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**Development of a
Regional Market
Information System for
Agricultural and
Livestock Commodities
under Initiative to End
Hunger in Africa
Funding through
USAID's West Africa
Regional Program**

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1. Introduction

A regional market information system (MIS) can play an important role in promoting increased trade within West Africa. Until recently, an MIS served mostly government and donors and, in practice, depended largely on donor funding. Many failed after donor funding disappeared. Establishing sustainable MISs that serve not only government and donors but also the private sector and other agencies requires a demand-driven model. This means that MIS interventions must go beyond the important technical details of collection methodology and database management to consider the responsiveness of the system to users' needs – particularly those who can pay for MIS services – and the institutional setting in which the MIS exists.

This paper justifies demand-driven MISs (section 2), provides a historical context in West Africa (section 3), explains the co-evolution of MISs and trader organisations (section 4), describes the steps needed to build a sustainable regional network of MISs (section 5), and suggests donor support to enable that (section 6). In an appendix, it includes a summary table of the state of MISs in the different ECOWAS states.

2. Justification

Regional trade is an engine of growth for West African countries. Trade allows economies to grow faster than the rate of domestic demand, thus permitting accelerated economic development. Governments should therefore design policy to promote trade efficiently. Two effective and complementary trade policies are the promotion of improved MISs and of traders' organisations.

Traders in a competitive market have an interest in reducing business transaction costs. Reduced costs hold out the prospect of increased profits, at least in the short run. Government also has an interest in reduced business transaction costs because, in the long run, a competitive market will pass on the benefits in the form of higher prices for producers and lower costs for consumers, thus raising the welfare of both.

Better market information reduces traders' transaction costs. It allows them to locate markets that they would not otherwise have found and to conclude more profitable deals. A lack of accurate market information acts as a non-tariff barrier that inhibits intra-regional trade. Buyers may turn to imports from outside Africa if they do not know what is available from neighbouring countries or do not trust suppliers from those countries to deliver reliably. Improved market information and building reliable commercial contacts (through a traders' network) help to remove this non-tariff trade barrier and expand regional trade, thereby leading to accelerated economic growth.

An MIS that provides information responding to traders' needs usually performs best. Traders' livelihoods depend on knowing how markets work and they are best placed to judge which extra information is likely to profit them most. Thus MISs should collaborate with traders' organisations to keep current with commercial needs, which may change considerably over time.

Equally, traders' organisations have an interest in collaborating with and supporting MISs that provide their members with useful information more cheaply than they can provide it themselves. However, the extra benefit accruing to the trader in terms of better market information may not justify the costs of his joining such an organisation. A traders' organisation that organises itself to offer more than just privileged access to market information will tend to attract more members and to succeed more than one that does not. For instance, an organisation that actively lobbies government in traders' interests or that negotiates or litigates (or credibly threatens to litigate) on behalf of its members (who are perhaps too small individually to contemplate such actions) will provide extra motivation to traders to join such an organisation – and to pay subscriptions to do so.

Those favouring good governance in West Africa should encourage the strengthening of traders' organisations. Their feedback fosters more responsive government, and is all the more important when they represent the voices of small or medium-sized traders, an important element of civil society. However, MISs must also consider the interests of groups beyond traders, including farmers, agro-processors, consumers and policy makers: they too, who can also benefit from better market information and they too play significant roles in civil society.

There thus arises the possibility of a virtuous circle. Government supports MIS services generating increased commerce worth more than the cost of those services. Traders access the information predominantly through their organisation, which also furnishes them with other services that, collectively, more than justify the cost of joining it. Part of the organisation's activity consists of providing feedback to government in the form of lobbying for well-honed and well-implemented policy to continue to promote accelerated economic growth. There arises a simultaneous deepening and broadening of both profitable commercial options and participation in civil society.

Although most economists working on MISs in Africa believe that the systems deliver a big payback, this effect is difficult to distinguish from that of other factors that might increase trade and marketing over a specific period, e.g. transport infrastructure or better farmer organisation. However, research suggests that market information increases market integration, which in turn, strongly suggests increased benefits from trade. In the context of evidence for increased market integration over the 1990s in the Ugandan maize market, Rashid (2002:13-14) of the International Food Policy Research Institute

finds that his analytical results point to a positive causal relationship between MISs and the extent of market integration. Moreover, the length and frequency of FM radio broadcasting of maize prices in certain areas correlated well with the dominance of local markets in national price formation.¹

Corresponding to this indirect evidence of a concrete contribution made by MISs, most farmers and traders who know such systems find them commercially useful. The usefulness varies with the prevalence of traditional trading relationships, which may not allow much flexibility to respond to price incentives, though the availability of market information may itself play an important role in accelerating change towards less traditional trading modes. Traders in Uganda and Indonesia value MISs, but prudently look for a convergence of MIS data with information from other sources they have available. As related below, traders in West Africa have already contributed to maintaining “their” MIS when it risked closure: they valued it highly because it delivered tangible benefits. In South Africa, several businesses collect, process and sell agricultural market information, while trade associations provide similar services to their members. As agribusiness becomes more developed and profitable, so related market information itself becomes commoditised and profitable. However, attaining this level of economic development generally depends on the provision to traders of market information as a public good at earlier stages of development.

Farmers also benefit from market information. Most Ugandan farmers find such information highly relevant for making decisions about choosing markets in which to sell and many also find it relevant for decisions about which crops to plant, though less so. They and most farmers in north Sumatra and west Java (Indonesia) use it to increase their market power in negotiations with buyers. (S. Ferris, FOODNET/ Kampala, personal communication: 26.ix.03; South Africa, n.d.; Shepherd and Schalde:1995)

¹ Analysts can measure the strength of the market linkages before and after the provision of improved market information in a variety of ways, using, e.g., correlation, Ravallion and co-integration analysis.

Ravallion analysis asks to what extent a price series depends on its own past values, rather than those of another price series. For MIS evaluation, the relevant comparison is for prices of a given commodity in a pair of marketplaces. Regression techniques isolate: (a) the effect of lagged own price, (b) current and lagged price of the other market, and (c) exogenous causes, such as seasonality and rainfall. The advantage of this technique over correlation analysis is that it allows the separation of the exogenous effects from the endogenous effects between market pairs. Analysts generally use (b)/(a) as a measure of market integration. Using this technique to measure the MIS effect requires the inclusion of a dummy variable to take account of the period when MIS was operating, i.e. treat MIS like another exogenous variable. (Ravallion 1987)

Co-integration analysis uses an “error-correction” model to examine the extent to which the short-term behaviour of two price series for a market pair shows that they move in synch within the context of their long-term evolution. The analysis establishes (a) whether the market pair system is “stationary” (mean-reverting); and (b) estimates the degree of their “mutual attraction”, the speed of adjustment towards this relation, and how other variables (e.g. MIS) change the strength of the adjustment.

