

# BIOVISION

Newsletter no. 25

## Rio opens up new opportunities

We keep going!  
Page 2

[www.biovision.ch](http://www.biovision.ch)

A future for all, naturally

Overcoming the crisis step by step | **page 4**

Hay and milk in the slums | **Spage 7**

Active for Biovision | **page 8**





According to the IAASTD (International Assessment of Agricultural Knowledge, Science and Technology for Development), small farms have the potential to massively increase yields by using ecological methods and adapted technologies. The “Kichabulu” farmers’ group from near Morogoro in Tanzania has already successfully implemented this premise with pedal-powered pumps for irrigation and organic farming.

Photo:  
Peter Lüthi / Biovision



## THE CRUX OF RIO+20 IS ITS IMPLEMENTATION

At its annual conference in Rome, the Committee on World Food Security (CFS) took initial steps towards implementing the mandate it was given at the Rio+20 conference. Biovision was well represented at the talks, where Hans R. Herren gave a speech. We are now seeking to ensure that the decisions taken at Rio are not watered down.

By David Fritz

### Cover:

In Assosa (Ethiopia) and its neighbouring villages, 550 farmers have already been trained on the Biofarm supported by Biovision, and are improving their soils and yields with the knowledge they have acquired. The farmer from Alubo in the photo is also benefiting from this training.

Photo:  
Peter Lüthi / Biovision

The UN’s platform for food security, CFS, is breaking new ground with the implementation of the Rio mandate. It now needs to create foundations to enable it to meet the challenge. As proposed at its annual conference at the end of October, this also means helping interested countries to assess their agricultural structures and potential for increased sustainability. When defining criteria for this process, the CFS will also be drawing on the experience of organizations such as Biovision.

### Biovision leads the way

Biovision has already made a start by conducting this type of assessment in three countries. Thanks to support from the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), this process is being implemented as a pilot project in Kenya, Ethiopia and Senegal. The Senegal project represents Biovision’s first foray into West Africa.

First of all, the Biovision team wants to define the current situation jointly with representatives from go-

vernments, associations and the private sector, and then develop and implement the most promising strategies for improving agricultural structures. The Kenyan government has clearly declared its interest in this process. Initial talks have already taken place in Kenya and Senegal, and workshops with these two countries are scheduled for early 2013. The fact that this development is now actually underway is also the result of Biovision’s substantial involvement both before and during the Rio+20 conference last June. By lobbying for a change in the course of global agricultural policy towards sustainable, ecological methods, the Foundation is strengthening existing projects in East Africa and pursuing its overall goal: “Healthy food for all, naturally!”

### A step change in agriculture

Today, nearly one billion people are suffering from hunger. The volatility of staple food prices on commodity markets is creating additional concerns for food security. 70 per cent of the poor in developing coun-



## BIOVISION AWARDED SPECIAL STATUS AT THE UN

Biovision is the first Swiss foundation to be awarded general consultative status at the United Nations. This entitles Biovision to participate in UN conferences and official debates and to lobby for its cause at its own side events.

During preparations for the Earth Summit at Rio, Biovision spent months campaigning for a change of course in global agriculture. The Economic and Social Council of the United Nations in New York (ECOSOC) clearly seems to have taken note of Biovision's successful efforts. By awarding it observer status in August 2012, ECOSOC is acknowledging Biovision's comprehensive approach.

3

tries live in rural regions and depend either directly or indirectly on agricultural yields.

According to the World Development Report 2008 published by the World Bank, investment in agriculture contributes more to the development of the gross domestic product (GDP) and abolition of poverty in developing countries than investment in other sectors. Moreover, the 2008 International Assessment of Agricultural Knowledge, Science and Technology for Development (IASSTD) report called for a step change in agricultural policy and practice in order to reduce hunger and poverty and improve the living conditions of the rural population. Achieving this will require an increased focus on small farmers, locally adapted cultivation methods and multifunctional agriculture.

In order to attain this goal, Biovision, in a first phase, has been active at a global policy level. During preliminary negotiations prior to the UN's Rio+20 summit, Biovision and its partners lobbied for sustainable agriculture and agroecology. They demanded that states wanting to change the course of their agriculture should be advised by an international organisation.

