

# Feeding the Future

# Update



## Chris Dowswell inspirational leader in the cause of Africa's farmers

**CHRIS DOWSWELL, who died at his home in San Miguel de Allende, Mexico, on 19 November, aged 64, was aide de camp (his preferred title) to the late Dr Norman E Borlaug for 31 years. Sometimes irascible and volatile – full of restless energy in his pursuit of excellence – he was also a warm, kind, caring, loyal and most generous man, as has shone through in these tributes to him.**

Nor was he in any way in Dr Borlaug's shadow. As great age crept up on Dr Borlaug, Chris helped to nurse him forward, articulating the vital messages for his agricultural audiences and taking huge pride in his historic accomplishments. He was the old man's rock – and was devastated when he died at the age of 95 in September 2009. For several days he was too overcome to write a word about his mentor. And then it came pouring out – brilliant and moving tributes to the great man.

By an extraordinary coincidence of life, the last time Dr Borlaug spoke in Africa was in Bamako at the 20th anniversary symposium of the Sasakawa Africa Association (SAA) in 2006. Chris Dowswell last spoke on African soil in Bamako in early November at the conclusion of the 25th anniversary symposium. It was typical Chris - telling it as it is. He did not enjoy public speaking, still less appearing in front of the cameras. But when he did speak, he made it count.

One's memories of Chris in Bamako are of him buttonholing individual delegates with a stream of ideas and plans for the future: Chris taking pictures in an African village which throbbed with life and excitement as the villagers welcomed symposium delegates with displays of agricultural produce and agroprocessing equipment: and Chris, rather diffidently wearing Malian national dress for the first time – and then enjoying the experience and the gentle ribbing he took from colleagues.

Chris began working for SAA in 1991, some five years after Ryoichi Sasakawa, President Jimmy Carter and Norman Borlaug founded SAA and started the Sasakawa-Global 2000 program in Africa. An agricultural economist by training, he worked mainly in agricultural communications and extension. At the International Maize and Wheat Improvement

Center (CIMMYT), he established the Center's first agricultural communications unit in the 1980s. He also worked for the International Fertilizer Development Center (IFDC) and Oregon State University. He did his undergraduate studies at the University of Colorado and his graduate studies at Colorado State University.

Chris served on the UN Millennium Hunger Task Force (2002-06), the IFPRI 2020 Millions Fed Advisory Committee (2008-09), and the World Food Program Purchase for Progress Technical Advisory Committee from 2009.

At SAA, Chris had different responsibilities including that of Special Assistant to the President, Dr Borlaug, and Director of Program Coordination. In 2009, he was appointed Executive Director, Programs, joining Masaaki (Aki) Miyamoto, Executive Director, Management, to lead the new SAA into the future.

Major accomplishments have included the SAFE (Sasakawa Africa Fund for Extension Education) initiative, perhaps SAA's most significant contribution to institutional capacity building – and the transformation of SAA over the last three years into a "more strongly African, younger and more gender balanced" organization, to quote Managing Director Juliana Rwelamira. Also to spread the donor base to complement The Nippon Foundation's unwavering support since the founding of SAA in 1986.

It is impossible, in this limited space, to do justice to Chris and the mark he has made on SAA, SAFE and African agriculture as a whole. He took Norman Borlaug's last words – Take it to the Farmer – as the title of the first Borlaug

### Tribute

It was a great shock to learn of the sudden death of Chris Dowswell, not least because we had all been together for the 25th anniversary symposium of the Sasakawa Africa Association (SAA) in Bamako earlier in November. At the conclusion of the seminar, Chris spoke in his usual insightful way. Not for him the soft words of congratulations or praise for a job well done over the 25 years of our work with Africa's farmers. Chris gave us the reality of the situation – and of the magnitude of the challenges that still lie ahead.

Chris was a valued colleague for all these years. He never wavered in his support for our mission. His vision and determination for SAA to succeed drove the organization and his colleagues forward and gave confidence to us at The Nippon Foundation, SAA's main donor.

