

LEISA

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Magazine on Low External Input and Sustainable Agriculture



Documentation for change

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Farmer Field School in Pitucuna, Rio Negro, Junin, Peru: critical reflection on existing pruning practices and action. Photo: Martin Garcia.

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16 The LEISA systematization process

Marta Madariaga and Marcos Easdale

Together with representatives of eight other organisations from as many Latin American countries, the authors were part of a systematization pilot project coordinated by the *LEISA Revista de Agroecología* team. This article focuses on the methodology tried and on the approach followed during more than one year. It looks at systematization

as a process which seeks to organise information in order to analyse it and draw lessons from it, and demonstrates that, contrary to popular belief, field experiences can be easily described and analysed, and that much can be learnt by doing so.

24 Learning through writing

Paul Van Mele

Report writing, and reading, is often a necessary part of life. But it could be said that official reports are boring, full of donor language, and they never say what actually happened or what really mattered. How can these shortcomings be avoided? Writing helps to internalise our experiences and, as such, a narrative can act as a self-learning tool. However, many people are not used to documenting their activities in this way. This article looks at one experience where writing narratives was used as a way of learning about how new extension methods had been developed, building learning capacities and making the methods more widely known and accepted.



LEISA is about Low External Input and Sustainable Agriculture. It is about the technical and social options open to farmers who seek to improve productivity and income in an ecologically sound way. LEISA is about the optimal use of local resources and natural processes and, if necessary, the safe and efficient use of external inputs. It is about the empowerment of male and female farmers and the communities who seek to build their future on the basis of their own knowledge, skills, values, culture and institutions. LEISA is also about participatory methodologies to strengthen the capacity of farmers and other actors to improve agriculture and adapt it to changing needs and conditions. LEISA seeks to combine indigenous and scientific knowledge, and to influence policy formulation in creating an environment conducive for its further development. LEISA is a concept, an approach and a political message.

ILEIA is the Centre for Information on Low External Input and Sustainable Agriculture. ILEIA seeks to promote the adoption of LEISA through the LEISA magazines and other publications. It also maintains a specialized information database and an informative and interactive website on LEISA (www.ileia.info). The website provides access to many other sources of information on the development of sustainable agriculture.

Readers are welcome to photocopy and circulate articles.

Please acknowledge the LEISA Magazine and send us a copy of your publication.

31 Participatory Video as a documentation tool

Chris Lunch

Participatory Video provides an opportunity for rural people to document their own experiences and knowledge and to express their wants and hopes from their own viewpoints. This article shows how this visual method allows everyone to record and tell their own story, and to get their voice heard. Participatory video is a strong addition to existing farmer-to-farmer and community-to-community mechanisms for exchanging information, such as story-telling and local markets. The completed films can be used to promote awareness and exchange within the same community and in other communities. If a picture speaks a thousand words, then a video must speak a million!



44 Toward sustainability: monitoring farm progress

Karl North and Donn Hewes

Many different tools are currently being developed for measuring sustainability. An interesting approach is the one using web graphs, with which, considering different indicators, it is possible to visually summarise the sustainability patterns of a given farm. The authors used this tool for measuring their own progress towards sustainability, analysing their situation after several years. They stress the importance of measuring progress, but also of considering the high levels of inter-dependence which the different variables show. This is a tool which helps plan future activities, looking at the farm as one whole which needs to be managed as such.

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DEAR READERS

The theme of this issue of the LEISA Magazine is slightly different from the themes of other issues. Here, we are looking at documentation processes and how they can contribute to the generation of new knowledge on LEISA and at the same time help organisations and projects in their efforts to improve their activities. With this issue we want to highlight the importance of being able to learn from each others experiences. Sustainable agriculture cannot be developed by following standard recipes, but has to be adapted to specific sites and contexts. This knowledge can best be generated from practical experiences – but to further develop the knowledge at large about ecological agriculture, these experiences need to be shared. And in order to share these experiences, they need to be documented and critically analysed.

Another difference is that this issue is bigger than usual – we managed to uncover many more experiences and methods relating to documentation than would fit in our normal size issue. And in the spirit of information exchange, we wanted to share as many of these articles with you as possible. We hope you will find ideas to inspire you to document your own experiences. To assist you further, we have developed a new section on our web site. This section presents a methodology which you can follow step by step when trying to document your own experience. Maybe you can then share them with us, and some of the 40 000 subscribers we now have, reading the six editions of the LEISA Magazine in English, Spanish, Portuguese, French and Indonesian. Good reading,

The Editors

Documentation for change

Editorial

The many different articles regularly published in *LEISA Magazine* show that development projects on agriculture or natural resource management can help to improve the productivity of farms and/or regenerate natural resources. The same can be said of the various efforts by farmers worldwide, many of which are also reported regularly in this magazine. The adoption of new techniques, as well as the processes of trial and error, lead to new skills and knowledge, resulting in better yields or improved management of the available resources. Those who have the chance to travel to rural areas, anywhere in the world, often find farmers who are improving their productivity and income in an ecologically sound way. But while the results of these initiatives can be evident to someone visiting a particular area, they are not generally known further afield.

The main reason behind this is that successful experiences, whether from external organisations or farmers' own innovations, are rarely documented. Nor is much effort made to communicate the results to others. Thus, somebody interested in finding out about a certain project will have to go to the area where this project was implemented. Only there can she or he see, *in situ*, what the results and the impact has been. It is easy to see why, then, academics and decision makers often believe that projects or programmes achieve very little, or that only a few farmers have something interesting to show or to say. This apparent "lack of evidence" is an argument which is often used against low-external-input agriculture.