The evidence above suggests that the cumulative benefits to agricultural markets from MISs largely exceeds their costs and may be a *sine qua non* for accelerated rural development, the growth of civil society and, ultimately, poverty reduction.

3. History

Some West African MISs date to the colonial era when price collection started. Post-independence governments have altered these and created others. However, for a long time they evolved in isolation with unconnected components and wasteful duplication of functions. Until recently, these MISs dealt uniquely with information within countries, rather than importing information from others. A given country would typically have (a) several unco-ordinated systems covering different commodities – different systems often covered crop agriculture and livestock – and (b) parallel systems covering the same commodity. Data collected in markets found their way to the capital city at a leisurely pace, with aggregation of quantities and averaging of prices at each successive stage in the administrative hierarchy until they formed part of national annual reports in a hermetically sealed system that bypassed the private sector. Traders used their own informal MISs for their decision-making.

Since the 1980s, efforts have taken place to remedy these shortcomings, initially to improve food-security monitoring. Faxes, and then e-mail, have greatly accelerated data transmission; computerisation of MISs has encouraged rapid and more sophisticated market analysis. As importantly as these technical changes, MISs have adapted to serve the private sector, first by sending price bulletins to traders and posting tables of price information in marketplaces, then by broadcasting price information by radio in local languages.

In adjusting to the needs of traders, some MISs began to incorporate price data from other countries, where available. For instance, in the early 1990s, CILSS briefly ran an MIS that faxed livestock prices between Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire and Mali; over a longer period, the commercial attaché in Niger's consulate in Kano faxed weekly prices back to Niamey (though little was then done with those data).

In 2000, six Francophone countries formally constituted an MIS network to exchange data on price and availability of agricultural and livestock commodities. These were Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, Mali, Niger and Senegal. By the time the network met again in January 2002, the countries included Benin (with a nascent MIS) and Togo (apparently on the point of creating one). Issues of methodological harmonisation, data exchange, links to the private and public sectors, enlargement to include other countries in the

region, sustainable financing and cost recovery, among others, remain to be fully resolved, but the network represents an important step forward.

The network of MISs grew out of activities funded by USAID. Its Sahel Regional Program (SRP) supported the *Institut du Sahel*'s food-security program, PRISAS (Regional Project for Strengthening Institutions dealing with Research on Food Security in the Sahel), allowing the creation of an informal network of West African food-security analysts who worked together. SRP also subsequently supported a series of *conférences régionales* (discussed below) at which some of these analysts decided to create the MIS network.

MISs joined to form a network principally to focus more on the private sector. This has been productive: in doing so they have they have:

- a) organized West African Agricultural Outlook Conferences
- b) collected and broadcasted information on market opportunities in West Africa to increase trading activities between private businessmen in the region. Each MIS diffuses the information nationally according to the target regional market niche. For example, the Malian MIS will get information from Guinea on livestock demand and diffuse it to the Malian traders.
- c) developed a business listing of West African agribusiness operators.

Institutionally, the nascent regional network has always leant heavily on Mali's MIS, the *Observatoire des marchés agricoles* – OMA, originally funded by USAID/Mali and with important contributions from other donors – because of its well-trained and experienced staff, supported by a second project, *Projet d'appui au système d'information décentralisée du marché agricole au Mali* (– PASIDMA), currently funded by USAID/Mali. However, this is a tenuous basis for long-term regional institutionalisation: the network needs formal regional funding.

In August and September 2002, USAID/WARP took its first step into this area, funding the installation of computers equipped for e-mail for MISs in the network that lacked them. WARP sees the MIS network as a valuable step towards promoting regional trade and, in principle, would like to support its development with funding from the *Initiative to end Hunger in Africa* (IEHA).

4. The MIS network and the traders' network

MISs continue to provide valuable data that inform food-security analysis by government (and donors). However, in addition, many argue that, in contributing to more efficient markets and thus driving trade, MISs help reduce the impact of shocks – such as drought

– on the economy and thus the need for food aid and other government interventions. However, their efficiency in doing so depends on the quality of roads and the purchasing power of the populations experiencing the shock. This “trade-based food security” approach justifies an MIS focus on supplying commercially useful data to the private sector.

Informal contact has existed between some well-informed traders and their national MISs for some time. Formal regional collaboration between traders of agricultural and livestock commodities and the public sector, including MISs, took a significant step forward with the first *Conférence régionale sur les perspectives agricoles en Afrique de l’Ouest*, sponsored by USAID in 1999. The *conference* gave traders access to information on agricultural marketing that previously would have remained in government offices. Two other *conférences* followed in 2000 and 2001.

In parallel, networks of traders have formed a regional network: the *Réseau des Opérateurs Economiques du Secteur Agro-Alimentaire de l’Afrique de l’Ouest* (ROESAO) to improve regional trading conditions. Like the MIS network, this network of traders also grew out of the *conférences régionales*. Indeed, it was through these conferences that the key actors got to know each other and it was at the second conference that they formally created their network.

[NOTE: ROESAO ALSO GREW OUT OF THE REGIONAL CONFERENCES. IT WAS THROUGH THESE CONFERENCES THAT THE KEY ACTORS GOT TO KNOW EACH OTHER AND IT WAS AT THE SECOND CONFERENCE THAT THE NETWORK WAS FORMALLY CREATED.] ROESAO has a 16-member orientation committee and eight country-coordination teams with a total of 60 paid-up members. Membership consists mostly of private food-industry operators and private cooperatives of traders and producers in the food industry.

Policy-makers from various countries attended the March 2003 ROESAO meeting. The meeting made nine recommendations, of which four specifically called on governments to carry out various actions. The ninth recommendation – for “stronger support from decision-makers and development partners” – suggests that ROESAO believes there remains some scope for increasing its policy-making influence. However, ROESAO has already influenced some policy changes by:

- putting together a livestock trade arrangement between Guinea and Mali where none existed before, which led to the creation of border market, thereby increasing livestock trade between Mali and Guinea
- stopping bureaucratic harassment, leading to an increase in commercial exchanges between Mali and Burkina Faso
- developing trade (cereals and livestock) relationships between Mali, Niger and Senegal

- negotiating with the rebels in Ivory Coast to maintain trade flows (import and export of fish, meat products and corn) between Côte d'Ivoire and Mali and its influence is growing.

The *conférences régionales* and the ROESAO meetings have gone a long way bring the public and private sectors together, to meet traders' demand for stronger links to counterparts in other countries, and to provide a platform on which they can strategise about how to overcome a dearth of information, which they perceive as a non-tariff trade barrier. In this context, when the first West African MIS network meeting took place in 2000, it did so with traders already beginning to formulate their MIS needs.

The MIS network meetings have furthered cross-fertilisation between traders and MIS officials: traders and MIS officials attend both. The new ideas that those attending these fora have taken back to their own countries have changed the thinking about the role of MIS at the national level. In each country concerned, the MIS network now pays more heed to the needs of the private sector.

