means Rural and Pari stands for Pariywaran meaning Environment. Grampari is established with the purpose of addressing the twin issues of rural development and environmental sustainability. This multi-country approach to local agriculture is a great opportunity for African and Asian



Abhay and Sunita Shaha

farmers to share knowledge and experience.

Albert Mampionona from Madagascar was returning home to a three-month tree-planting programme. The next step will be to plant 1000 Camphoria-Ravintsara trees, which are a source of oil. This was his first time in mainland Africa; even though Madagascar is part of the continent. Madagascar has great potential to improve production he said. "This networking between African countries and sharing experiences has been very valuable. I am thinking how we can have Dialogues like this one where I live."



Albert Mampionona



Relaxing after lunch during a farm visit

There was a break half way through the conference for two days of visits to farms and agricultural enterprises. Included were visits to a Sugar Factory, three farms and an Indigenous Medical Arboretum sponsored by the Ford Foundation. On these visits we were able to see first hand some of the farming methods that we had been talking about. This brought a change of pace when new friendships were formed.

Towards the end of the Dialogue there were very helpful discussions about the management structure of the Farmers' Dialogue and how it could contribute to further outreach in Africa, seeking and encouraging those who could help their countries develop. This report is a small sample of what was presented by speakers during the Dialogue. A noticeable change in priorities over the past years is the rising concern about climate change and the spread of initiatives to plant trees. During the conference a number of other initiatives were planned, one being another East African Farmers' Dialogue in 2010, to take place in Uganda.