

**Horticultural exports, a driving force in modernising food production in Africa.  
18/02/2009 – By COLEACP’s PIP Programme<sup>1</sup>:**

***Do horticultural exports hinder local agriculture?***

Media coverage of the current food crisis that has hit developing countries, coupled with pressure from key environmental lobbyists, regularly translates into sensationalist, widely broadcast warnings about the dangers and risks of export agriculture for the planet and its poorest inhabitants.

In May 2008, the French TV channel France 2 broadcast on its ‘*Compléments d’enquête*’ programme a report entitled ‘*la Faim des Haricots*’ (‘Bean hunger’), whose premise was as follows: ‘Kenya has begun mass production of green beans so that Europeans can eat them out of season. This has brought economic success: exports have become a primary source of foreign currency. But it has also created an environmental nightmare, threatening water supplies and bringing intensive air traffic. Meanwhile, the farmers themselves still can’t afford to buy the beans they are producing!’

The programme was sensationalist, and the information was biased and didn’t tell the whole story. It’s important to also bear in mind that the beans are mainly transported in planes carrying European tourists, and the ecological footprint of a country like Kenya is very much less than that of northern countries. It also ignores the fact that COLEACP has been working for over 8 years to ensure the implementation of Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) in **export horticulture in 28 ACP countries**, and that the green bean sector in Kenya is one of the most often-cited success stories.

‘Action Against Hunger’, a renowned humanitarian NGO that began work in Kenya 6 years ago, stated in the same programme that ‘the production of vegetables does not encroach upon traditional crops, instead it is a plus for the population. It is a huge source of employment, and it contributes to the local economy’. The journalist himself concluded with the words: ‘green beans, a driver for development’.

Contrary to popular belief, export agriculture does not hinder food production in Africa. In reality, outcomes of COLEACP’s PIP programme show that export agriculture in fact helps to advance local cropping systems and raise food production. More importantly, export agriculture is a vehicle for technology transfer that benefits local agriculture and local people.

***African food production suffers from local structural constraints***

---

<sup>1</sup> COLEACP is an inter-professional association of ACP exporters and EU importers who work together to promote sustainable horticultural trade.

The structural problems facing agriculture in developing countries are well known, and are not connected to the export industry. In reality, there are many constraints from the political, the economic, and the logistical to the technical. The situation varies depending on the country, its history, and its size, but nevertheless there are common factors limiting agricultural development in countries in the South. For twenty years the sector has not received sufficient emphasis or been prioritised in national or donor policies. Access to credit and therefore investment and capital is still too limited. Transporting and protecting the quality of agricultural products is often difficult due to poor storage and roads infrastructure. Finally, the development of agricultural production itself is hampered by constraints intrinsic to the industry: lack of access to land, poor quality or inappropriate agricultural inputs, and insufficient knowledge of good agricultural practices among small-scale producers.

Since horticultural exports are an important generator of foreign currency, they help to fund the development of the sector, particularly when large numbers of small-scale local producers are involved. The industry therefore does more to remove the factors limiting agricultural development in Africa than it contributes to an ‘environmental or humanitarian disaster’, as claimed by some elements of the media.

### ***PIP aims to protect millions of rural jobs in ACP countries***

The challenge facing PIP, an ACP-EU cooperation programme, is to maintain the flow of exports of fruit and vegetables between ACP countries and the EU in order to safeguard hundreds of thousands of family farms and millions of jobs. From the outset, PIP has sought to enable ACP companies meet EU market requirements, and in particular to help small-scale producers consolidate their position in the supply chain.

The impact of the programme on progressing local food production has been both micro and macroeconomic.

PIP has promoted the advancement of local farming systems. It has also helped to improve and streamline crop production methods. This has been achieved by developing and distributing some thirty crop protocols among small-scale producers, providing technical support for the implementation of Good Agricultural Practice. Some export crops are also consumed locally (e.g. okra, cassava, yam, cherry tomatoes, lettuce etc.). In addition to GAP, PIP has encouraged alternative production techniques (Integrated Crop Management – ICM, Integrated Pest Management – IPM, etc.), organic farming, and the safe use of pesticides.