The Nippon Foundation has similarly supported the Sasakawa Fund for Extension Education (SAFE), the sister organization of SAA which since 1992, has provided mid-career agricultural extensionists with degree qualifications at African universities across the continent. Chris was instrumental in getting SAFE off the ground. Today, more than 3,500 extension officers have benefitted from this program. This success, too, stands as a tribute to him.

In the last few years of his life, Chris presided over the transformation of SAA with re-defined strategies and objectives, a stronger management matrix – and staff levels that truly reflect an African organization facing up to African progress and problems. Chris was very proud of these developments.

In Bamako, I said that SAA and Sasakawa-Global 2000 are stronger today because we have started collaboration with a number of new partners and donors. Much of the credit for this must also go to Chris who saw the need to expand the organization by growing the donor base.

I also mentioned Dr Borlaug's motto – "Never give up." This was Chris' motto too. We shall certainly never give up the struggle to bring food and income security to African farmers – and Chris, as with Norman Borlaug, will forever be linked with us in this noble task.

**Yohei Sasakawa, Chairman,  
The Nippon Foundation**



**Sasakawa Africa Association**

*SAA Founders:*

*Mr. Ryoichi Sasakawa,  
Dr. Norman E. Borlaug,  
President Jimmy Carter*

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Symposium, held in Addis Ababa in July 2010. Yohei Sasakawa, President Carter, President Chissano and a host of African leaders honored the occasion and paid tribute to the extraordinary life and times of Dr Borlaug.

Now others must lead the way and drive forward the dreams and ambitions of Norman Borlaug and Chris Dowswell. Millions of Africa's smallholder farmers and tens of thousands of extensionists will continue to benefit from their inspirational leadership.

**SAA will continue to "take it to the farmer".**

**CHRIS and I shared a passion for smallholder farmers in Africa, particularly women farmers, and we shared a vision of an Africa free of perpetual hunger and malnutrition.**

Chris was always there for everyone. As soon as he met you he wanted to know everything about you and would share a lot about himself. In October, as in the previous year, Chris and I attended the World Food Prize celebrations in Des Moines. We served on the Borlaug Youth Institute together. He loved young people and took a personal interest in them. He would be there meeting people, introducing me to many and was always full of great things to say about people. He downplayed his own virtues and strengths. Yet he had seen it all from the beginning when Dr Borlaug first conceived the Prize.

Just over two weeks before he died, we celebrated 25 years of achievement for SAA in Mali – and he was already planning the next Borlaug symposium in Abuja next November. He was leaving Bamako for Nigeria to firm it up – and became unwell. We hoped he had fully recovered – but sadly it was not to be. Because of Chris, SAA is where it is today. We are all better people for having known him. Our charge now, and responsibility, and in honor of Chris, is to continue with what he believed in.

At SAA, we wish to thank everyone for the outpouring love and support through your messages, for a man we knew to be more selfless than many of us, a lover of Africa and a champion for the downtrodden, and especially the smallholder farmer.

Chris will always be missed, by his immediate family, by the SAA family, and by many who knew him and others who have come to know him in death. We love you Chris and may God rest your soul in Eternal Peace.

**Hon Professor Ruth Oniang'o  
Chairperson, Sasakawa Africa Association**

THIS is truly tragic. Chris had done so much but had so much more he wanted to do. We will certainly remember him through all of his accomplishments and the numerous lives he touched.

**John B Hardman MD  
President and CEO  
The Carter Center**



Chris in Bamako with (from left) Dr Abou Berthe, Country Director, Mali, Ruth Oniang'o, Chairperson, SAA, Juliana Rwelamira, Managing Director, SAA, in November.

ROSALYNN and I were saddened to learn of the passing of Executive Director Chris Dowswell. After Dr. Norman Borlaug's death, Chris led the Sasakawa Africa Association through a reorganization in order to improve agricultural extension agents' capacity to serve small scale farmers in Africa. While food security on the continent has improved, we regret that Chris was unable to witness his ultimate vision of a food secure Africa. His good work will continue to inspire for generations to come, and we are proud to be among the many people whose lives have been touched by Chris' commitment to helping his fellow man.