It is therefore necessary to find a way of analysing activities, results and impacts so that these can be made available and shared with others. One way of doing this is through an effective documentation process, involving all those who have been part of a case, and building on their experience.

Especially relevant for LEISA

More than just describing a case, the aim of a documentation process is to build new knowledge. There is still a lot to learn about the techniques, methods, interactions and science involved in ecological agriculture. LEISA, as a concept, is constantly evolving and changing as a response to changes in the natural, social and political environments. Documenting new developments is therefore very important for the further development of LEISA. The articles in this issue show that the purpose of documentation is not only descriptive: the process needs to examine closely what results and impacts are achieved in a given case, and why. Going through this process is an opportunity to learn and to discover interesting and useful links, opinions and learning points. These can then lead to adaptations of the activities and feed into planning, whether planning large projects or cropping patterns on small scale farms.

Difficulties involved

There are several reasons why interesting experiences, successful or not, are often not documented. Perhaps the most common problem is lack of time. Field workers are busy implementing their projects or programmes, often running many different activities at the same time, all of which need to be finished before a certain date. There is thus little time to sit

down and look back at what has actually been done and achieved. And there is even less time to put this all on paper, nicely phrased and in an easy to understand language. In the same way, farmers are busy with their everyday activities, with very little time to even keep records of their daily tasks, of inputs used or of yields obtained.

To others, the main bottleneck is the lack of expertise or abilities to document. Many field workers, both in government organisations and in NGOs, complain that they do not feel prepared to analyse a certain practice in detail or to write this down, also claiming that their main responsibilities are in the field and not behind a computer. Not surprisingly, they show a certain "fear" when asked to document an experience, as if expected to do something that can only be done by experts or by an external consultant. A third set of difficulties commonly mentioned is the lack of institutional support for setting aside time and resources for documentation.

Those familiar with governmental and non-governmental organisations may see some contradiction here, for a lot of time and resources are often dedicated to putting documents together: teams spend a considerable amount of time writing proposals and completing evaluation forms. There are many reports which have to be completed and submitted, describing all that has been done and all that needs to be done in the near future. These, however, are not really the result of a documentation process, as they do not fulfil the two basic objectives of such a process: to help those involved in a given experience learn from it, and thus be able to improve the experience itself, and to let others know what is being done and achieved in a given field.

Most of the reports or documents prepared by organisations working in the field fail on two grounds: they are only descriptive, and they are not shared. By only concentrating on describing activities and results, we miss the opportunity to look in detail at the reasons behind each of these activities and results, and to learn from them. By giving more importance to the description than to the analysis, the result is a document full of information, but from which it is difficult to extract lessons. Therefore, it does not contribute to the generation of new knowledge. At the same time, by not sharing the results of our work (sometimes not even among colleagues or members of the same organisation), we limit the possibilities of others to learn from our successes and failures.

Advantages of proper documentation

The articles in this issue show that documentation is not necessarily a difficult process, nor is it something that can only be done by external experts. On the contrary, it is a practice which can easily become a regular activity. There is a lot to be learned from our own decisions and activities, and from the consequences these have. A detailed analysis of our experiences, from which clear lessons are drawn, can contribute to a better definition of what needs to be done in order to proceed and reach certain objectives. As part of a wider monitoring and evaluation process, documentation can help make better decisions or help (re)define a course of action. In the same way, as shown by Den Belder et al. (page 6), documentation can play an important role in supporting the learning processes fostered by approaches such as Farmer Field Schools or Participatory

Technology Development. In their words, documentation “is a powerful tool to integrate and expand knowledge”.

A documentation process is essential for sharing results with others. This is important when we are interested in promoting a given technique or procedure, when the aim is to scale up certain project experiences, or when we try to create a wider impact. A specific document, as one of the final products of a documentation process, can be disseminated, copied or exchanged with others, and thus reach an audience with no geographical barriers. While we usually refer to a book, leaflet, brochure or to different types of written and printed documents, the same is true for other options: a set of images, a video, or a slide show. The benefits are even greater if we look at the whole process, and not just at the final document. As a learning process, documentation can also contribute to sharing



Photo: AGRECOL, Bolivia

Women exchanging experiences: preparing compost in Muruq'u Marka, north of Potosí, Bolivia.

information and exchanging knowledge by showing what needs to be done in a particular situation, and – just as important – to avoid making similar mistakes again. Instead of reinventing the wheel time and again, every new effort should build on what others have done – something which can only happen if we know what has been done and why it was successful or not.

In similar ways, a documentation process can have a fundamental role in ensuring that existing knowledge is not lost. The efforts of PROTA (page 33) contribute in this sense by compiling the existing knowledge on more than 7000 plant species of tropical Africa. Collecting, compiling and recording information is particularly important when dealing with indigenous or traditional knowledge, especially if this is otherwise not registered. The LIFE method, as reported by Köhler-Rollefson and Rathore (page 13), facilitates the documentation of animal genetic resources, giving due credit to the rightful owners of indigenous knowledge.

At the farm level, farmers can reflect on their activities by registering inputs like time spent or the amount of seeds used,

together with the final price for the produce, and analysing all this further. Documentation can in this way support the development of a farm towards a specific goal. This is particularly important for farmers striving to increase the sustainability of their farm with available resources. The case presented by North and Hewes (page 44) compares the developments on the farm over time, together with a thorough analysis of the reasons behind the results. In this way, the plans for the farm can be adjusted to better support the development of the farm in the chosen direction.