The agribusiness community believes that MIS works in its interests. In 1997, due to a lack of funding, OMA stopped its activities (market information collection and broadcasting) in Niono, Mali. Traders there offered to finance OMA's activities because they thought that it was to their advantage to do so. In 2002, Senegalese cereal traders needed a supply of millet to meet demand for this commodity in their country. They contacted the MIS office in Dakar, which, in turn, contacted OMA in Bamako. OMA then diffused this information across Mali, resulting in a deal made in Ségou (where millet was abundant during that period) between Senegalese and Malian traders.

ROESAO is only one of several private-sector networks that have arisen in West Africa since 1990. Its members tend to be established medium-sized businessmen who want to expand their regional trade. However, large businesses, which generally have their own sophisticated MISs, may have an incentive to join these networks, at least partially in order to benefit from the information exchanged, which often differs from that collected by their own MISs.

From a role once played completely inside government, national MISs have now evolved to serve two masters: they provide information useful to both the public and private sectors. This has brought about a need for autonomy from government, which is often a difficult balancing act because, though they typically now receive most of their funding from donors, government still tends to regard MISs as one of their agencies. Moreover, MISs will probably eventually require government to pay a large part of their costs to become sustainable. However, it is important too that a national MIS does not become the tool of particular private-sector interests that have an interest in biasing the system's data to its own ends. Retaining managerial autonomy – and the perception of managerial

autonomy – from *any* interest group are important in order to avoid undermining internal morale and credibility with respect to the outside world.

In concluding this section on the impact of traders of agricultural and livestock commodities on MISs, we should note that they are not the only non-governmental constituency for MIS services. Farmers, processors, consumers, bankers, input traders and NGOs – as individuals or in association – as well as donors & lenders, and international agencies also want access to MIS outputs. In negotiations with MIS, government may represent poorer and less-organised farmers and herders and may fund MIS provision of information they need as a public good. However, most of these groups are capable not only of identifying the market information they need but also paying at least some part of the cost of its provision. [SOME FUNCTIONS STILL RETAIN A “PUBLIC GOOD” NATURE AND WILL REQUIRE PUBLIC FUNDING]

An MIS should demonstrate an institutional responsiveness that capitalises on these needs. Indeed, an MIS should go further, courting these groups and showing them how it can offer them a service to their advantage. An entrepreneurial MIS would sell its services to clients outside the country in which it is based. However, most MISs will take several years to reach that stage and they should become entrepreneurial only to the extent that they have capacity to produce the services they agree to deliver, in order to maintain their credibility.

5. Developing a regional network of MISs

Developing a West African MIS network requires:

1. reinforcing existing national MISs and supporting the setting up of national MISs where in countries where they do not yet exist
2. enabling national MISs to interact synergistically.

5.1 Building and reinforcing functional national MISs

5.1.1 The model: Mali’s Observatoire des Marchés Agricoles

The combination of an efficient, responsive national MIS with both public and private-sector stakeholders can work well. The case of Mali makes this clear. The Malian government understands market dynamics better, and has made better policy decisions, because of the information and analysis it has received from OMA. As a measure of its appreciation of OMA’s value, government pays its operating expenses of 100M Fcfa per year. OMA has provided government with information for improved decision-making. The best example was in April 1997 when OMA’s prediction of a considerable increase in rice prices in December 1996 led to the Malian government’s elimination of import

taxes on rice. OMA also earns fees for non-core work done while continuing to retain private-sector support because of the valuable information it provides. Table 1 presents OMA's budget for calendar year 2002, showing the preponderance of state support and the contribution from non-core fees.

Table 1
OMA's budget for 2002

1.1 Sources	1.2 Income 1.3 (millions of FCFA)
Government	80
PRMC (USAID and other donors)	20
OMA self generated funds	10
TOTAL	110

OMA and the networks interact through regional meetings and conferences, workshops, and daily or weekly electronic communications through which OMA is responsive to private-sector user needs which, in some cases, have become its priorities. For instance, in 2002, a contractual agreement between the USAID-funded Agro-Enterprise Center in Bamako and OMA for the collection and the broadcasting of market information concerning horticultural products generated a new emphasis on horticultural market information.

Staatz, Diarra and Traoré (2002) attribute OMA's success to several groups of factors. Firstly, the system has had the freedom to respond flexibly over time to private-sector needs, due to continuity of managerial autonomy and sustained donor support. User-needs studies and national workshops have provided a consensus on priorities. Evolving frank and constructive dialogue with traders have generated a sense of ownership that leads them to put pressure on the system to perform. Democracy in Mali reinforces this receptive atmosphere. Secondly, shrewd recruitment and appropriate training has resulted in a strong technical team, while good management has instilled team commitment. Thirdly, OMA has aimed to function as a coordinating and facilitating body, strengthening traders' networks and working towards more effective marketing extension programmes, while leaving the commerce itself to the traders. Fourthly, the system has consciously kept a balance between public and private roles: a home in the partly independent Chamber of Agriculture keeps the MIS at arm's length from government. Fifthly, setting up management and technical committees has brought in expertise and perspectives from other parts of both the public and private sectors, and allowed the promotion of a transparent image.

Once OMA had taken time to identify users that it could efficiently service, the technical side began. In response to user needs and with stakeholder agreement, OMA broadened the range of price data covered from the traditional cereals and livestock to include those from fruits, vegetables, fish and input markets at the farm gate, wholesale and retail levels.

After having identified potential sources and providers of information, OMA instituted close control of data quality in the markets chosen. To ensuring data quality, it installed micro-computers, modems and solar-powered radios in 16 rural and urban centres for quicker and more reliable collection, transmission, treatment, and broadcasting of market information. It undertook routine visits to these centres to prevent enumerators from slacking and free riding.

OMA has used a decentralised model for data handling, with remote units linked electronically to each other and to headquarters, allowing rapid transmission of data and efficient networking. It has automated data processing to avoid delays at this stage. Some final products use print media – weekly & monthly situation reports; special bulletins on outlook, market volume and export prospects – and OMA maintains close collaboration with written and electronic press to develop these reports. Others take form of radio broadcasts on local and national radio. Different products and media allow the system's information to reaches a range of potential customers.

