Seed security: How far has PELUM come?

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FROM THE SECRETARY GENERAL

THE BOARD'S MESSAGE to the Secretary General was clear: "Go back to your offices in Harare and concentrate on strengthening country working groups. Either we do this or the potential of the Association will never be fully realised."

The turning point has been reached. We have always known that one day the shift had to occur, but we never really worked out the details. A shift is a process. This shift of focus to country working group development will culminate in a revision of our strategic plan in October 2001 which 50 PELUM members are expected to attend. In the meantime, the country working groups will work out detailed plans about how this is to happen. So will the Regional Desk.

The process will be accompanied by a shift in the locus of power in the organisation. One of the instruments that will change is the constitution. Remember that in 1999, the Biennial General Meeting told our Board to look into the constitution closely with a view to giving more power and responsibility to country level.

Within the PELUM Association, there is consensus about the need for a shift and what form it should take. The 1999 PELUM evaluation highlighted similar feelings from the membership. The wave of change is therefore coming from within. For an organisation that believes in participation and empowerment, this is consistency.

PELUM is a complex mix of stakeholders whose inspiration is drawn from common concerns and causes. The composition of stakeholders is dynamic. We keep responding to the needs and interests of the members.

In looking at why we should scale down on the regional activities and scale up the country activities, the Board and its staff came up with the following reasons:

• The country working groups (CWGs) are close to the ground where change should happen.
• Strengthening of CWGs is an expressed need among members.
• Some CWGs are finding it difficult to make a start by employing a co-ordinator.
• The shift is in line with the spirit of decentralisation.
• There is a lack of prioritisation of PELUM activities where there is no country desk (CD) or where the CD coordinator is part-time.
• The shift is in fulfillment of the PELUM vision, mission, principles and values.

Strengthened country working groups would:

• Increase the presence of PELUM in the region.
• Make all regional programmes effective.
• Increase the overall capacity and accountability of PELUM Association.

To effect the desired change, the Regional Desk should raise funds with and for CWGs until they are ready to do this on their own. The Regional Desk should not increase its capacity to facilitate organisational development within the Association but appoint someone from within to be responsible for the organisational development of CWGs. Staff employed by the CWGs should be oriented by the Regional Desk even though they report to the country leadership.

For their part, the CWGs should develop their own strategic and annual plans based on institution-
SEED SECURITY: how far has PELUM come?

By Sarah Kimakwa, seed security programme co-ordinator

PELUM Association launched its seed security programme in March 1999 out of a strongly felt need among both PELUM and non-PELUM members.

During 2000 the programme's main thrust was to train community development workers in all aspects of seed security and to network with like-minded organisations in the region and beyond. The Association was able to promote the programme among the many other seed security initiatives in the region. Looking back on the year, I am pleased to report that we achieved all that we set out to do.

Three sub-regional training workshops were held in Kenya, Lesotho and Zimbabwe. The training focused on the technical aspects of seed production, selection and storage, community organisation in seed security, biodiversity conservation and laws and conventions that govern seed industry globally and in specific countries.

Eighty-two participants attended the workshops from over 50 organisations within east and southern Africa, and there was one participant from Ethiopia. Funds were raised from workshop fees paid by non-PELUM members. Participants were able to prepare their own action plans and those of their countries, resulting in similar workshops being organised among member countries. Zimbabwe, Botswana, Lesotho have held national workshops. Tanzania organised a regional training workshop. South Africa held an awareness creation workshop in 1999 that led to the establishment of a seed saver network.

At organisational level, several members have incorporated the skills and knowledge acquired in the workshops and given feedback about their own seed projects. Among them are ADP Mbozi in Tanzania, Fambidzanai Training Centre and Nyahode Union Learning Centre in Zimbabwe, RODI in Kenya, GROW in Lesotho, the Lutheran World Federation and Cinci Wa Babili in Zambia.

Botswana held a one-week workshop which focussed mainly on international conventions and policies relating to biodiversity and advocacy and lobbying. Fifteen participants attended the workshop, representing member organisations, farmers and the government. The following resolutions were passed:

• There should be increased collaboration on seed security among NGOs, government departments and interest groups involved in biodiversity and sustainable agriculture.
• Another workshop should be held to target a wider about international conventions and their impact on local biodiversity management.

Tanzania

As a follow-up to the seed security workshop held in Kenya in July 2000, Gerald Mgaya and a representative from VECO and ADP Mbozi in Tanzania organised a five-day feedback meeting attended by 18 field staff.

International conventions and biopiracy were topics of great concern for the participants. The rapid multiplication method for sweet potato and cassava raised a lot of interest among participants and they built a nursery on the spot to demonstrate the techniques.

Lesotho

NGOs involved in seed security in Lesotho followed up the PELUM Association workshop, held in Mokhotlong and Maseru in March 2000, with a two-day meeting which brought together all the stakeholders in the seed industry: the government, farmers, university academics, civil society and the NGOs.

The aim was to create awareness about seed security initiatives and related seed laws that exist in Lesotho and to establish a framework for co-operation in dealing with seed issues.

Participants had time to make presentations about their efforts to enhance seed security for smallholder farmers. Lesotho is a small mountainous country with diverse agro-ecological regions, shallow soils and extremes of climate. Access to seed which is suitable to such conditions is critical.