Different possibilities

A documentation process will rarely follow a fixed recipe. It should be adapted so as to be relevant to each specific situation and organisation. It may also serve different purposes. Each particular documentation process must take into account the different perspectives of everyone involved or affected, not only of those who are responsible for the writing (or who are in charge of a project). As such, the issue of who is actually documenting an experience, and for whom, should be carefully thought about throughout every process.

By definition, documentation is a participatory undertaking. Many different people are involved in one experience; each person may have a different point of view or opinion; everyone has something different to contribute. The way in which these different perspectives become part of the process will depend on the methodology followed.

The documentation approach chosen will depend on the time and the resources available, as well as on the number of persons or institutions to be involved. It will also depend on what final product is expected, and on who is likely to benefit. In some cases, it may also consider the use of information technology. This can have many benefits: the use of the internet, for example, can help reach a wider audience at a very low cost. Using CDs can store lots of information in a small space, which can then be easily exchanged. Digital photography can be the basis of a documentation process in situations where reading and writing is not part of the local culture, but where visual images have for centuries facilitated communications, reflection and debate (AGRECOL, page 28). It must be clear, though, that the use of expensive equipment is never a necessity, but rather a tool that can facilitate the process.

In all cases, whether documentation involves writing or not, the whole process is made easier when using a predetermined structure. As shown by Madariaga and Easdale (page 16), following a specified structure can make the process more thorough, without overlooking important aspects. This approach is also important as the documentation process can be rather lengthy, and may involve many people.

Whatever the methodology or approach, the importance of a documentation process lies in the opportunities for learning that it provides. These come out of the final product which is shared, just as much as of the process itself. As such, the benefits of documentation are many, both at an individual and at an organisational level.



Photo: Authors

Farmers presenting and discussing results.

Documentation: an effective tool in Farmer Field Schools

Eefje den Belder, Martín García and Don Jansen

Approaches such as Farmer Field Schools (FFSs) and Participatory Technology Development (PTD) aim to promote sustainable development through learning processes based on self-discovery activities and meetings in the field. To be useful for farmers, both approaches require a well developed and organized programme. This includes the selection of topics which farmers want to know more about, the content of the meetings in the field schools, and the reflection on the activities undertaken. In the “Sustainable Coffee Project Peru”, relevant and well documented data has played an important role in supporting the learning processes of the Farmer Field Schools. This is illustrated here with three examples: a survey of the coffee farmers’ situation as a basis for developing the content of the curriculum for the FFSs, the development of field school leaflets to support the education process in FFSs, and the use of a field book in the evaluation and comparison of farmer practices as part of a Participatory Technology Development process. We are not suggesting that our approaches are perfect, but would like to use these three examples to show how record-keeping can strengthen learning processes.

The project is supervised by Plant Research International, Wageningen, and financed by the DE Foundation. It is carried out together with the farmers forming the *Cooperativa Agraria Cafetalera Sostenible Valle Ubiriki* and is located in the Ubiriki-

Perené valley in Junin, one of the central departments of Peru. This department borders the Andes on the west and the forest on the east. Coffee production started in this region about 20-25 years ago when immigrants with a long tradition in maize and potato production came from other regions in the Andes. About 98 percent of the production is Arabica coffee, 90 percent of the coffee is shade grown, and 75 percent of the plantations are above 1000 m. Most of the farm lands are close to protected natural areas and the combination of climatic, soil, rainfall and sunlight conditions provides an excellent environment for coffee.

The project started in March 2003, targeting households dependant on coffee production. The design and implementation of the project is based on informed participation and social unity, and is specific to this region. About 190 farmer families currently participate in Farmer Field Schools (at this moment 9 in total) which are based on discovery learning, experimentation and decision-making. The project team is made up of the local project manager and three field staff facilitators. The FFS participants have recently organized themselves into a registered agricultural cooperative. After the election of their leaders in October 2004, the cooperative decided to start a certification process and in April 2005 the *Cooperativa Agraria Cafetalera Sostenible Valle Ubiriki* obtained the Utz-Kapeh certification for sustainable production. The producers hope that by gaining more control over the sale of their coffee, they will be able to improve their standard of living.

Developing the content of the FFS

In order to develop content relevant for the field school programme, 150 families were interviewed at their farms. Various tools were used to gather data, including a four-page questionnaire. The questionnaire addressed technical issues in coffee production and processing, extension and training in the region, local organisation and participation as well as livelihood security. It also included questions on the difficulties faced, such as a lack of labour or land, availability of inputs like fertilizer or pesticides, financial or supply constraints, social/gender analysis, and the lack of information as a result of extension services that were difficult to reach. The farmers themselves defined their constraints using the questionnaire. Analyses of all documented answers and initial observations in the coffee fields resulted in qualitative and quantitative data on the farmers' constraints.

Farmers expressed their satisfaction during the follow-up workshops, saying that "I discovered that I am not the only one who has a problem in my field with *cola de chancho*" (root deformation in coffee plants); "Now we have a list with areas of new knowledge we feel we need in order to improve coffee production", or also that "Finally I have a say in what I feel I need to learn."