Drawing on their successful experience in Mali, Professor John Staatz of MSU and Dr Niama Nango Dembélé of PASIDMA recommend a two-phase project for developing national MISs (Staatz n.d.). Phase 1 consists of research for up to a year to study:

1. the basic structure, conduct, and performance of the markets to monitor, by commodity, to get a sense of the major actors in these markets, the major market channels, how these vary in space and over time, some of the perceived problems in market performance, and the most important monitoring points in the system
2. the potential clients for a MIS, tightly defined, with some information on the heterogeneity within each group, especially with respect to their information needs
3. the priority data needs of each group in terms of commodity, periodicity, medium of delivery, and the extent to which the data input can change the market
4. the process, such as national workshops, by which to reach consensus about which data the MIS collects and diffuses
5. current data collection systems, to avoid duplicating existing services and to find ways of adding value to the work of those services

6. the optimal mix in the proposed MIS between data collection, data analysis, and policy analysis, to avoid forcing too many functions into a single organisation
7. the most appropriate institutional home(s) for an MIS, taking into account: (a) where the market news portion of the system would be close enough to the clients that they would feel some ownership of it, (b) where the data would not risk manipulation, (c) whether the MIS would have a managerial or technical advisory board to assure credibility, (d) a location that reinforces managerial autonomy and (e) linkages between separate units that may perform different MIS functions.
8. the information diffusion strategy (medium, periodicity, payment), bearing in mind that in some countries radio stations charge significant fees for airtime
9. appropriate rendering of technical terms in local languages
10. a strategy to build sustainable financing of the system: (a) public funding for the “public good” functions of the system, (b) “fee-for-service” products, (c) legal and accounting issues, (d) private consulting by MIS staff
11. linkages to existing regional market information networks
12. external sources of backstopping needed
13. the staff recruitment and staff development plan

A second, operational phase would follow for 3-4 years. Openness to feedback remains important during this phase, despite the importance of the findings of the first-phase research.

5.1.2 MIS subject matter

MISs might enrich their offerings in a variety of ways. A donor representative has suggested that a regional information system should include both production and marketing data for agricultural and livestock commodities. Analysts equipped with both types of data would be better able to interpret trends in the regional agricultural economy. Alternatively, MISs might include trade volumes or estimates of commodity stocks. Measures of stocks in, and flows of commodities into or out of, markets add significantly to an understanding of market dynamics. Other add-ons might include transport costs, phytosanitary information, or details of trade fairs.

So far, MISs have dealt mostly with market prices because they already find themselves stretched without including other elements. In the specific case of stocks and trade flows, it is notoriously difficult to obtain data with any accuracy: keeping track of all flows between markets, even at major border posts, takes considerable effort; and informal

operators have no reason to share the information about their stocks with outsiders. Thus MISs generally consider collection of these data a poor use of resources. Individual MISs, or even the regional system, may eventually find that the demand for information goes beyond price data and respond accordingly. In the meantime, it makes sense to avoid diverting scarce resources from the central task of timely diffusion of price data that traders currently want.

Though trying to report on stocks and trade flows of agricultural commodities may be a waste of time, East African MIS experts note that traders greatly appreciate forecasts of crop production (and consumption). Government offices harbour such information but rarely think to make it available to the private sector in combination with price data. Representatives of CILSS countries meet annually to combine estimates of food balances, largely based on estimates of cereal harvests, to estimate sub-regional food deficits. They make these estimates public several months after the harvest, by which time they probably retain little commercial value.

Even limiting themselves to price data, MISs have difficult choices of what to collect and diffuse (and perhaps analyse). Members of traders' organisations prefer whole sale prices because they tend to work on this scale. However, using wholesale data restricts coverage to a relatively small number of markets that trade quantities on such a scale, thus reducing the usefulness of these data for food-security work, which wants dense market coverage.

5.1.3 Individual electronic bids

MISs can now offer an electronic service to members of traders' organisations that can provide some extra data as a by-product. Traders would post requirements on an MIS website or broadcast them by e-mail to a list of MIS e-mail addresses, e.g., "Amadou Enterprises has 5,000 tonnes of this year's maize to sell at 15,000 Fcfa per tonne, collected from Ségou, Mali". Traders can post (a) bids as well as offers, (b) with or without delivery to destination, and (c) for immediate or future delivery. This virtual market offers a significant service to some medium-sized traders who may not have good access to foreign markets and whose concerns about doing business with an unknown potential business partner in another country will be partially assuaged by the knowledge that he or she is a member of the traders' association in that country. The MIS gains too, by getting direct access to the volumes and prices of what are typically large wholesale transactions – data to which its data collectors in the field would not have access. (The Kenya Agricultural Commodity Exchange (KACE) already operates such a system for the business community in East African countries but it remains underused: businessfolk prefer trading with faces or voices they know.)

5.1.4 Fee-based operations

In the long run, it seems clear that governments will have to finance MISs in order to get public goods in the form of a flow of basic market data for producers and traders. However, an MIS may partially subsidise its core services with cost recovery or profits from the provision of private goods. OMA and Niger's MIS already generate some revenue in this way. These activities may take the form of additional work for non-government agencies and the private sector, such as:

- more frequent (or more extensive) reports that use data collected but not normally made public
- analysis of data that the MIS would otherwise present raw, without value added
- data collection and analysis on a topic contracted specifically for a client (later made public once the commercial value of the information drops). The International Fertilizer Development Center has hired OMA to collect prices in agricultural input markets.

In May 2003, KACE e-mailed its clients announcing that it was changing to a subscriptions only service, at a rate of US\$ 125.00 annually (Mukhebi 2003).

An MIS with core public-good responsibilities provides a good platform of experience and skills on which to build these private-good services. In evolving towards a partially self-financing arrangement, MISs will have to take an entrepreneurial approach, not just by responding to market demand but also by developing and marketing products targeted at its prospective clients and enlarging the client base.

5.1.5 Gender and HIV/AIDS considerations

Gender

Rarely do existing MISs consider information of particular importance to disadvantaged groups in society. To the extent that they consider users' needs, they tend to concentrate on commodities that are of interest to the members of the traders' organisations, dominated by men, rather than those of interest to women, e.g. vegetables. Neither do they consider the information-delivery mechanisms that would best suit women, to communicate effectively the data of interest to them. For instance, would distribution of price information, and interpretation of it, best be distributed through women's groups or through radio programmes oriented to women than through, say, market blackboards or radio programmes oriented at traders?

This also holds true of MIS activities with respect to other economically disadvantaged groups in the context of the overall goal of poverty reduction. At the outset, an MIS must make important decisions on which interest groups to serve, bearing in mind that it cannot solve all ills. At a minimum, AICHAIEHA funding would require MIS to address women's needs. This would require study in each country.

HIV/AIDS

Traders – and drivers of lorries they hire – frequently travel both within their countries and regionally to buy and sell. This travel puts them at high risk of contracting HIV/AIDS through casual sexual relationships. Trade and marketing routes are thus HIV highways that allow this grave threat to the socio-economic equilibrium of West Africa to spread and multiply. Slowing the transmission of HIV/AIDS, particularly to rural areas, can play a much more effective role in combating the disease than trying to deal with it once it has arrived.

However, the need for all national institutions to join the fight against HIV/AIDS has not yet reached the MISs in West Africa. Struggling just to attain their basic goals, MISs overlook this factor and do not communicate any HIV/AIDS messages along with their market information.

MISs have no more competence in designing and delivering HIV/AIDS messages than the agricultural extension systems to which some African governments are considering adding the task of rural anti-HIV/AIDS propaganda. Fortunately, national anti-AIDS programmes can do this for MISs, tailoring the message to the specific situation of those working along major trade corridors. The MIS would then broadcast them as public-service announcements during its popular programmes of market prices.