### Initial success at Rio

Our hard work has paid off. As a direct result of efforts by Biovision and its partners at the UN conference, the final Rio+20 declaration includes a commitment to sustainable agriculture in order to ensure food security and at the same time protect natural resources. And the CFS, Biovision's preferred candidate, was entrusted with implementing the declaration.



UN headquarters in New York.  
Photo: Joseph Sohm/Visions of America/Corbis

“These are sound foundations on which Biovision and its partners can build to advance their projects for the transformation of agriculture and food systems in their African target countries, both directly with the people concerned, and also at a political level”, explained Hans R. Herren, who is also Joint Chairman of IAASTD, which will form the basis of the CFS's work.





After Usman Baschir from Afa Megele lost nearly all his animals to deadly sleeping sickness, he underwent training on the Biofarm and converted to organic crop farming. Since then, things have been steadily improving for him and his family.

Photos:  
Peter Lüthi / Biovision

#### TSETSE CONTROL AND ECOLOGICAL FARMING

### Overcoming the crisis step by step

After a journey across bone-dry plains in the shimmering heat, Usman Bashir's plantation feels like the garden of Eden. The 47 year-old farmer kneels by the irrigation channel and sends the elixir of life on its way towards his vegetables. "Before, I only planted maize and sweet potatoes, in quite a muddled sort of way. As a result, my yields were low", he reports. Today, however, Mr Baschir uses a precise system that includes soil preparation and improvement, targeted irrigation, professional planting and sowing, and also weeding and harvesting. "My wide range of vegetables is a joy to behold", he says with a smile, proudly showing us his magnificent cabbages, carrots, Beet - root, potatoes, tomatoes and peppers.

The former livestock breeder from Afa Megele in Ethiopia, a small village near Assosa close to the border with Sudan, has been through some very difficult times. During recent years, he lost nearly all his cattle after tsetse flies infected them with deadly nagana (sleeping sickness). This was a downright disaster for him and his family.

#### "Everything takes time"

In 2011, he was given the opportunity to participate in a six-day intensive course on ecological cultivation methods on the Biofarm training centre for sustainable agriculture in Assosa. This centre was established in 2009 by "BioEconomy Africa" with the support of

Biovision. By the summer of 2012, it had already trained 550 farmers in sustainable crop farming methods, animal husbandry and human health, and taught them how to manage organic traps in which to catch tsetse flies. These coloured, odour-baited traps can control insect populations, and therefore also the spread of nagana, in an environmentally-friendly way.

Usman Baschir looks back over the past year with satisfaction: "Since I attended the courses on the Biofarm, things have been improving step by step", he reports confidently, "but everything takes time." He sees his greatest challenge for the future as accessing the market in order to sell his produce.

Photo gallery for this report:  
[www.biovision.ch/usman\\_e](http://www.biovision.ch/usman_e)





In Uganda, students from East Africa and Europe together with local smallholders conduct research into new solutions for the challenges of an ecological agriculture. Photos: Verena Albertin / Biovision

#### STUDENTS AND FARMERS JOIN FORCES

## Hands-on, state-of-the art research

Young people who are currently studying agronomy at African universities may in the future occupy key positions in governments, administrations, industry or training institutions. Students are therefore an important target group for Biovision in its efforts to disseminate sustainable farming methods in Africa and beyond. For this reason, the Foundation is supporting the “International Training Course on Organic Agriculture” (ITCOA) project in Uganda. These courses were initiated by the University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences (BOKU) in Vienna in 2005 to enable students from East Africa and Austria to jointly research solutions for problems faced by ecological farming, in direct cooperation with Ugandan small-scale farmers. ITCOA not only tackles production issues, but has increasingly been looking at new strategies for marketing organic produce. Since its inception, 40 students have participated in the three-week course in Hoima and Kampala every year.

Biovision Project Manager Samuel Ledermann is convinced of the project’s positive impact: “By supporting this course, we are helping to strengthen the scientific base for sustainable agriculture and its development in Africa.”

Short film about this project:  
[www.biovision.ch/uganda\\_e](http://www.biovision.ch/uganda_e)

Comment

## The seed bears fruit

In 2010, I participated in the agricultural “Bustani ya Tushikamane” (ByT) training project at the “International Training Course on Organic Agriculture” (ITCOA) in Uganda, as a student of agronomy and as an assistant. This course opened my eyes to new ways of working with farmers. Skilled experts also gave me a good overview of ecological farming in Africa. I was very inspired by our visits to certified farms and contacts with different organisations in Uganda. So, while I was still on the course, I decided to commit myself to the organic certification of small-scale farmers in Tanzania. On my return, I got to grips with transforming my idea into reality, together with the ByT team and in collaboration with the national umbrella organization for organic farming. In August 2012, one of our farmers’ groups was the first group in Tanzania to be awarded the EAOPS certificate\*. All the participants are very proud of this. And I am sure that more groups will follow.