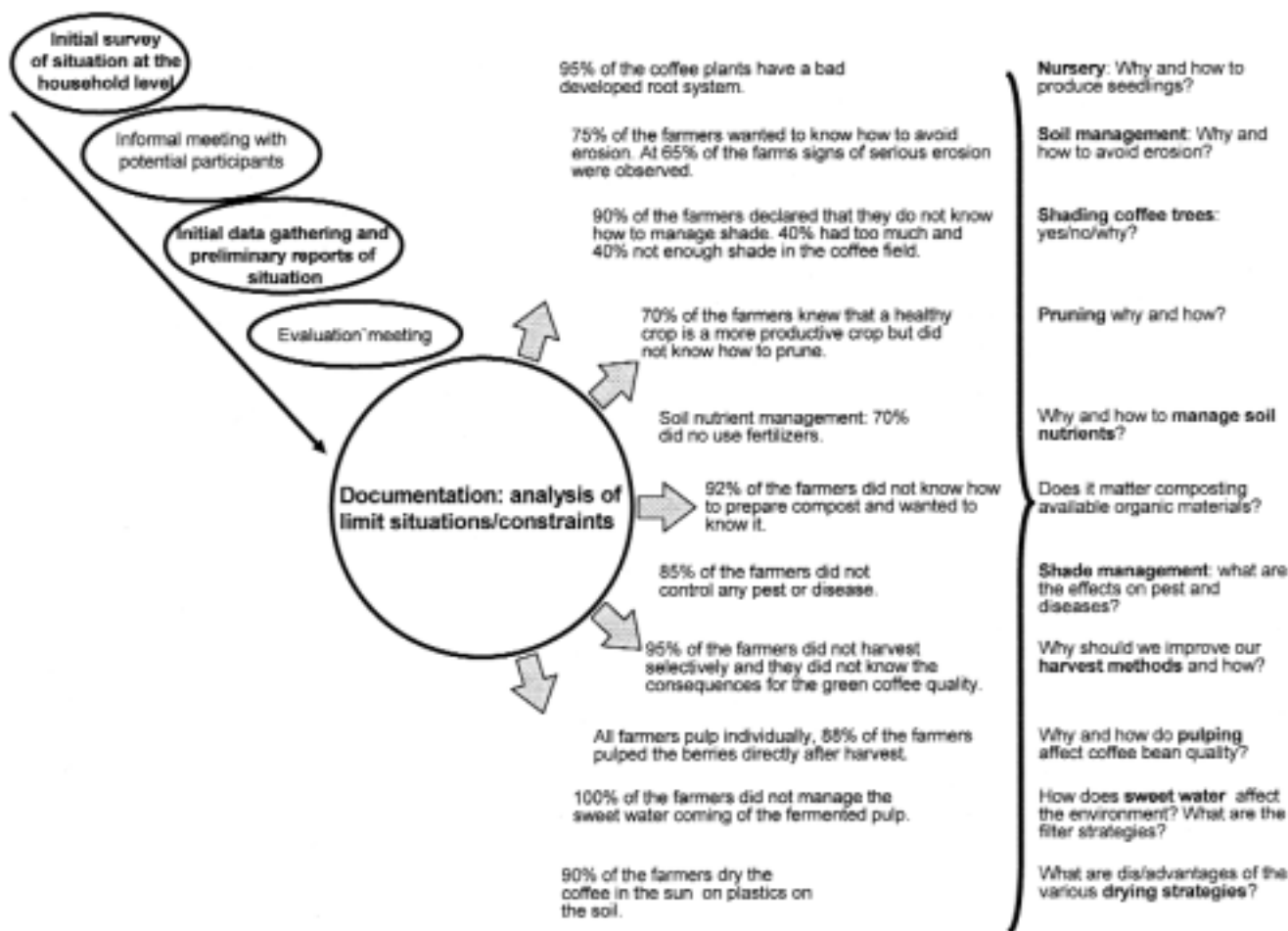
In this way, all potential FFS participants were involved in the development of the FFS programme. The project team and the farmers analysed the constraints in coffee production in the

region, and identified relevant themes that needed to be addressed. Questions like, "How can I improve the coffee quality? How can I earn a living? How does the coffee market work?" formed the starting point for the educational programme in the Farmer Field Schools. Rather than assuming some appropriate educational topics, the early involvement of farmers helped to make sure that the programme was relevant to the farmers' understanding of their actual situation. As a result, farmers took a very active interest in the Farmer Field School.

Farmer Field School leaflets

During the field meetings, a variety of approaches were used to work together with the farmers, including diagrams, pictures, photographs, boxes, living materials, oral presentations, songs, poems, plays and leaflets. Different strategies were needed for different topics, but farmers found the leaflets the most useful. During the initial interviews, 87 percent of the farmers mentioned they would like to participate in a Farmer Field School, 60 percent of the farmers thought that information transmitted by radio as useful, while 100 percent of the farmers considered leaflets as relevant and appropriate to their needs.

The leaflets were made by the local team together with the farmers. Leaflets were written in the farmers' language with an emphasis on "why and how". They included possible technical solutions, advantages and disadvantages of the different solutions, consequences and possible obstacles. The leaflets also included the remarks made by farmers during the meetings,



Example of the role of documentation in the determination of an educational programme in a coffee Farmer Field School for Peruvian small holders in the Central Amazon region.

often written down by one of the facilitators or taken from the farmers' individual learning diaries (own reflections on what they learned from the case). Drawings made by the facilitators and photographs taken during the sessions were selected by the farmers to illustrate the leaflets.

To date, 18 technical leaflets have been written and the idea is to combine them into a small manual. In this way, farmers can re-read and reconsider the meetings, and choose solutions. Experience has shown that, together with the leaflets, field meetings provide a good basis for ongoing innovation and local adoption. The development of the technical leaflets was a joint activity carried out by farmers and facilitators. As a result, the relationship between the farmers and facilitators changed towards an attitude of joint responsibility and mutual trust, and a better understanding was built between farmers and facilitators.