5.1.6 Management autonomy

It seems important that national MIS should have strong relations with business organisations that allow it to receive feedback to fine-tune its services to commercial needs. In addition, where possible, each should have its institutional homes outside government, with flexibility to serve both government and business on an equal footing and with credibility in both sectors.

5.2 Harmonisation of the MIS network

5.2.1 Expanding the network

A regional network should cover all West Africa, corresponding to the Economic Community of West African States, ECOWAS. However, the current group of MISs in the regional network are preponderantly Francophone and members of the *Union économique et monétaire ouest-africain*, UEMOA (as well as of ECOWAS). There remains a cultural and linguistic jump for the regional network to move beyond the UEMOA-focused grouping to one that includes all the countries in the region.

UEMOA's member countries share a common currency, a common language (except for Guinea-Bissau), similar legal and administrative systems, and many close historical ties. UEMOA countries have recently enacted a common *Organisation de l'Harmonisation du Droit des Affaires en Afrique*, a legal framework for regional business. They are relatively homogeneous and working with them alone is tempting because it would be easier. However, doing so would impose a constraint on intra-regional trade linkages that seems unlikely to correspond to cross-border commercial opportunities.

Business culture in Anglophone countries is more direct, with less deference to the authorities, than in Francophone countries. To the extent that increased trade, including that between Anglophone and Franco phone countries, justifies MIS expansion, it will be necessary to ensure that MIS end-users from these different backgrounds understand each other, and those overseeing their interactions must budget for simultaneous interpretation at meetings and translation of documents.

5.2.2 Nigeria

In particular, careful planning must precede bringing Nigeria into the MIS network. Differences in language, business culture, and administrative and legal systems aside, Nigeria accounts for approximately half a third of the regional economy, dwarfing any other economy in the region. Mutual ignorance tends to bring about a fear of Nigeria by economic operators from elsewhere and an indifference about the rest of West Africa by a Nigerian business community understandably focussed on its own large internal market. Relatively weak communications and business exchanges perpetuate this situation. Building links between Nigeria and the rest of West Africa at the public and at the private levels will take careful planning and significant investments. However, the greatest potential for increased regional trade lies in facilitating these liaisons.

Table 2 summarises Nigeria's market information systems.

The Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (FMARD) has three market information systems, none of which meets the goals of its public-sector users. The Field Project Monitoring Unit (FPMU) in each state reports to the Federal Minister of Agriculture through FMARD's Department of Planning, Research and Statistics (DPRS). The government funds this system poorly and data reach Abuja slowly. In parallel, FMARD has had a system in which agents of the Agricultural Projects Department (APD) in each state collect data in a sample of the state's markets. They transfer copies to the FMARD's Projects Coordinating Unit (PCU) in Abuja for national collation. PCU obtains better data than DPRS because of donor funding. However, PCU has no mandate to diffuse prices for business decision-making and has made little use of media for broadcasting.

Table 2: Nigerian market information systems for agricultural commodities

		Market-chain level		Commodities			Diffusion		
		retail	wholesale	inputs	crops	livestock	admin.	media	internet
FMARD	FPMU	x			x	(x)	x		
	PCU	x			x	x	x	(x)	
	SGRD		(x)			x	x		
FOS & CBN			x		x				x
USAID-funded	RUSEP	x	x	(x)	x			x	x
	DAIMINA	x	x	x	(x)			x	x

Notes:

1. Parentheses indicate less than full coverage in space or time
2. "admin." = "for administrative use"
3. Maximum lag in availability: admin. – 1 year; media – 1 week, internet – 1 day.

The Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) and the Federal Office of Statistics (FOS) collect data for the national accounts and consumer price index (CPI), respectively. The retail prices that FOS gathers for its CPI take up to six months to reach Abuja; FOS does not diffuse them. CBN and FOS sometimes use DPRS and PCU data. Many FOS publications appear years after the collection of the data they contain. However, CBN plays an important role in setting up the Commodity Exchange Market (CEM), which will operate simultaneously in Lagos and Abuja. When CEM opens, probably later in 2003, it will generate real-time data on quantities traded and the associated wholesale prices, which should be available electronically. Commodities will include: grains, cow-peas & beans, cassava products, and tree-crop products. If the exchange spawns sufficient business, it will become the wholesale reference market for Nigeria and probably for its neighbouring countries.

Two projects financed by USAID/Nigeria are in the process of improving the availability of price information to Nigeria's traders in agricultural commodities and inputs. The Rural Sector Enhancement Program (RUSEP)² gathers retail data in three markets in four (of 36) states. Data flow in by mobile phone, e-mail and fax. PCU and the ADP office in each state each have recording studios that they have hitherto used only for recording radio programmes of agronomic advice for farmers. Now RUSEP uses them to record MIS programmes for radio diffusion. The broadcasts take place in the major language of that state by the most expeditious radio station.

RUSEP plans to work with FMARD to build capacity in PCU and equip it with computers and cellphones to allow the unit to oversee this process itself. Simultaneously, it is negotiating with a major newspaper, *The monitor*, for a column on agricultural market information that journalists will write based on PCU data; it also plans to promote

² USAID/Nigeria finances RUSEP; the International Institute for Tropical Agriculture (IITA) and Winrock International manage it. IITA houses RUSEP on its Ibadan campus. (IITA also manages the FOODNET system mentioned in the body of the text.)

the posting of agricultural prices in marketplaces. RUSEP maintains a web site with Nigerian MIS data. Among its other goals are: to expand activities to more states and to include daily wholesale prices in what it offers the market. The challenge is to do all this while maintaining both data quality and speed of transmission. RUSEP intends that the demand for data from the private sector – professional associations and traders – should drive the system.

Thus it seems that RUSEP follows most of the steps that made OMA a success in Mali. However, one notable difference is that the programme intends to build the national MIS within government: it sees the advantages of building it at arm's length from government but believes that doing so would create much more work and major additional costs. Perhaps it is for government to debate the transfer of certain PCU functions into a different institutional setting where they become more independent of government. On the other hand, this may seem perverse in Nigeria, where the private sector fights to remain close to government. Unfortunately, USAID funding should end at the end of September 2003, though it appears that an extension may prolong this for another six months. However, in either case, there will not be enough time to fully institutionalise the system. Similarly, under current funding, it seems very unlikely to have the time to integrate its MIS into a West African MIS network, though it expresses an interest in doing so as a logical extension of its current work.

Developing Agricultural Input Markets in Nigeria (DAIMINA), run by IFDC, principally attempts to redynamise the fertiliser market, which slumped in the mid 1990s. DAIMINA is working to integrate the prices of fertiliser and other inputs into an improved MIS that will link to regional networks. Throughout Nigeria, DAIMINA uses ADP enumerators to gather weekly wholesale and retail prices of agricultural inputs and, in the states where it has formed trade associations for inputs to agriculture, it also gathers prices of agricultural commodities. Trade associations that DAIMINA has set up also contribute data. This currently results in up-to-date monthly data on input and crop prices. From March 2003, PCU and the ADPs should be organising radio broadcasts of these data.