The ITCOA course was also very valuable for establishing our social network, which has now grown to a substantial size and links us with a number of prominent people. The small ByT project has grown into the non-profit organization “Sustainable Agriculture Tanzania” (SAT), which is playing a leading role in sustainable agriculture at a national and regional level. Thanks to the course, SAT continues to work closely with the renowned Sokoine University of Agriculture, from which more than 20 students have already completed their field practice at our centre. The seed from Uganda has borne fruit in Tanzania and we will continue to cultivate it.

\*East African Organic Products Standard



#### Janet Maro

The agronomist Janet Maro works as an assistant for the “Bustani ya Tushikamane” project, a training centre for sustainable agriculture in Tanzania, and is President of “Sustainable Agriculture Tanzania”

Photo: Peter Lüthi / Biovision





It is Lilly Frei's dearest wish to redistribute wealth on our planet.

Photo:  
Nina Zenklusen / Biovision

#### BEQUEST FOR BIOVISION

### A twofold benefit

Lilly Frei's affinity with Africa started in the early 1970s. As a young woman, she spontaneously contacted the American "Experiment in International Living" organization, who promptly arranged a six-week stay for her in Tanzania. There, she lived with a guest family for a month and worked with the Masai, where she lent a hand in the construction of clay huts and on the farm.

Today, Lilly Frei does not travel that far any more, mainly for environmental reasons, but she likes to spend time in the garden and roam the mountains and plains with her friends from the Alpine Club. These hikes are opportunities to discuss everything under the sun. This is how she got to know Biovision and its symposiums, several of which she has attended. She particularly appreciates the Foundation's holistic approach to projects, and the first-hand information provided by speakers from East Africa. "This not only leaves guests with lasting impressions and images, but also helps to overcome clichés about Africa", she maintains.

Problematic realities that particularly trouble her include the negative consequences of agribusiness and land grabbing. Ms Frei is glad that Biovision demonstrates alternative ways of doing things by promoting small-scale organic farming. Switzerland is also home to developments that the former social worker does not agree with, such as speculation in the real estate

sector. For this reason, the home that her grandparents created with their hard work will not be sold on the open market – something she has provided for in her will. Instead, it is to be sold to an organization that maintains affordable homes. And Ms Frei is confident that Biovision will be able to achieve positive results in its partner countries with the proceeds of the sale. "This way, I can create a twofold benefit", she says contentedly.

A lasting memory for Lilly Frei: Her guest family in Dar es Salaam (Tanzania)

Photo: Lilly Frei



#### Information on legacies:

If you have any questions or want to request our free legacy guide, Chantal Sierro at Biovision will be pleased to help you: Tel. +41 (0)44 341 97 19; E-mail: [c.sierro@biovision.ch](mailto:c.sierro@biovision.ch)



48-year-old Almaze Getahun has been able to improve her life thanks to her work in the vegetable gardens of the slums of Addis Ababa (Ethiopia). Biovision supported this project for three years.

Photo:  
Peter Lüthi / Biovision

## FROM THE LIFE OF ALMAZE GETAHUN “Gurara changed my life”

Almaze Getahun looks at the picture on the wall and her eyes fill with tears. The photo shows her daughter, who emigrated to the Middle East at the age of 19. “Many young people in the slums of Addis Ababa see no opportunities and try their luck abroad”, she tells us. “At first, everything went well. Our daughter found a job as a domestic worker. She was even able to send money home. But later she became the victim of a jealous intrigue and lost her life.”

Almaze Getahun was born in the rural Ethiopian region of Amhara. At the age of 12, she was married and followed her husband to the capital. He worked as a casual carpenter, but money was very tight. With each of the four children who were born, the situation worsened. “I often did not know how to pay for food and school. Luckily, we didn’t have any serious health problems”, she sighs. Out of necessity, Almaze worked as a wood carrier. But this job was difficult and dangerous. Women are frequently robbed and raped by the roadside in Addis Ababa.

