



■ A beacon in the sea of information **Infonet-BioVision: Help is a mouse click away**

The trigger for Infonet came from a simple farmer in West Kenya: Raphael Okoth (pictured), a farmer in Nyabera, complained to Monique Hunziker of BioVision, that he rarely has access to help and information when he has problems with his vegetable crops. The farmer said in frustration: "I need an information pool that I can access directly at need, because agricultural advisers hardly ever find their way into the fields."

In the ordinary workday for Monique Hunziker the problem was exactly the opposite. As a biologist with specialist knowledge in international agriculture and tropical health she was confronted with a muddled flood

of information from scientific studies and textbooks. She has learned to filter the relevant facts from the sea of information, to reduce complex interrelationships to their essence and to explain these clearly and understandably. So Raphael Okoth's wish fell upon open ears, especially as she had long known that countless numbers of farmers in Africa share Raphael's problem.

In 2006 BioVision began the project Infonet-BioVision, with financial aid from the Liechtenstein Development Service (LED) and in co-operation with the E-Learning specialist Ursula Suter (Avallain AG). Goal: An internet information platform for East Africa with locally relevant information on sustainable farming, ecologically sound pest and disease control for animals, people and agricultural crops, as well as on conservation of natural resources and income advancement through ecologically compatible methods.

Project leader Monique Hunziker is aware that many farmers in Africa still do not have access to the internet, but she also knows that is changing rapidly. "Every day there are more computers all over Kenya - in internet cafes, at non-profit organisations and recently in mail centres too. We are making use of this development with Infonet." Infonet-BioVision is also produced in an

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Editorial



Do African farmers need agricultural advisers? Surely they already know the best way to cultivate their land?

Yes, Africa's farmers need new knowledge, training and support. Collective experience and traditional knowledge is being lost as a result of devastating illnesses such as Aids and other influences. Moreover, the conditions in Africa have changed greatly in the recent past – beginning with colonisation and continuing to the climate change of today. Population growth, loss of agricultural land and increasing drought lead to more and more people having to live off less and less fertile land.

Conservation and recovery of soil fertility through use of compost, manure or crop rotation often does not belong to traditional African agriculture. Subsistence farmers searched for a new piece of land as they needed it, when the old land was leached. That is for the most part impossible today. In order to avoid clearing of the rain-forest because of the lack of agricultural land, and to prevent people from settling in land at risk of drought, or in malaria and tsetse infested areas, they must get more out of their land without destroying it. Here modern methods of organic agriculture can step in. Therefore BioVision places special focus in the projects on ecological farming and the communication of this knowledge to the farmers.

*Dr. Hans Rudolf Herren
President of BioVision Foundation*

Monique Hunziker, Leader of the Infonet-BioVision project, creates an overview from the sea of information.

offline version on CD, which can be used independently of the internet. Agricultural advisers and teachers from state organisations, schools and various relief organisations are also particularly important target groups. They usually have an internet connection and also conduct farmer training programmes.

Quality not Quantity

Infonet-BioVision appeals through the quality and selection of information and understandable visualisations and illustrations. Monique Hunziker and her team have conscientiously chosen from and condensed the immense flood of information to give users a clear overview. Thus the selection consists of the 150 most widespread major diseases and pests in East Africa – divided into the four areas of human, animal, plant and environmental health. “We want to enable access to locally relevant and scientifically proven information, with which the farmers can solve their most common problems”, explains the project leader. All editions of The Organic Farmer (TOF), which are especially valued by farmers for their practical tips, can be downloaded from Infonet-BioVision. As a further step, Infonet will eventually be linked up with the popular SMS advice service, so creating a communication platform for farmers and local experts.

Teamwork between researchers and farmers

In selecting and reworking the guidance and information, the project leader counts on co-operation with competent scientists from the international research institute ICIPE, in Nairobi, as well as with institutes in Europe such as FiBL, in Frick. She is at the same time in constant contact with three farmers' groups in Kenya with a total membership of 918, most of whom are women. The members contribute local and traditional knowledge, test the comprehensibility of information and illustrations from Infonet-BioVision, test out the instructions and bring in their own practical experience. The groups are co-ordinated locally by Anne Brunste, a competent agronomist and practising farmer. Anne is also the link between the farmers in the field and the ICIPE scientists. In the next phase of the project she will build a network of farmers' groups, NGOs and authorities so that Infonet-BioVision expands into the training of agricultural advisers and farmers. “The project ultimately stands or falls with the local people”, Monique Hunziker. She is sure that Raphael Okoth in Nyabera can access the information he needs from the computer at the local mail centre, and very soon also by SMS.

www.infonet-biovision.org

is already accessible in test version. At this time the area of Plant Health is complete. Behind the clear user interface is a comprehensive and complex databank from Avallain AG. An international scientific advisory board and specialists from the field of E-Learning are actively involved in the project. Infonet-BioVision will be officially launched in October 2007.





■ A Day in the Life of **Stella Ettebet Ng'Olekoru, Sorghum-Guard in Kenya**

The cock crows at six o'clock. I open my eyes and watch the stars fade away. My mother, my sister and I usually sleep in the open air next to our small clay hut. My six brothers find places to sleep further up on flat stones. Our father died eight years ago.