The content of the leaflets varied a lot according to the needs of the participants and difficulty of the topic. For example, in pruning, a small group started to compare the development of coffee plants over a long period in an "experimentally" pruned field with that in a farmers' practice field. A small group monitored the development of the coffee plants in both "treatments". They presented results to the other participants. Various ideas were then discussed. The following questions were

summarised in the resulting leaflet: "Why should we prune?"; "What happens if we do not prune?"; "How and when can we prune?"; "What happens after pruning?"

Comparing existing farmer practices

While FFSs are a useful addition to local knowledge, the strength of Participatory Technology Development lies in the evaluation of locally acceptable technological alternatives. If the daily work in the coffee fields and reflection on the choices made is documented, record keeping can be an important tool and help develop decision-making skills. In this process, the field book is essential.

Farmers used the field book to register all their expenditures and hours spent in coffee production and processing, including that of hired labour. Data was registered in a format designed in the field schools together with the project team, and collected every 14 days. If necessary, registration was guided by the facilitators. Data was summarised using a simple descriptive model developed at Wageningen University, in simple graphics in which individual farm results remained anonymous. The results were discussed every three months in the farmer field school groups. Within a short time, however, farmers often openly informed each other about their own results. These discussions allowed for comparison of different farmers' practices, farmer to

Example of leaflets produced in the Farmer Field School

Small groups of between 5 to 8 participants were formed. Each group discussed their problems and reflected critically on their experiences, trying to answer several questions. Under the guidance of a facilitator, critical reflection on existing pruning practices and on new knowledge lead to "conclusions". The conclusions are summarised in the leaflets.

Why should we prune?

- Because an old plant becomes a young plant and produces like a young plant
- Because you may want to prevent the tree from growing too tall, which will make tasks such as harvesting easier
- It maximizes the amount of new wood for the next season's crop, you encourage the growth of new vigorous stems and branches
- Pruning results in bigger berries of higher quality than smaller berries
- It prevents overbearing and thus reduces biennial production
- It helps prevent some pest and disease problems
- So it can use the manure more efficiently
- It improves the economic situation of the farmer

What happens if you do not prune?

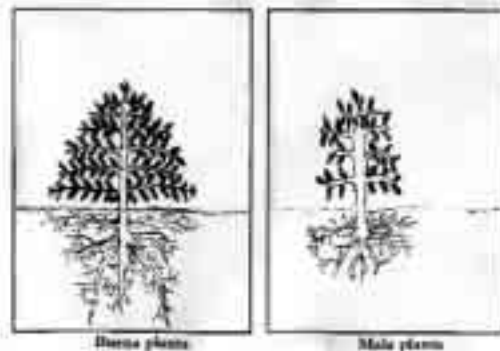
- It will be more difficult to prevent and reduce some pests and diseases
- It will be more difficult to harvest the berries from a tall tree with branches of 3 - 4 m
- We will harvest smaller berries with more infestations
- The worker does not want to harvest in an old field if you do not pay extra.
- Old branches will compete with young branches for nutrients

QUE PASA DESPUES DE LA PODA

- Se empieza a recuperar la planta, salen nuevas hojas el tallo empieza a engrosar. La planta se vuelve mas vigorosa.
- La incidencia de plagas y enfermedades empieza a bajar.

QUE SUCEDE CUANDO SE PODA PLANTAS DEBILES

- Quiere decir amigo agricultor cuando hacemos una poda, solamente las plantas que tienen buen follaje (hojas) brotan buenos chupones.
- Cuando se poda plantas débiles los tallos se secan y no rebrotan las yemas o salen yemas muy débiles que después se mueren.
- Porque las hojas son el espejo de las raíces las plantas con pocas hojas son plantas con pocas raíces es decir plantas con bastantes hojas son plantas con abundante raíces.



Example of leaflets produced in the Farmer Field School.

farmer information exchange, as well as comparing progress. Farmers adapted existing technologies and tried out new ideas. Comparison of existing farmers' practices gave farmers the opportunity to think about problems that were difficult to experiment with, because of high costs involved. In this way, through record-keeping, farmers developed skills that allowed them to analyse their own situation. Some examples of the skills acquired include:

- how to compare the differences in hours spent in harvesting in relation to the total harvest;
- how to compare hours of field work and total coffee harvest;
- how to compare income per hectare in relation to all expenditures on the farm.

Farmers appeared to find this type of data collection, analysis and discussion very interesting, challenging and enjoyable. This was reflected by the discipline shown by those involved and the resulting very high quality of the work. Also, it gave the farmers the opportunity to test the usefulness of this method for their needs. Initially, only six farmers per school started keeping records because this method was new for the farmers as well as for the facilitators. After the presentation of the results of the first coffee production cycle, all FFS participants wanted to complete the field book because this "diary" allowed them to analyse their own situation. The strength of this approach lies in the simple well organised record-keeping, accurate observations and of the visual presentation to the FFS groups. An important factor influencing the farmers' willingness to participate is the relevance of the field book output itself to their farm management. Of course, this method has some limitations. Not every problem can be dealt with by using the field book approach. Some problems are very complicated and need more time and guidance, such as shade management. Other problems are too dangerous for experimentation, such as diseases and pests that spread easily, like the coffee berry disease or coffee berry borer.

The FFS approach provided fertile grounds for debate on the field book results because the farmers and facilitators had already worked closely together for one year. The FFS groups had functioned well and proved to be "effective teams" with trust and respect.