Crop-chemical companies, consumer groups, seed companies and food-processing companies have all started contacting the project for details of input markets. In addition, it has established links for cotton growers with their counterparts in Kenya in order to help them obtain improved seed. The project aims eventually to have access to the previous day's market data. DAIMINA launches its web site in February 2003 and its data should then appear on the site.

DAIMINA collaborates with PCU in these MIS activities and co-ordinates with RUSEP. It concedes there exists some duplication of functions between the two projects. For its part, RUSEP notes that it works with the seed component of DAIMINA but does not

know what DAIMINA is doing in MIS. Under current proposed funding, DAIMINA will continue until 2009, in contrast to RUSEP's proposed end in September 2003, with a possible extension until March 2004.

Thus there exist two USAID-funded activities that promise to dovetail well into the WARP network. Both already have websites. Both work actively with the private sector. Both have expressed an interest in linking with any network that WARP may fund. At least DAIMINA should continue its operations for the next seven years, by which time it should have become self-sustaining. In addition, should CEM take off, it will become important to link its output into a regional MIS network.³ The scale and diversity of Nigeria's agricultural economy and of its demand for different goods may justify establishing several MISs there. However, no one in the current UEMOA-centred MIS network knows enough to answer this or many other questions about how best to accommodate Nigeria. A mission there would answer this and other basic questions.

5.2.3 Other regional market information networks

In addition to the nascent network of market information systems that PASIDMA has facilitated, two other comparable networks, based in Abuja and Lomé, have recently started. A third, with a classic food-security perspective, will start soon.

Since October 2000, IFDC has run the African Agricultural Market Information Network (AFAMIN), financed by the Dutch government and based at IFDC's Africa headquarters in Lomé. AFAMIN's web site provides links to country-specific sites in Burkina Faso, Ghana, Mali, Nigeria and Togo, as well as providing information on agricultural policies and regulations; fertilisers, pesticides, seeds, crops and livestock; and an interactive buy-and-sell section. It aims to link farmers' organisations, agri-input companies, financial institutions, government agencies and donor agencies. AFAMIN intends to add Benin, Senegal and Côte d'Ivoire to its system. It is not clear how much further than the web site AFAMIN's activities extend. (IFDC c2002)

Complementing AFAMIN, the Marketing Inputs Regionally (MIR) project – also run by IFDC – will network countries with the aim of developing trade in agricultural inputs. The Dutch government will finance MIR for seven years from January 2003. Based at ECOWAS headquarters in Abuja, its first phase will electronically link MISs for Ghana, Mali, Nigeria and Togo. A second phase will include Burkina Faso.

Separately, ECOWAS has just signed an agreement with FAO for a Technical Cooperation Project (TCP) that for “Strengthening and Coordination of Information Systems on Food Insecurity, Vulnerability and Food Trade in the ECOWAS Countries”. The two

³ For more detail on Nigerian MISs, see the author's report: *Report to USAID's West Africa Regional Program on a trip to Nigeria, 18th – 28th January 2003*

partners have designed the TCP “to lay the foundations to assist the implementation of a regional food security information system (RFSIS) covering all the ECOWAS countries, based on the existing information systems” (FAO and ECOWAS 2001). As such, this regional network will link together classic food-security-oriented MISs, such as those that exist at AGRHYMET, USAID/FEWS, FAO/GIEWS, WFP/VAM and EC/RESAL, focussing on the provision of information on “geographical zones and populations that are particularly vulnerable to food crises”. It is not trader-focussed. In implementing RFSIS, the TCP will support the setting up of an agricultural data bank at the sub-regional level and the monitoring of agricultural product prices and stocks and the sub-regional trade in food, livestock, fresh and processed fish, etc. RFSIS will thus contribute to identifying obstacles to sub-regional trade. It will also provide an early-warning and forecasting function for regional decision-making. The project document emphasises the harmonisation of approaches and tools in food-security information management and in avoiding duplication of other institutions’ information systems. (FAO and ECOWAS 2001)

In contributing to regional MIS linkages, WARP will want to take into account the work that AFAMIN and MIR have already started. Ongoing dialogue, leading to a rational division of funding responsibilities between USAID and the Dutch Cooperation could significantly reduce the cost of WARP’s contribution to this effort.

5.2.4 The role of regional organisations

An important element in developing MISs for improved regional trade is agreement by the major regional organisations. Before investing in this area, donors should reach agreement with should ensure that regional organisations agree onto an efficient and mutually acceptable way to allow MIS expansion to full regional coverage.

ECOWAS has agreed that CILSS (*Comité inter-états pour la lutte contre la sécheresse dans le Sahel*) based in Ouagadougou will perform food-security work for the entire West African region, not just the Sahelian states. However, as noted above, the ECOWAS secretariat in Abuja will soon receive TCP support from FAO to set up a regional network of classic food-security information systems, including their MIS components. It would seem more appropriate for CILSS to run this classic food-security network operate and that ECOWAS (and/or UEMOA, which has its own trade strategy), with a stronger mandate for regional economic integration, should play a role in a trader-oriented MIS network.

in a “trade-based food security” world, the dividing line between food security and trade becomes blurred. Classic public-sector food-security analysis of commodity price data sinks into the background. In this context, it becomes moot to what extent CILSS should be involved with an MIS network. On the other hand, UEMOA has no great expertise in

this area either. Donors will want to establish that these organisations agree on MIS responsibilities.

5.2.5 Donor collaboration

Donors are currently aligned with different West African regional organisations. France and the EC preferentially support UEMOA; the US has historically funded CILSS and has committed itself to working with ECOWAS. In this context, it is important that donors agree to harmonise their funding for, and co-ordinate on funding to, an MIS network that can meet regional institutions' goals.

As noted above, collaboration with the Dutch Co-operation on linking a WARP-funded MIS network to existing MIS networks is important.

5.2.6 MIS network structure

MISs have collectively adopted a decentralised, distributed model for their regional network. As with the internet, no single location exists to which MISs send data, where it is processed, and from which it is then diffused. In contrast, a centralised information centre would have the advantage of working with a single regional database for analysis, diffusion and archiving in a unified fashion. Dealing with all data in a single hub appears to offer advantages of cost saving and ease of data handling once all inputs have been consolidated. However, with its current resources, the regional network finds considers such a system too cumbersome, preferring a simpler decentralised model of bilateral exchanges of harmonised data. Further, failure at the hub condemns all national systems to suffer. Finally, a decentralised system has advantages of greater responsiveness to national and sub-national needs through subsidiarity.