My mother and I swap milking duties with the goats in the morning and evening. At the moment we have six, who altogether produce a cup of milk. After milking I put some sticks on the embers, blow on them and then put milk and water on the fire. When the tea is ready my brothers come down from their rocks. It is the middle of December and we are on school holidays. Every third day it is my turn to guard the sorghum field. I drink up and make my way down the steep rocky path to the lowland. Our place is about two hundred meters above the valley floor on a rocky escarpment. This leads up to the high plateau, where it is much more fertile than down here in Kerio Valley. We have droughts all the time. Then the crops fail and we have very little food. This autumn we had a lot of rain and the sorghum is high. On the way to the plantation I meet my friends, and at seven o'clock we all climb up the watchtowers around the big field: altogether 52 girls and boys between seven and fifteen years old. When the day starts to get warm the birds come. The worst are the sparrows and weaver birds. If you do not drive them out they

come in great swarms and steal half of the whole crop in one day. As soon as they come I wave my arms and shout loudly. If that doesn't work I shoot at them with little balls of clay from my pipe. But the birds are clever. They notice where the small or inattentive children are keeping watch and fly over there. That's why we big ones always have to rush to help the little ones. I don't dislike having to keep watch, because otherwise I would have to collect firewood at home, carry water, wash up, clean and look after the little ones.

At eleven o'clock there is some Ugali to eat. That's boiled maize meal. I chew on a sorghum stalk as well, to stop feeling hungry. At about one o'clock it gets really hot, and the birds have a rest. Then we can chat under the straw roofs of the raised platform or play hide and seek in the plantation. At about three o'clock we have to go back to the posts. After sunset at half seven we climb down from the watchtowers. I hurry home, since after seven it is already pitch black. At home we eat Ugali with leafy vegetables or with leaves from wild trees. Before we go to sleep we chat a bit more and listen to music from the transistor radio. Then I roll myself up in my blankets and look up at the stars until they slowly begin to blur.

*Recorded by Peter Lütbi
in Kokwomeses, West Pokot*

■ 'Kerio Peace Queen' **Camels for the Beauty Queen**

Kaku Patricia Kamewun, beauty queen from West Pokot (Kenya) will never forget the 20th of December 2006. On this day the chosen 'Kerio Peace Queen' received her prize. On the occasion of a peace festival with the neighbouring tribes of the

Turkana, Samburu, Pokot and Marakwet, the seventeen year old half-orphan won through on the cat walk against 40 other competitors (see Newsletter Nr. 12). Then the long wait began for the 'Peace Queen', as the first prize came ambling along upon eight hooves to her remote village: a female camel with her foal. "This is the first time I have ever owned anything", said the overjoyed winner as she received her prize, and there and then began to practise milking the camel.

"The mare produces more than enough milk for the family, is the basis for further breeding, and at the same time is an unmistakable sign of the empowerment of oppressed women in West Pokot", enthuses Mercy Kyiapiap, co-initiator of the peace festival and assistant in BioVision's Cawesi project. Project leader Rolf Gloor emphasises that keeping camels promotes gentle use of nature: "Camels endure dry periods significantly better than cattle or goats, their soft hooves preserve the delicate ground, they can get nourishment from leaves instead of from sparse grass, and produce much more milk."





■ Good Marks from the Federal President

Moritz Leuenberger praises Farmers Newspaper

In the middle of November 2006, Moritz Leuenberger of the Swiss Federal Council attended the World Climate Conference and also visited ICIPE in Nairobi, the international research institute with African roots and long-standing partner of BioVision. Peter Baumgartner, initiator and editor of the Kenyan farmers newspaper 'The Organic Farmer' used the opportunity to introduce BioVision's newspaper project to the then Federal President. Moritz Leuenberger praised the clear style of information and the easy format of the newspaper: "Even I would understand this", he said, winking to Peter Baumgartner (left in picture) and to ICIPE director Prof. Christian Borgemeister. He emphasised that exactly this kind of information is needed to open up new prospects for small farmers in Africa.



■ West Pokot in Zürich

Empowering Women at the BioVision Symposium

Mercy Kyiapiap, assistant in the Cabesi project (abbreviation of Camels-Bees-Silk) made an impassioned appearance at BioVision's symposium in the Zürcher Volkshaus. The 26 year old Pokot woman from West Kenya, aided by project leader Rolf Gloor, captured the hearts of the 600 or more guests with her refreshing and engaging speech. The guests were given a vivid insight into the life and culture of the people of West Pokot and into the current progress of the Cabesi Project.

Beforehand, Simone Niggli, biologist and twelve-time World Champion in orienteering, spoke on her commitment to the role of ambassador for BioVision. Foundation President Hans Rudolf Herren expressed his gratitude to the two 'power women' for their dedication and presented a sobering report on the grave consequences of global warming for Africa.



■ ... instead of Christmas dinner **CH Architects Corporation supports BioVision**

In summer last year Guido Rigutto, manager of CH Architekten AG in Volketswil, was already thinking about Christmas. In June he suggested to his three partners that instead of the annual office dinner and gifts for customers, they should support good projects in the field of development co-operation. BioVision won their vote and just before Christmas 8'000 francs arrived in the donation account. Architect Rigutto explains their decision: "the objective of 'help for self help' in the projects really convinced us. It is important to support people so that they can take their future into their own hands and take advantage of opportunities." BioVision sincerely thanks the 25 employees of CH Architekten AG for their generosity and solidarity!



Hope for Africa!



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Many thanks for your donation.

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