



ileia

2012



**agri
cultures**
NETWORK

ANNUAL REPORT



Summary

Upscaling agro-ecological approaches is the need of the hour

Over the past 28 years, partners of the AgriCultures Network have mobilised and shared relevant practical experiences which illustrate that sustainable small-scale family farming presents a model of agriculture which is spreading every day and which has great potential to feed at least half the world's population in a sustainable manner.

Contrary to what many believe, feeding the world in the year 2050 is not just a matter of the private sector taking charge and fixing the problem. Addressing the food question begins by acknowledging the crucial contribution of 400 million small-scale family farmers around the world, and by appreciating the proven effectiveness of many agro-ecological methods. The need of the hour is a massive upscaling of agro-ecological approaches and a global policy environment that supports such approaches. In 2012, the AgriCultures Network has built further strength to contribute to this effort.

**Edith van Walsum, director of ILEIA, secretariat of the AgriCultures Network
July 2013**



AgriCultures Network in 2012

For the AgriCultures Network 2012 was a year of turning points and redefining strategies. The world around us changed: There is an increasing need for documenting learning and creating knowledge, from UN agencies to farmer organisations; ICT is demanding changes in the way we communicate and build knowledge; and promoting an enabling policy environment is becoming increasingly important.

And our funding context changed dramatically. Funding of the Dutch Government came to an end in 2011, after twenty five years. Thanks to the Swedish International Development Agency (Sida), continuity of our operations was assured: we started a new five year strategic programme 2012-2016. This support gives us a new financial basis which is essential for making the quantum leap that is needed in the present global context.

On these pages, we present you some of our our highlights of 2012:

1. Knowledge sharing and magazines
2. Documentation and systematisation
3. Policy advocacy
4. Strengthening the network

1. Knowledge sharing and magazines

What we did

Farming Matters, plus six regional and five local editions of the magazine continued to be the Agri-Cultures Network's major vehicles for knowledge building and sharing on sustainable farming. In 2012, we published magazines on the following themes:

March 2012	Insects: Friends or Foes?
June 2012	Agro-ecology: From farmers' fields to Rio+20
September 2012	Farmers' organisations: Up to the job
December 2012	From desertification to vibrant communities

Visit **Agriculturas**, **Agridape**, **Baobab**, **Farming Matters**, **LEISA China**, **LEISA India** and **LEISA revista de agroecología**.

What we achieved

During 2012, we saw a slight increase in the total number of subscribers of our magazines, totalling to about **half a million** at the end of the year. The majority of new subscribers are women and young people.

We made a major shift in the distribution of our magazines, adapting to modern times and changes in our funding situation. Most of the magazines are emphasising digital dissemination through email, websites and social media, distributing much smaller amounts of printed copies. AgriCultures Network members are following different paths to ensure the distribution of their magazines, and despite financial constraints, the numbers of subscribers have grown.



We witnessed a fast growing role of the www.agriculturesnetwork.org website and of the social media for sharing knowledge. The AgriCultures Network website registered 329,905 visitors, 282,956 unique visitors and 546,018 page views in 2012. On the network's Twitter account we had 3380 followers and on Facebook 816 likes at the end of 2012. Through our bookmarking system on the website, 772 people shared the content. These numbers are increasing every day. Two of our members developed a Smart-phone application (app) for Android, which gives its users access to the full content of the magazines.

The process of digitalising is ongoing. While positive effects can be seen, this shift is presenting its own challenges, says one of our member groups: *"Most of our readers are in the rural parts of the country, where internet connectivity is a big challenge."*

www.agriculturesnetwork.org 
[@agriculturesnet](https://twitter.com/agriculturesnet) 
facebook.com/agricultures 
 

1. Knowledge sharing and magazines

What we learned

Continued publication and distribution of all our magazines ensures a stable presence, globally and in the respective regions. Feedback from readers from all continents – some at the grassroots level, others in influential positions – shows that the need for information on sustainable family farming is growing and that our magazines and website respond to this need.

In this context, the decision to stop distributing paper magazines free of charge, but instead give more space to the digital edition and to further development of the website, marks another turning point. It builds on the new reality wherein almost everywhere access to internet has improved greatly, and also on financial constraints of the network.