Closing remarks

If learning approaches and research in farmer field schools are to achieve a real impact on farm productivity and livelihoods, methodologies for sharing information have to be developed and their use must be promoted. Documentation is a powerful tool to integrate and expand knowledge. The examples presented here show that:

- documentation of the actual production conditions together with the farmers makes it possible to identify current constraints and possible solutions. This knowledge is used to develop a relevant FFS curriculum. As the farmers are involved from the beginning, they feel that they "own", at least in part, the programme of learning which motivates them. Sensitive awareness of the issues and careful contextual, social, and institutional analysis will help to build an effective educational programme.
- documentation of the conclusions of field meetings with farmers and facilitators, as in the form of small leaflets, can help build up a relationship of mutual trust and understanding within the farmers' communities. Encouraging farmers to design the content of the leaflet helps to make the learning process more effective and will encourage them to continue.
- through record-keeping in a field book, farmers develop skills that allow them to analyse their own situation and make



Photo: Authors

Pruning in progress.

progress. By comparing their own farm management activities with the results of their others, farmers can adapt existing technologies and try out new ideas.

We believe that documentation is an important tool for spreading local knowledge and local processes of innovation, and we hope that the experiences presented here will encourage others to further develop these ideas.

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Building documentation and communication capacities

K.V.S. Prasad and T.M. Radha

Together with many other NGOs, the Agriculture Man Ecology (AME) Foundation has been working on ways to improve the sustainability and productivity of the agricultural and natural resources of rural communities in the states of Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh since the late 1980s. Recognising that effective information sharing mechanisms are critical for learning from each other, AME, in collaboration with ILEIA, developed *LEISA India*, a regional edition of the LEISA Magazine. However, the main problem in publishing an interesting magazine is the access to good quality information on the experiences taking place in the field. With the aim of further strengthening information exchange on sustainable agriculture between organisations, a concept note was prepared and circulated. This served as a basis for a consultative workshop where the concerns and issues which hinder effective information sharing of field based experiences were discussed.



Participants discussing the documentation process.

During the workshop, participants agreed that in order to increase information exchange, good quality documentation of experiences would be needed. The group expressed that the process of documenting and sharing experiences and learnings is of crucial importance to the organisation itself, but also ensures that others learn from the experiences, and makes the intervention agency's role as a change agent visible. The outline of a collaborative plan of action towards better and wider information sharing for sustainable agriculture began to take shape, focusing on two main issues:

- How can more information on sustainable agriculture be generated, documented and widely disseminated?
- What capacities are needed within the organisations to be able to do this?

It was realised that capacities cannot be increased with a single training event, but that a long term programme is required. Such a

programme should be rooted in the needs and priorities of the organisations, it should enable processes to intensify and prioritise documentation and communication within the organisations, and it should improve staff's abilities and skills in doing so.

One of the outcomes of the workshop was the development of the LEISA India consortium, which included AME's field offices as well as partners like MYRADA or GEAG, two Indian NGOs, the Tamil Nadu LEISA Network and a few interested individuals. Though informal and loosely structured, the consortium partners started to support each other, and a joint two-year programme on documentation and communication was planned for the period 2004-2005, conceptualised and developed by *LEISA India* in collaboration with ILEIA.

The Documentation and Communication Programme

The participating organisations had to commit themselves to prioritise documentation processes, to identify persons within their organisations to take part, and finally to institutionalise the entire programme within their organisations. The activities included workshops on sourcing, documenting and communication; as well as planning and review meetings, field work and assignments. The partner organisations set aside staff time to allow for participation in the workshops as well as for further documentation and writing between the workshops. The *LEISA India* team and ILEIA provided the necessary support.

The programme was based on three approaches: participatory learning, learning by doing, and periodic planning and review of the learnings and outcomes. The participatory learning environment enabled learning from the diverse experiences of the participants in working with agricultural information at field level. Group learning processes were combined with individual assignments based on the organisational priorities of each participant. Hands-on learning benefited from the support of well-known and experienced resource persons who provided the necessary clarity and added value. Thus, these workshops built on the existing experiences, skills, and critical capacities available within the group at each stage of the programme process. It was also important to put each participants' learnings into practice within their respective organisation. Insisting on having the same individuals from each organisation attending all workshops and carrying out the assignments in between, has helped in building core capacities within the organisations.

The integrated joint planning and review processes ensured the necessary focus and rigour. Involvement of the heads of the organisations in the review meetings, along with the participants, helped to review the progress made in a realistic way, and also ensure necessary support and commitment for the programme.

Three workshops on Sourcing, Documentation and Communication were designed. Each organisation agreed to make an assessment of their own documentation activities before the first workshop, helping define specific objectives and a programme for each partner organisation. The organisations were also requested to prioritise two experiences which they wanted to document and publish. These workshops were

intensive, involving reviews of all participants' efforts by the group as well as by resource persons. They were timed so as not to clash with the seasonal field programmes of the participants. There was a minimum three-month interval between each workshop to allow participants to complete their assignments. The venue for the workshops was located away from the city, ensuring a week of uninterrupted attention to the learning and reflection processes.

What to document?

The first workshop, in November 2003, started with the identification of field experiences. Each participant presented the experience selected by his/her organisation, explaining why this particular case had been chosen. The experiences selected would be the basis for the assignments they would undertake after the workshop.

A "field study" was planned in order to illustrate the difficulty of identifying interesting experiences and finding enough information in the field. The MYRADA watershed project in Kolar was selected for this. The workshop purposely avoided any detailed discussions of conventional methodologies prior to the field visit, in order to allow participants to explore what, in their experience, would prove to be appropriate and effective ways of sourcing information that would lead to a complete and integrated description of the selected LEISA experience.