**Jimmy Carter, Former U.S. President,  
Founder of The Carter Center**

**A LIFE CUT SHORT – but what an extraordinary life. Dedicated to advancing modern agriculture, focused on changing the poverty of smallholder farmers in Africa, following in the footsteps of Norman Borlaug to whom he was so close in so many respects: greatly influenced by the late Bob Havener, whom he regarded as a father figure – Chris pushed himself remorselessly in pursuit of his objectives.**

Devoting to a cause and to a public figure whose convictions and ideas he increasingly shaped, meant days and weeks of hard travel, across oceans and across Africa. Only in Mexico, where he had put down roots, could he rest.

We miss Chris, genuine and frank, passionate and thoughtful – but as Dr M S Swaminathan said, we must "rededicate ourselves to the causes for which Chris has lived and worked."

This is the call we hear loud and clear – in Africa, and with all his colleagues in SAA and SAFE to whom he was a guide and friend. And in Tokyo, led by Yohei Sasakawa, Chairman of The Nippon Foundation.

We have made a commitment to help in the fight against hunger and poverty. In Chris' memory, we renew that commitment.

**Masaaki Miyamoto  
SAA Executive Director – Management**

**THERE has been an extraordinary outpouring of tributes for Chris, particularly from the countries where we work – Ethiopia, Mali, Nigeria and Uganda. From the staff of SAA and SAFE, as well as colleagues and friends, everyone is devastated.**

Chris cared about people whatever their status in society – not least for young mothers who had difficulty attending meetings and workshops because they had children to look after. Bring your children, Chris would say – and he often provided money from his own pocket so that they could care for their babies.

Chris was our mentor – with an institutional memory going back to the founding of our organization. Above all, he interacted with the farmers. Without spending time in farmers' fields, he felt he had not done his work.

We will miss him – but he will always be our inspiration.

**Juliana Rwelamira  
SAA Managing Director**

## In memory of my friend Chris

IT IS with great sadness, as well as a strong sense of gratitude, that I offer these few words of remembrance for my friend, Chris Dowswell. I had the great good fortune of knowing Chris longer than most people, having met him first in graduate school in late 1971, but I won't say I knew him better. In truth, many people knew Chris well, as he opened himself and his heart to almost everyone in his life. He was a generous and giving person – of his time, his genuine interest in you, his love and affection, and even his money (which I believe he always considered the least of what he had to give).

Chris was a natural leader. Not by virtue of his physical appearance – a standard we all too often apply to leaders today – but by the power of his ideas, his passion, his dedication, and his professionalism. He was fearless in “speaking truth to power”, which imbued him with power and moral authority far beyond any that could be bestowed by others.

Chris once confided in me that he always felt like he was hearing a crashing wave behind him...that he was always just a few steps ahead of that wave and that one day it would come crashing down around him. But I think what he heard was the sound of the waves he was



forever making wherever he went...of the wake he left behind as he passed through life. Those waves continue to spread and will long rock the boats of many people and institutions. Chris had a way of making you think, of enabling you to see more clearly what were to him simple truths. And sometimes he helped you understand that things were not as simple or as clear as you thought they were, that life is not black and white, but instead is gloriously multi-hued.

Chris leaves a huge gap behind that none will ever fill, at least not in my life. He made me a better person, a better man, a better colleague. I will always be grateful to him and for him, and he will forever own a large part of my heart.