Readers say:

“Farming Matters is definitely one of my favourite magazines to read to learn about innovations around sustainable agriculture.”

M. Commons, Thailand

“THESE PUBLICATIONS AND MATERIALS HAVE BEEN OF ENORMOUS HELP TO ME AND MY COMMUNITY.”

T. Barko, Nigeria

“THE MAGAZINE HAS BEEN VERY USEFUL TO ME, TO THE MEMBERS OF OUR GROUP AND TO THE RURAL COMMUNITIES WHERE WE OPERATE.”

Emamuel Ngenge Ngeh, President of Young Farmers Development Common Initiative Group, Cameroon

“Inspired by the stories in Farming Matters, we decided to write our thesis about the solutions agro-forestry can offer. Thank you for publishing this great magazine!”

Three master students at Wageningen University, the Netherlands



2. Documentation

What we did

When you work on sustainable farming, analysing lessons and the factors of success is an excellent way of learning. When you make the extra step to turn your insights into a shareable article, you also allow others to benefit.

In 2012, we noticed that there is a growing demand for capacity building in the analysis, systematisation and documentation of field experiences. NGOs and farmer organisations as well as major international institutions like FAO and IFAD have identified this as a strategic need, especially in Africa and the Middle East. In 2012, having developed a strong international reputation in this field, AgriCultures Network members received frequent requests for such support.

In 2012, **IED Afrique** has been notably active, carrying out various documentation trainings for IFAD and UNDP on adaptation to climate change. ILEIA continued its capacity building work with IFAD in Eastern and Southern Africa and started a new collaboration with IDRC/IFAD to support a knowledge network called **KariaNet in the Middle East and Northern Africa**, together with IED Afrique.



We trained staff who then engaged in field based documentation activities. Various articles were written and disseminated as an outcome of these workshops, which can all be downloaded from our [website](#).

Participants reflect on the documentation workshops:

“ I NOW KNOW HOW TO BUILD A STRUCTURE FOR MY STORIES AND HOW TO IMPRESS MY AUDIENCE.”

“ I learned how to analyse and disseminate my experiences and I discovered positive and negative aspects in my project.”

“ THIS TRAINING ALLOWS ME TO SHARE FARMER EXPERIENCES IN AN INTERESTING WAY.”

“ LEARNING ABOUT MINDMAPS AND UNIQUE SELLING POINTS WERE EYE OPENERS.”

“ I NOW WANT TO GO AND TEACH MY COLLEAGUES ABOUT DOCUMENTATION.”

“ These stories give such a good impression of what IFAD does and are more readable than the documents we normally produce.”

“ IT IS NOW EASIER FOR ME TO ORGANISE MY THOUGHTS ABOUT MY WORK.”

“ I WILL APPLY WHAT I LEARNED HERE IN FUTURE REPORT WRITING AND IN PRESENTATIONS.”

2. Documentation

What we learned

We see this form of collaborating with major institutions as an interesting opportunity to get to know them better and to help their staff draw lessons. However, our observations so far have shown that documentation of practical experiences often remains an isolated activity; much could be gained if this gets better integrated into the larger KM process and if these organisations give more importance to *farmers' learning processes*.

In the MENA region, we became keenly aware of our limitations concerning the common language, Arabic. This impeded more intense learning, both by the participants and by the trainers. This makes it all the more relevant that our trainings and materials are now being translated into Arabic and used in trainings in the region.

We noted that there was a very high interest in improving writing skills: how to build a story and how to make it readable. This aspect will receive more attention in our future trainings. After witnessing the small number of women present in the Tunis workshop, we decided to make a special effort to invite women participants for the trainings that followed, which proved successful.

In 2013, we will focus also on teaching young people the skills of documentation, and work with farmer organisations. We will also seek funding support to document the upscaling of agroecological approaches in family farming, which will help to draw recommendations that can serve as input for policy advocacy. In 2013 we also hope to find ways for our network to support such documentation efforts in Latin America, Asia and Europe.



3. Policy advocacy



Advocacy is a new area of activity for the AgriCultures Network. We hired new staff to start engagement in policy advocacy, prioritizing coordinated discussions within the network about the direction for joint policy related work. We sharpened the network’s **narrative** and defined our policy priorities in the framework of family farming and agro-ecology.