The exercise allowed participants to interact with various groups involved in the project, and to try out different methods of finding information. They also used cameras to get hands-on experience with photo documentation. The participants were accompanied by a photographer, quietly making observations during the whole process. Reviewing the results after the field visit, the participants hilariously related their "excellent" and embarrassing skills in photo documentation.

The workshop was structured so that each participant was able to contribute his or her knowledge and experience on field observation, the approaches and methods that could be adopted in information and data collection, and experiencing the "soft skills" required while interacting with farmers in the field. Group discussions on the skills and knowledge needed for meaningful sourcing of information, the need for reflection, and on the general mistakes and assumptions made, helped the participants to prepare better for their own information-sourcing assignments. Meanwhile, participants also discussed the results of the field study, reflecting on the process, and worked as a group to present a report during the workshop. This was a particularly important and successful exercise as it required workshop participants to combine their individual approaches, perspectives and experiences, and make explicit the ideas and insights gained.

At the end of the workshop, participants presented the experiences chosen as part of the assignments for information sourcing in their respective organisations. The planning cycles for the activities were presented along with commitments.

Documenting LEISA experiences

In February 2004 the participants returned for the second workshop with the texts they had worked on since the first workshop, including texts such as "The Participation of Women in Agriculture Extension System", "Changes in Cropping Practices following Watershed Interventions", or "A study on a collective approach of Women farmers in organic vegetable production and marketing". Each experience was individually

read, analysed for its completeness and strength and checked to see whether the data was reliable. Each text was also assessed to see how far they succeeded in describing processes and impacts in a complete and reliable way.



Photo: K.V.S. Prasad

One of the authors learning how to use the digital camera.

The texts were presented by each partner and reviewed by all the participants. The approach was effective because of the multidisciplinary nature of the group, its experience and specific skills. Much of the in-depth work of critical comment took place in small groups. Care was taken to ensure that each of these groups had as representative a composition as possible – skills, gender, experience and knowledge.

The process helped the participants identify gaps, irregularities, unclarities and strengths, and to meaningfully weave it all into a complete message. Most importantly, they became aware that documentation has to be an ongoing process within the organisations, and systematic and regular if it is going to be meaningful. Serious intent is not enough and will not help recover information which has been 'lost' in memory lapses at various levels. Based on the inputs received, the participants were asked to go back to the field, address the gaps and improve the text.

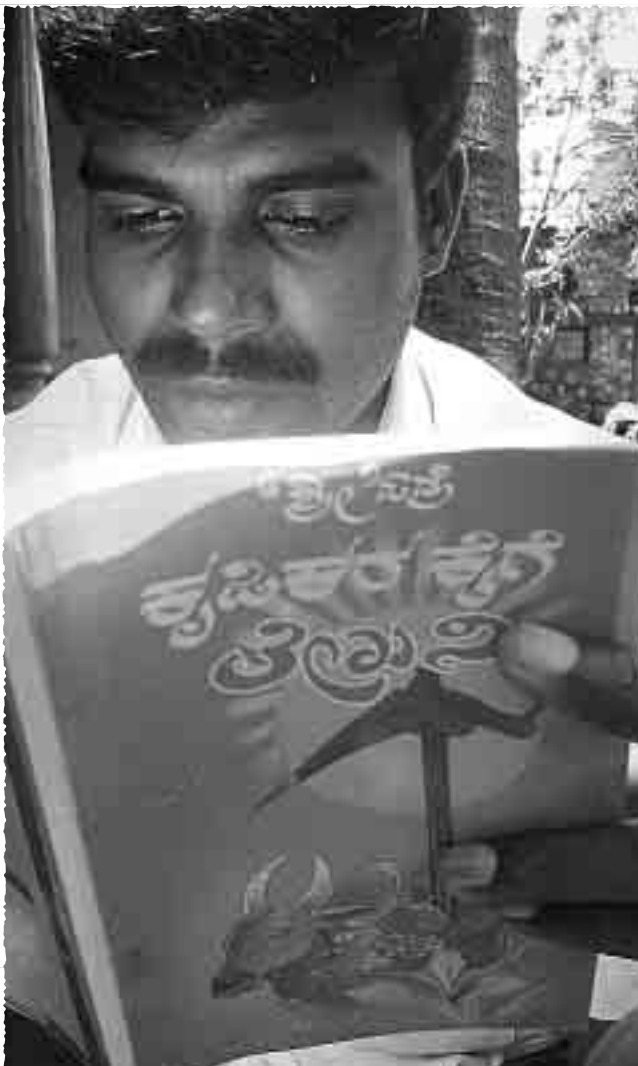
Another important dimension addressed in the workshop referred to the principles of good writing. The focus was on writing in a simple and straightforward way, for which a renowned development journalist shared his experience and tips with the participants. Thus, the second workshop helped participants to reflect, look critically at content and learn a little bit about how to communicate simply and effectively.

Communicating the experiences

The third workshop, held in September 2004, focused on the selection of communication tools and media for specific messages and target audiences. The workshop therefore involved resource persons from the print media, radio and video programmes, as well as those involved in archiving and repackaging information.

After reviewing the assignments, the workshop focused on the potential of various tools for effectively communicating a message and how the choice of message and tool can be made for a particular target group. The participants experienced making recordings for radio and video under the guidance of specialists. These specialists gave valuable insights and much needed clarity on the use of these tools, as well as on their limitations. They also highlighted that these tools are expensive to buy and maintain. Attempts were made to explore which methods were suitable for communicating partners' experiences. Participants tried making posters and wall newspapers based on their experiences. The workshop concluded with a planning session for the next period.

