



ECHO Update

Networking Global Hunger Solutions • May 2008 • Issue 29





The CORE of ECHO

The poor have few options. This lack of options is one of the most defining realities of their lives.

In contrast, we have become so accustomed to the countless options in our lives (and at times frustrated at all the decisions we need to make) that we hardly think about this major difference between us and so many in the world. Which kind of car should I purchase? Which church should I attend? Which doctor and which hospital should I choose for an operation? At which super-market should I buy steak, chicken, lamb or salmon for tonight's dinner?

Take for example, Abdu's family living in a small village in West Africa. Their family is not extremely poor by village standards, but they rely each rainy season on their arid land to produce enough millet to feed the family for another year. One crop failure could be a disaster for their entire village. If the farm could be just a little more productive, at least one of the children might be able to attend elementary school. Hopefully, the farm has produced enough grain to feed the family and the cattle.

On the cover: Uganda: Farmers showcase amaranth with Tom Gill, a former ECHO intern. Above: Central African Republic: A Fulani farmer and his inga tree.



Abdu's only option for travel is by foot, and that is only if he is healthy. There is a clinic within walking distance but it will most likely not have a qualified physician. There is no church for fifty miles.

A big decision coming up for the family might be to cut the mango tree and make charcoal to sell and cover the cost of an urgent operation or to keep the tree for its food that comes soon after the end of the dry season.

ECHO exists for one major reason: to assist those working internationally with the poor to be more effective, especially in the area of agriculture. We provide a range of carefully selected and explained options to community development workers which will enable them to be more productive in the impoverished communities where they work. We help them do what they do, better. They, in turn, can provide options to the poor which will give them a future and a hope.

That purpose translates into ministry through our three main focuses: providing options, training, networking. We help agricultural development workers who then introduce concepts, new crops and techniques to small farmers to help them grow food more efficiently and use the land more sustainably.

Options: Information Services

One of the most productive ways of helping the poor is to work directly with development workers, local churches, missionaries, and Peace Corps volunteers. Our technical response unit will listen to their plans, and their environmental conditions, and suggest ways to help their projects succeed. ECHO's technical staff is comprised of agricultural experts and missionaries that have worked overseas in various capacities, current interns, and others who specialize in agricultural research.

Our technical staff writes articles for *ECHO Development Notes*, a quarterly agricultural journal. Topics range from rope and washer pumps to corn in Africa.

Jim and Peg Van Loo, in Uganda, wrote regarding a problem with their tomatoes which were suddenly wilting. They were working in a remote area with very little access to agricultural resources. Bob Hargrave, our technical research specialist, replied with a recommendation to try another variety of tomato that is resistant to fusarium or verticillium wilt. They obtained this variety in-country and continued to focus on their goal in Uganda: to help the poor.

Seed Bank

In the developing world, nutrition is a key to health. There are a number of plants that are extremely high in certain vitamins or proteins, but few people are aware of their nutritional attributes. Even if they happened to read an article about the plants, most publications would not tell where to find seeds.

ECHO's seed bank holds over 350 varieties of crops that are of value for farmers and families in the developing world. Trial-sized seed packets are offered free of charge to members of our overseas network. Here at ECHO, we conduct variety trials to see which seeds will yield the best results. This helps our seed bank workers to send seeds of crops that will adapt well in certain environments and will provide high yield and nutrition. The seeds produced from such crops will be distributed for use in local communities.

Training

ECHO does not send out workers; ECHO assists those who are already in the field, or preparing to go, by serving as a training ground and a technical resource. College graduates with an interest in overseas service are selected for a 12-month paid internship with hands-on work experience in tropical agriculture. The demand for those who have been through the internship program continues to affirm the value of the training and experiences that ECHO provides. Missionaries, development workers, and college students can utilize ECHO for shorter periods of practical experience and guided study.

Some of the most exciting work that ECHO does is the training of these interns and students. Angela Boss, an intern in 2002, is now serving with New Mission Systems International in Central African Republic (CAR) and Canada. She believes that even with a degree in agriculture, she learned the practical experience she needed to work in CAR at ECHO. Former ECHO interns are working in countries all over the world. Some of them have now returned to the ECHO farm to help train current interns.



“My week as a student at ECHO very much shaped the work that I did in Liberia. Thanks to the information I learned, I was able to create and teach curriculum and start some projects. With students and community members, we planted ten different pilot orchards and distributed over 2,000 moringa seeds.” Robin Denney, Suakoko, Liberia.

Networking

ECHO understands that there is a wealth of agricultural knowledge residing in universities, research stations, community development projects, and especially amongst farmers around the world. We also recognize that many of those working with the poor internationally do not have access to this knowledge. This is where ECHO becomes the key link in connecting this knowledge, or these options, with those who are working with the poor around the world. As such, ECHO does not “teach” people how to farm. Rather, we provide ideas and resources that allow farmers to be more proficient and successful as they struggle to produce food under difficult conditions.

This past year, ECHO has networked with universities, non-profit organizations, and community development organizations from Costa Rica to Cambodia, from Haiti to Tanzania.

Jeanne Florestant, an employee of Hospital Albert Schweitzer in Deschapelles, Haiti, visited ECHO to attend the workshop on Agricultural and Nutritional Options for People Living with HIV/AIDS in December 2007. By March 2008, she had already written training material about which plants to grow to supplement diets of HIV/AIDS patients for community health agents. Jeanne asked an ECHO staff member how to obtain chaya, one of the plants mentioned in the workshop. Jeanne was connected with Levy Dorsainvil, a gardener in Haiti, who already had chaya plants growing nearby. Jeanne met with Levy and received a few of the young plants. Within a year, this plant will be ready to be harvested and distributed to those in need of the protein and vitamins present in chaya's leaves.

Because of the nature of many mission groups, their sphere of influence may be limited to only a few villages or a particular church. ECHO, as a neutral organization, not only provides assistance without discrimination but also becomes a common ground for groups to meet and interact with one agenda they have in common: helping the poor help themselves. This networking component of ECHO's work has brought many groups and individuals together to share ideas and successes.



A local health care worker teaching a daily nutrition class for mothers with malnourished children. Galmi Hospital in Galmi, Niger.

From Desperation to Hope

Suffering takes place around the world. Families have little food. Some parents do not have money to send their children to school or even buy them medicine. We have witnessed the despair of parents and the frustration of development workers knowing that there must be some way to produce more food but not knowing how to find it.

Ideas, seeds, and support from ECHO can turn a hopeless situation into one with a future. A barren piece of land can be turned into a productive garden producing not only food and income but also pride, confidence, and hope. ECHO staff members offer new ideas, seeds and options for difficult problems. Interns take their knowledge and skills and become agents of change in communities desperate for experience and expertise in agriculture.

The passion and commitment of the ECHO staff and interns comes from a sense of calling. As committed believers in Jesus Christ, each sees the work that they are doing as a fulfillment of God's call for all of His followers to show compassion toward the poor and to not only love God but to love their fellow men as well.

ECHO, helping those working with the poor to be more effective.



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