Furthermore, the implementation of sustainable management and food safety control systems among exporters and their suppliers (e.g. small-scale producers), coupled with the capacity building of human resources at all stages of the export supply chain, has fostered improved control and standardisation of production.

Yields are thus increasing, and the quality and consistency of agricultural production is improving. As a result, produce is likely to attract higher prices and producers' income to increase.

The impact is also macroeconomic. By organising and training small-scale producers, and by developing the capacity of exporters and local support organisations (e.g. NGOs, trade associations, consultants), the programme is helping to build relationships between local players. The whole sector is thus increasingly organised and undergoing self-improvement.

Another strong example of how horticultural exports help to benefit African agriculture is in the development of new local skills and expertise. For example, in horticultural export companies the programme has trained the managers and technical staff involved in production, traceability and quality control. Some public bodies have also benefited from technical support such as national plant protection and pesticide regulatory authorities.

The PIP trainers are generally consultants who themselves have been trained by the programme in specific fields of expertise such as food safety, traceability, HACCP, crop protection and the safe use of pesticides. When the programme first began, 80% of the consultants were from Europe; today, 80% are local.

The impact of PIP on improving food production for local and regional markets goes beyond the horticultural sector in which it operates due to close cooperation with partners in other sectors (e.g. cocoa, coffee) who use PIP technical and educational materials. These partnerships take the form of "agreements on use" that ensure the proper application of the materials in order to benefit and protect the interests of ACP exporters and producers. These agreements can be signed with consultants or with national and international cooperation organisations active in agricultural development in ACP countries (e.g. FAO, World Bank, NGOs).

***Technical assistance to the export sector has a positive impact on local agriculture and helps towards the Millennium Development Goals***

Technical assistance to the export sector has decisively positive effects on the upgrading of local agriculture and therefore on local economies. The horticultural export industry is therefore driving poverty alleviation in developing countries, as well as contributing to the Millennium Development Goals.

Horticultural exports in ACP countries generate many jobs, both unskilled (e.g. in fields and packhouses) and skilled (e.g. in export companies, laboratories, and research organisations). Thanks to the generation on employment, for women as well as men, and the accumulation of capital generated by the export trade, disadvantaged areas in the South can escape the spiral of poverty and underdevelopment, and instead enter a cycle of investment, development, and income generation in rural areas.

By helping to increase incomes of small-scale farmers, the export trade enables them to access to school and medical care, and has a positive impact on children's education and health.

### ***Positive environmental impact***

Good Agricultural Practices, disseminated by PIP through crop protocols, and a training system tailored to small-scale producers, have a positive impact on the environment. For example:

*On water quality*- by ensuring that in the crop protocols the most dangerous pesticides are replaced with products that have less persistent effects, by reducing their use through training in sustainable agriculture, and by promoting good practice in the use of pesticides.

*On soil quality* - where pesticide pollution is reduced due to the elimination of the most damaging substances, and through the dissemination of good agricultural practices such as crop rotation. Soil testing can also be used to rationalise fertiliser use.

*On preservation of the ecosystem* -, by replacing broad-spectrum pesticides with substances that do not damage non-target beneficial organisms.

### ***PIP 2: increasing impact to help benefit ACP agriculture***

After a positive final evaluation of PIP Phase 1, the programme will enter a second phase in October 2009.

In this second phase, the strategy and scope of the programme will be broadened. It continues to address Good Agricultural Practice and food safety, but also specifically targets sustainability in terms of the environment and ethical trade. This includes, for example, support to producers in sustainable farming practices, good carbon practices, and water management. PIP will also further capitalise on advances made in the export sector by actively disseminating knowledge and skills to benefit local and regional producers and consumers.

The horticultural sector is and must continue to be an economic driver for the African, Caribbean and Pacific group of states. The strategy of Phase 2 will be to ensure the viability in the long run of horticultural businesses by supporting and promoting sustainable agricultural practices.