The "Système d'Information Commerciale Régionale Allégée Non-Personnelle" of CILSS's *Projet de Fluidification des Echanges et des Rapprochements des Politiques Agro-Alimentaires* (FERAP) well exemplifies a centralised MIS that failed. It did not fulfil its primary mission of obtaining data from national MISs in order to inform the business community about regional trade opportunities. From the centre, it could not stop each national MIS promoting its own national exports and focussing on securing cheap import sources for its own economic operators, rather than providing a wide range of data that might help economic operators outside its own borders.

Annual meetings resolve general issues and allow planning of the decentralised system's activities. On the assumption that most intra-regional trade will involve countries with common borders, more frequent sub-regional meetings (of both MIS and traders' organisations) may prove advantageous, involving e.g. the following groups of countries: Guinea-Mali-Senegal, Benin-Niger-Nigeria, Burkina Faso-Ghana-Togo.

A single network website can provide information for both national MIS researchers and the regional business community; discussion of day-to-day issues can take place by e-mail; backstopping travel can deal with most unforeseen issues that e-mail cannot resolve. Both the MIS network and ROESAO can operate well using this low-cost model but only as long as national offices use electronic communication well. Those providing support may have to organise training in management of spreadsheets and databases but also in skills as simple as typing in order so that ordering, analysis and transmission of data and any associated commentary take place efficiently.

5.2.7 Regional standards

The network of MISs requires standardisation of at least data-formats to allow easy comparison of prices between countries. This standardisation has already begun, with the adoption at the second SIM network meeting in January 2002 of a set of commodities for which MISs will exchange prices, along with the corresponding units of analysis and data-collection frequency. Each national MIS will have reasons to go beyond this list, according to its own needs, developing its national operations in a variety of dimensions – data collected, diffusion methodologies, relations with government and the private sector – as long as these do not conflict with its core network responsibilities.

5.2.8 Regional radio broadcasts

A MIS network might organise regional weekly market-information broadcasts for West Africa in English and/or French, broadcast regionally on the short wave band or nationally on AM or FM radio. The network might also provide up-to-date prices and other market information via the WorldSpace Foundation, which may provide an ongoing project to launch a USAID-funded East African regional trade information system with free bandwidth. The foundation's Assistant Director for International Programmes is Aaron Sundsmo (asundsmo@worldspace.org).

5.2.9 Quantifying success

A regional MIS network would boost intra-regional trade; national MISs would do the same but also increase domestic marketing. It would be difficult to attribute increments of trade or marketing to an MIS effect. However, there are ways of measuring the success of the systems without any extra research:

- Firstly, more analysis of the type done by Rashid (2002), cited above in section 2, can indicate the increase in market integration attributable to an MIS.
- Secondly, noting feedback systematically provides a good measure of the effect of the broadcasts. How many letters, faxes, letters, telephone calls and e-mails does the MIS get from those who listen to its broadcasts and those who read its bulletins and market posters? What is the nature of this feedback: complaints that

- broadcasts are too long, too detailed, in the wrong language – or too short, insufficiently detailed, and badly timed?
- Thirdly, monitoring and evaluation can estimate geographical coverage of penetration by user group (farmer, small trader, exporter, etc.) and how useful to they find it?
 - Fourthly, how many entities pay for MIS data? How much do they pay annually? What proportion of the recurrent MIS budget does government pay?

These criteria form attractive criteria by which WARP may evaluate the success of the MIS project. In the third case, an MIS might aim for a 20 percent government contribution and 10 percent of its data sold by year 3, rising to 33 percent and 20 percent, respectively, in year 5.

6. USAID/WARP support to MIS-related initiatives

USAID/WARP should promote the setting up of a sustainable West African network of MISs. This section presents a ten-year vision of how that might be done, starting with the existing network members and methodically increasing membership until all ECOWAS countries join after five years, and gradually decreasing support over the next five years. This would result in a funding requirement that would start at a level comparable to that of the existing PASIDMA project, grow to a peak in years 5 and 6, and then decline to year 10 (although this paper does not provide a budget). WARP might want to fund this process, described below, on its own or with other donors. Judicious collaboration with USAID/Nigeria and with the Dutch Co-operation (for regional MIS networks) should considerably reduce the period needed to develop this system, but WARP should not underestimate the time taken to set up sustainable systems without a strong MIS tradition (e.g. Sierra Leone) or the institutional reinforcement that will facilitate sustainability.

A network of MISs requires a project to develop it. PASIDMA plays a pivotal role in supporting the current nascent network under the guise of reinforcing Malian MIS capacity. Though there remains more work ahead to improve the Malian MIS, the time has come to give PASIDMA an ECOWAS-wide mandate, reinforce it, and rename it, perhaps as the *Projet d'appui au réseau ouest-africain d'information sur les marchés agricoles*, PAROAIMA, and as the West African Agricultural Market Information Network Support (WAAMINS) project. Five-year renewable USAID/WARP funding would give the project the scope to fully develop the system.

PAROAIMA would have its main offices in Bamako or Ouagadougou and in Abuja, with daily electronic contact. The choice of a Bamako office has the advantages that it is the current location of considerable MIS expertise. Conversely, Ouagadougou hosts UEMOA, an economic and monetary organisation that would benefit from direct

exposure to trade and marketing issues arising from MISs and traders' associations. One of the existing USAID/Nigeria-funded MIS projects would house the Abuja office, which from at least the start of the operational phase of developing a Nigerian MIS, PAROAIMA would have another office in Nigeria. The Nigerian office would develop and maintain relations with ECOWAS (which, like UEMOA, would benefit from exposure to trade and marketing issues raised by a user-driven MIS), the Nigerian government and the Nigerian private sector. It would also support the flow of information and study tours between Nigerian MISs and traders with those in other countries, and vice versa. Staff in both offices would be fluent in both English and French.

In designing PAROAIMA, WARP would want to ensure the appropriate institutional context, through formal consultation with (a) USAID bilateral missions in West Africa, (b) ECOWASCILSS, UEMOA and CILSS and UEMOA and (c) other donors and lenders involved in this type of activity, particularly the Dutch. Consensus at the start, and regular consultation thereafter, will make the project's activities easier and more successful.

As importantly, WARP must ensure that PAROAIMA should explain clearly to national governments the advantages an MIS can bring, in order to mobilise state funding for sustainability. To the extent that states commit to supporting the operating costs of their own MISs, WARP's investment need cover only human capital development within the MIS and acquisition of new information technologies. In addition, it will be necessary to build a constituency for MIS among private-sector groups because, in a democratic environment, governments not only listen to individuals those contacting them directly but also to lobby groups within the business community. At key moments, such as the instigation or restructuring of an MIS, the best way to address the public and private sectors at the same time is often to hold a public meeting. At the meetings, various parties can feel that they have had a chance to air their views in the debate over the design of the MIS and, in turn, can publicly endorse the concept.