In 2003, Almaze seized the opportunity of a lifetime. She participated in the Gurara project run by a major women’s group, who had rented five hectares of wasteland from the city and transformed it into a flourishing vegetable garden. The group’s two hundred women were trained in ecological agriculture and animal husbandry. Almaze Getahun has since been working in the vegetable garden, the chicken run, the animal shed and

## SWISS-ETHIOPIAN KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE

### Hay and milk from the slums

In the summer of 2011, seven Ethiopian agricultural consultants took part in work placements in Grison, where they gained an insight into the life of Swiss mountain farmers and in particular helped with animal husbandry and haymaking. The exchange was organized by the Plantahof educational and advisory centre for farmers in Landquart and was co-financed by Biovision.

The new experiences were immediately applied in the Gurara garden in the slums of Addis Ababa. In May 2012 hay bales were already piled up there, making it possible to feed the cows and therefore maintain good milk yields, even during the dry season. The animals now also provide more dung which, together with green waste, is transformed into high-quality compost. This is used to improve the formerly degraded soil and boost vegetable yields.



Photos: Peter Lüthi / Biovision

the restaurant owned by the group. This way, she earns 250 – 300 Birr (about 14 Swiss francs) a month. A short time ago, she was able to take out a micro-loan and improve her home. Her debts have already been paid off and her family now lives in a nice house with their own vegetable garden and chicken run. “Gurara changed my life”, says the woman who has gone through so much, and at last a slight smile lights up her sad eyes.

More pictures: [www.biovision.ch/almaze\\_e](http://www.biovision.ch/almaze_e)





Sweet-toothed local children were faster than the jury in faraway Addis Ababa and checked out the quality of the honey for themselves in Tolay. Photo: Peter Lüthi / Biovision

#### AWARD FOR BIOVISION PROJECT

## Bronze for honey from Tolay

At the end of September, Biovision's honey bee project faced international competition at the "ApiExpo Africa" bee fair in Addis Ababa, and took an excellent third place. "It was exciting to receive the award in front of more than 1000 participants", reported project leaders Dr Shifa Ballo and Lulseged Belayhun from Ethiopia. "The award was presented to us by the Minister of Commerce and Industry. We are very proud of the international recognition that the project is receiving thanks to this award."

#### NEW ONLINE DONATION PLATFORM

## Get active!

Biovision has set itself the goal of raising 10 000 Swiss francs for push-pull projects (organic pest control for maize) by the end of next April. We do not want to do this in a conventional way, but through our new online donation platform [www.getactive.ch](http://www.getactive.ch). And here's how it works. You launch your own fund-raising activity on the platform. The sky's the limit as far as creativity is concerned. Whether you sell cakes at a Christmas bazaar or organise a charity run in aid of Biovision – each donation helps farmers in East Africa to sustainably increase their maize yields. If you don't want to organise an activity yourself, you can support other people's activities or donate money to push-pull online in a very simple, safe and fast way. We hope you'll visit our new website soon! [www.getactive.ch](http://www.getactive.ch)



The Colaizzi family from Geneva demonstrate how it works. They have already donated the proceeds from two flea-market sales to Biovision. Our heartfelt thanks! Photo: José Colaizzi

#### Correction regarding Newsletter 24:

The picture on page 8 of our last newsletter showed the finalist Su Kahumbu at the Innovation Prize for Africa 2012 event, and not at the Vision 2030 Innovation Award for Agriculture ceremony. We apologize for this mistake. At the same time, we are glad that Su Kahumbu is receiving awards by the dozen for her mobile phone app "iCOW".



Werner Wehrli from Chur asked his birthday guests to not bring presents, but instead to support Biovision.

Photo: Fotostudio Wolf, Chur

#### BIRTHDAY SURPRISE

## Donations replace gifts

In June, Werner Wehrli from Chur celebrated his 60<sup>th</sup> birthday. "Since I am a keen supporter of Biovision's work, I asked my family and friends to make donations rather than buy me presents", explains the Divisional Head at the Department of Agriculture in the canton of Solothurn. The guests and Werner Wehrli himself raised 1,360 Swiss francs in aid of Biovision projects. The birthday party, which included a hike near Flims, therefore had a second purpose: "Family farms can sustainably provide people in Africa with food and also maintain the landscape." Our heartfelt thanks for this generosity!