Policy in the magazines

We strengthened the policy angle in our magazines. For example, our issue on **Insects on a farm** pointed at the promotion of pesticides and GM crops, and alternatives that are better for farmers and for the environment. Our **Rio+20 edition** analysed proposals for the ‘green economy’ versus policies to support agro-ecology. The edition on **farmer organisations** made a plea for more decision making space of farmer organisations in policy spaces. And finally, the issue on **desertification** addressed the need to include locally appropriate innovations in policies to combat desertification.

Rio+20 conference

AgriCultures Network members teamed up for a new type of collaboration around the Rio+20 conference on sustainable development in June. The magazine went hand in hand with policy advocacy. For the first time in the network’s history, AgriCultures Network members decided to bring out one edition with the same content in our various languages. We organised a joint side event at the conference. Read more [here](#).



3. Policy advocacy



Promoting agroecology

In September, when the Chair of the Board of the internationally renowned Wageningen University made a strategic plea for more industrial agriculture, ILEIA responded by launching a **series of events**, strengthening the agro-ecological interest, experience and energy present among the international population of Wageningen.

In November 2012, Brazil's national commission that will develop the **new Agroecology Policy** was officially installed, uniting government and civil society. Paulo Petersen of AgriCultures Network member AS-PTA has played an important role in the preparatory process and is a member of the Commission.

Also in November, a **new law came into effect in Peru** that prohibits the import and production of genetically modified crops (GMOs). AgriCultures Network member ETC Andes is one of the participants in the platform "For a GMO-free Peru", together with other NGOs, farmer and consumer organisations, playing an important role in the process.

What we learned

Policy advocacy is a new area for the AgriCultures Network. The need to address policies and 'the enabling environment' was shared, and it has become clear that this requires new ways of working and dedicated energy. As a network, we have to learn to be more agile and responsive, and to seek **strategic allies** to join forces. In this respect, some network members are ahead of others, which creates scope for learning.

We realised that our strength and role is in sharing farmers' field experiences and evidence with others, who have more expertise in reaching policy makers. We also learned much about the importance of our choice of magazine themes. It remains crucial to link themes with current events and developments, while also ensuring that we are not driven by the 'hype of the day'.

Another thing that became clear is that there is a great interest among the public to learn about the potential of agro-ecology. We aim to claim and utilize this space optimally in 2013.

4. Strengthening the AgriCultures Network

We have come out of a severe financial crisis in 2010-2011 as a stronger network. Its impact on the network members was that it triggered greater clarity of purpose and a stronger sense of coherence.

VIDEO

[Meet the AgriCultures Network](#)

What we did

We agreed that a network governance mechanism is needed that reflects a new reality of the network, where members take up more responsibility for network activities and decision making. A governance working group was established, consisting of IED Afrique, AME Foundation, AS-PTA Brazil and ILEIA.

What we achieved

We realised that creating knowledge and communication for advocacy is becoming important. This goes beyond providing information and “doing what we are good at”. We have to seize this increased global role. This makes it necessary to collaborate more smartly than ever before, both within the AgriCultures Network and in broader alliances at local, regional and global level. To be effective, we need to continuously strengthen the organisational and financial base of the network.



4. Strengthening the AgriCultures Network

What we learned

A powerful learning for all in the network was that confidence in our own and each-other's strengths is crucial for the future of the network, more than money. The network has embarked on a process to establish a new governance mechanism, which will facilitate strategic decision making and network growth for the future.

Another major lesson is the importance of agreeing on the fundamental values that bind and position us.

Our exercise to formulate a new AgriCultures Network **narrative** (What do we stand for as a network?) reconfirmed our common value base. Listening to and building on each others' analyses of regional challenges and opportunities we found a strong coherence and complementarity, leading to the conclusion that the network is a major asset that will both nurture and be nurtured by its members.



www.agriculturesnetwork.org

ILEIA
P.O. Box 90
6700 AB Wageningen
The Netherlands

@agriculturesnet 
facebook.com/agricultures 
Flickr 



ILEIA, the Centre for Learning on Sustainable Agriculture, is a member of the AgriCultures Network, a global network of organisations that share knowledge and provide information on small-scale, sustainable agriculture worldwide.