**Be safe and at peace my friend**

**Tiff Harris**  
Communications specialist

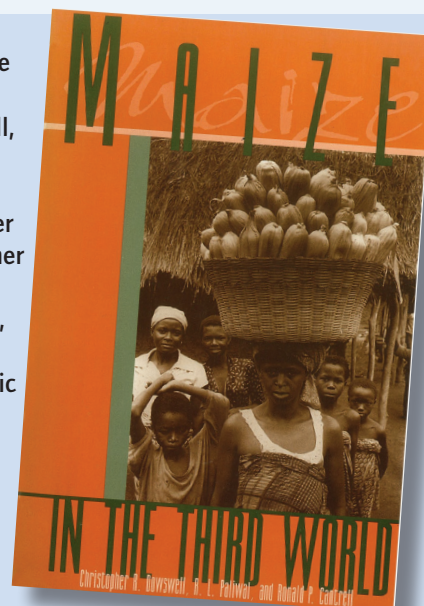
CHRIS was a great soul who cared deeply about people and devoted his life to development causes, particularly the fight against hunger and poverty. In constant contact with CIMMYT staff and management during the last two decades, his thoughtful advice and criticism helped guide us on many occasions in pursuit of the center's mission. He loved Mexico and made it his home; Mexicans in turn opened their arms to Chris as their adopted son."

**Thomas A. Lumpkin**  
Director General  
CIMMYT

CHRIS was here at the World Food Prize in October and was, as always, filled with energy and enthusiasm for his role and partnership with us (and so many others) in preserving and advancing Norm's legacy. He was a very special friend to the World Food Prize and to me personally. We here at the Foundation are devastated by this terrible development.

**Amb. Kenneth M. Quinn**  
President of the World Food Prize  
Foundation

Chris was a co-author of the definitive book on *"Maize in the Third World"*, with RL Paliwal and Ronald P Cantrell, former directors of the maize program at CIMMYT. The book was commissioned by Bob Havener, former director-general of CIMMYT and former president of Winrock International. Published in 1996 by Westview Press, a division of HarperCollins, the book examined the biological and economic issues relevant to improving the productivity of maize in developing countries.



## If Norman were here today

If Norm were here today he would certainly agree that while an improved variety can be the "engine" for great productivity change, it is fertilizer that is the "fuel." Without fertilizer the power of the improved variety will never be realized. There is nothing magic in the variety alone.

He would also say, "don't tell me how many improved varieties have been developed, tell me how many are in use in farmers' fields and over what area." That is the measure by which we should judge the value of our work.

He would point out that when he, Jimmy Carter and Ryoichi Sasakawa launched the SG 2000 program in Ghana in 1986, estimated fertilizer use in sub-Saharan Africa was something like 8 kg of nutrients per hectare of arable land. Today, 25 years later, estimated use is 9 kg, even though population has doubled.

He would contend that the failure to implement effective soil fertility strategies is the single-most important biological reason why a Green Revolution has not come to Africa. And it will never come, he would predict, if Africa's declining soil fertility is not reversed. To underpin such a transformation, he would give very high priority to training more soil scientists, agronomists and extension specialists in soil and crop management.

Finally, Norm would be pleased that national governments, the donor community, and even the private sector have re-discovered the importance of smallholder agricultural development in Africa.

"The potential is there," he would say, "but you can't eat potential". We need leadership, research, training, infrastructure, credit, and access to markets to transform Africa's great agricultural potential into reality. Without these investments, all this will be empty talk.

Chris Dowswell



THE NEWS of the death of Chris Dowswell was a shock to me and it robbed us in Africa of a committed man for the upliftment and enhancement of food and nutrition security with employment generation and wealth creation in Africa. Those of us left behind must remain resolute in the struggle until the war is won. May his soul rest in peace.

**HE General Olusegun Obasanjo**  
former President of the  
Federal Republic of Nigeria

THAT Chris Dowswell is no more is almost impossible to comprehend for anyone associated with SAA who saw him recently in Bamako, apparently in good health. Loyal collaborator for more than a quarter of a century of Dr Norman Borlaug, he was the living embodiment of the great man's ideas and work in pursuit of a green revolution for Africa. Now, with his death, a vital link with Norman Borlaug has gone. We now feel truly orphaned. Where will the great leap of progress come from now – if not from ourselves?

**HE Nicéphore D. Soglo**  
former President of the  
Republic of Benin



Chris and President Chissano at the Borlaug Symposium in Addis Ababa, July 2010.



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