PAROAIMA would run for five years, renewable for a second five-year period. Over the course of its first five years, it would sequentially bring into the MIS network countries not currently members. Every six months, it would start a "new country assessment" following the phase 1 methodology outlined above by Staatz and Dembélé. A year after the start of PAROAIMA, a joint regional meeting of the MIS network and the *conférence* would debate the recommendations of the first such assessment and the proposed workplan for the country just assessed. The meeting would include representatives from the public and private sectors of all ECOWAS countries, not just those with members in either the MIS network or the *conférence*. In subsequent years, the joint regional meeting would consider two such assessments.

The order of inclusion of non-member countries in this process would depend on the:

1. the apparent readiness of existing information-system structures to participate
2. the enthusiasm and degree of organisation of traders and other potential end-users
3. the level of complementarity of market information about that country for existing members (as revealed by member-country preferences for new countries).

An initial rapid-reconnaissance appraisal (RRA) of each non-member country would reveal the degree to which countries meet the first two of these criteria. Information relevant to the third would emerge via a poll of member countries. After the RRA and the poll, at the first annual meeting organised by PAROAIMA, members would reach consensus on the order of inclusion. This decision would allow PAROAIMA to draw up a five-year expansion workplan and, with donor approval, start the phase 1 “new country assessments” in the non-member countries. The workplan would also include some ongoing support to existing member-country MISs and to the network.

This phase 1 process would treat Nigeria like all other prospective members because, although larger and more complex, its economy will still lend itself to the same “new country assessment” methodology. Moreover, however, once it joins the network, the presence of at least one MIS project funded by USAID/Nigeria means that Nigeria will not require considerably more capacity building support than other countries. Indeed, for this reason, it may be easier and faster to bring Nigeria on stream than, say, The Gambia, which probably does not already have project support for a domestic MIS.

In an effort to accelerate membership growth without straining PAROAIMA’s funding envelope, non-member countries may choose to develop their MISs by completing the “new country assessments” under separate financing (but using the network-approved core methodology). Non-membership of a given country for part of the first five years would not exclude public or private-sector organisations there from receiving market information from the regional network, either by accessing the network web site or by receiving informal e-mails of prices. .

Over the course of the first five years, the process outlined would cover all non-member countries. However, due to the phasing of the start of development work over the course of the first five years, at the end of that period some MISs would have only recently begun to receive support. Moreover, it seems likely that at least several others will require continuing – though declining – support as they institutionalise their activities and adapt to acquire the skills needed to meet end-users’ needs. For this reason, donors should foresee the need for a second five-year period, but one including quickly diminishing levels of funding for the network as a whole and for the more mature MISs, and defining a clear exit strategy for donors over years 6 – 10.

PAROAIMA would fund a variety of activities, outlined below. Some actors in these activities would have the means to self-finance, or partially so. The project would

therefore use its funds to leverage further funds from other donors and from the beneficiaries themselves. For instance, it would limit grants for transport and/or lodging funds from private-sector participants to these meetings. However, it would fund MIS staff and outside experts to these meetings where they did not have other financing.

As the network expanded to include Anglophone countries within ECOWAS, it would be important to include budgets for simultaneous interpretation at meetings and translation of documents, from English to French and vice versa.

In all this, the traders' network and the MIS network would be complementary. Both are institutional arrangements to promote regional trade. It is the Traders who provide MIS with information on market opportunities and they are the first clients of a regional network of MISs.

PAROAIMA would have several functions, details of which would depend on the work plans developed during each phase of the project according to the process described above:

1. It would liaise with other regional networks of MISs, establish links with them, and work to harmonise methodologies and synergistic work plans.
2. It would perform, or contract and oversee, the “new country assessments” in the non-member countries.
3. It would provide support to national MISs as they come into being and evolve. Funding to national MISs should be conditional on full network participation.
4. It would organise multi-country training courses in French and, as Anglophone countries join the network, in English to cover management, database use, economics and other skills needed for efficient MIS operations. These should be open to staff of newly joined and more established MISs, according to need. PAROAIMA would also serve as a clearing-house for study trips for staff of less sophisticated MISs to the offices of the more sophisticated.
5. It would channel continuing funding to the annual MIS network meetings. For promotional reasons, where practical, each of these meetings should take place in a country with a newly-established MIS.
6. It would support a bilingual (English/French) web page for the MIS network to parts of which national MISs could have access to add their most recent data to their databases and post offers or bids from members of *bone fide* traders' associations in their country.

7. It would provide ongoing support to the *Conférence régionale sur les perspectives agricoles en Afrique de l'Ouest*. This support would take the form of limited funding to support annual meetings of the organisation and more localised *ad hoc* meetings of *conférence* members from adjacent countries to develop specific plans for development of agricultural trade between pairs or trios of countries, e.g., Guinea-Mali-Senegal, Benin-Niger-Nigeria, Burkina Faso-Ghana-Togo. Funding could also cover specific training needs and study tours.
8. It would continue PASIDMA's support to ROESAO, particularly through responding to innovative proposals from this network or its members.
9. Where appropriate, it would also support initiatives by end-users other than traders: farmers, processors, consumers, bankers, input traders and NGOs.
10. It would promote the mainstreaming of gender and HIV/AIDS issues into the work of the individual national MISs and at the network level.
11. If USAID/WARP could obtain the collaboration of the Voice of America or WorldSpace for weekly market-information broadcasts for West Africa in English and/or French, it would organise these broadcasts. Alternatively, it would make available to member-MISs programmes of regional market content for national broadcasts, or use web-radio to diffuse such programmes.

USAID/WARP should seek feedback on this proposal and should ensure that it knows more about the range of MIS activities perspectives in Nigeria before starting project design.

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Annex: MIS status of ECOWAS countries, December 2002

	MIS exists?	MIS network member ?	Commodities included?			Traders' organisation exists?	Radio broadcasts?	e-mail?	Cost recovery?	Other details
			cereals	livestock	other (specify)					
Benin	yes	Yes	yes	no	fruit & veg, fish	Yes	Yes	yes	no	local FM broadcasts
Burkina Faso	yes	Yes	yes	no		Yes	Yes	yes		
Côte d'Ivoire	yes	Yes	yes	no?	fruit & veg	Yes	Yes	yes		Information pertains to the period before September 2002
Gambia	?	No								
Ghana	?	No								
Guinea	yes	Yes	yes	no	pPalm-oil	Yes	Yes	yes	yes	Cost recovery plan and fee schedule adopted
Guinea-Bissau	?	No								
Liberia	?	No								
Mali	yes	Yes	yes	yes	iInputs, horticulture, fish	Yes	Yes	yes	yes	local FM broadcasts
Niger	yes	Yes	yes	yes	horticulture	Yes	some-times	yes	yes	separate MISs for cereals and livestock
Nigeria	several?	No	yes?		inputs	Yes	some	yes	no	3 Min. of Ag. MISs, 2 USAID projects, Commodity exchange
Senegal	yes	Yes	yes			Yes	Yes	yes	no	A separate MIS exists for imported rice
Sierra Leone	?	No								
Togo	no	No	no	no		No	No	no	no	The grain board collects some price data for government use only.
Total	?	7								