Looking back at the whole year, participants mentioned how they managed to turn their first studies into a communication product, and that they had already started documenting their second experience. Similarly, they mentioned the conscious efforts made to show the work of their organisations: an article on *Namma Dhwani*, a community managed radio service, was published in both the global and the Indian editions of LEISA Magazine; MYRADA's article entitled "Planting Trees on Bunds" appeared in a publication brought out by German Agro Action; a video and a poster on "Women's rights on agricultural land" was developed by one of the participants and circulated among various NGOs and other organisations.



Other publications can also give ideas for the final layout of the document.

At the end of the first year of the programme the participants felt that there had been a definite shift in thinking and that they were now "writing with a purpose" instead of reporting for the sake of accountability only. There was better clarity on the various aspects and dimensions required to prepare a complete text. The programme also proved that, given the time, resources and the attention required, it was possible to carry out a documentation process successfully. However, the participants felt that it was often their individual interest which drove them to complete the assignments in time. They were once again hard pressed for time once they were back in their respective organisations, attending to various other duties. There was obviously still a need to institutionalise this programme.

Institutionalising documentation

The second year of the programme, therefore, focused on institutionalising documentation in the respective organisations, so that documentation activities would continue even after the completion of the programme.

Activities were planned within the respective organisations so that the documentation skills could be spread to other staff members. In some cases, this was done by forming the staff into teams and making them responsible for the documentation of ongoing activities. Another way of institutionalising was by upgrading the skills of team members through trainings. For example, MYRADA conducted a Communications Workshop to upgrade the skills of its own middle and senior level managers in communication and documentation. Similarly, the LEISA Network, along with the AME Tiruchi Unit, took the lead and organised a documentation workshop for NGO partners. More than 20 NGO staff were trained on various aspects of documentation and communication. This workshop acted as a path breaking collaboration between All India Radio Tiruchi and AME Foundation in broadcasting a series of primetime programmes based on field experiences. In the same way, the AME Madanapalli team has intensified its contributions as well as coverage of its activities and events in the local newspapers and media.

As a result of these institutionalisation processes, the importance of documentation seeped through and was translated into sustainable actions in the organisations. The organisations involved planned and implemented internal capacity building programmes with the help of the trained participants, thus sustaining the momentum. The participants and the organisations themselves saw improvements in the quality of content as well as presentation, leading to greater recognition and visibility of their efforts. Most importantly, the benefits of the programme could be experienced by the participating organisations.

The momentum created in the participating organisations still needs to be nurtured and supported for a longer period so that regular documentation becomes a habit which is fully integrated with the implementation of project activities. Only in this way will the experiences of field activities lead to knowledge which is accessible for others and which can therefore help in developing sustainable agriculture further.

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Documentation of animal genetic resources: the LIFE method

Ilse Köhler-Rollefson and Hanwant Singh Rathore

Livestock play a vital role in supporting the livelihoods of millions of people in many different ways. Full documentation of existing livestock breeds is needed to enable the sustainable use and conservation of domestic animal diversity. Conventional documentation methods focus on population sizes and production characteristics. They are based mostly on numerical data and body measurements and results from the controlled conditions of a government farm. But looking at a breed from this perspective does not consider the keepers' priorities, nor understand the contribution to livelihoods that goes beyond numbers. The resulting information therefore does not reflect the situation from the farmer's point of view, for whom cash products are often of secondary importance.

Conventional breed descriptions also have another large gap. They fail to recognise and document the role of livestock keeping communities. They also fail to highlight the indigenous knowledge that has been important in the development and management of any well-defined breed or livestock population. This failure contributes to the wide-spread myth that local breeds have been shaped by natural selection alone rather than by conscious human effort. It also allows such local breeds to be seen as free for all to use for commercial interest; at random and without compensation for their traditional breeders or custodians.

A comprehensive approach

In the context of a GTZ-supported project, the Indian NGO *Lokhit Pashu-Palak Sansthan* (LPPS) and a small number of other NGOs composing the LIFE Network (LIFE stands for Local Livestock for Empowerment of Rural People) cooperated on developing a more participatory approach to documenting animal genetic resources. The aim was to show the intellectual contribution of the livestock keepers, and document breeds from a people centred point of view. The method captures important characteristics of traditional breeds that had previously been ignored, and records breeds based on the knowledge and priorities of the associated communities. Most significantly, it understands breeds as products of social networks. First tried in India, this approach has been termed the "LIFE approach".

The LIFE approach is not a fixed method or recipe but rather a framework that uses flexible participatory methods instead of pre-determined forms. Until now it has been tested with large animals, such as cattle, buffalo, and sheep, and mainly in pastoral contexts. But it can also be used in other livestock species and farming systems. There are seven phases, and based on the information required, different methods are used at each phase:

1. The social and cultural context

The first phase aims to look at the broad context in which livestock, and the selected breed in particular, are found. This means looking at the breed's link to a particular community, cultural entity or social sphere. To decide whether an animal population represents a breed, it is necessary to determine if there are any breeding institutions (such as, for example, a communally kept bull), or if most animals are born into the herd and are not bought or brought from outside. This is something

that can be found out with informal enquiries, interviews or discussions. Local people often have many different words to describe the various age and sex classes as well as colour types of breeds. The number of different terms used can be an indirect way of discovering how much indigenous knowledge there is about one breed. Listening to and recording the terms commonly used helps to promote an understanding of the local concepts, and assists in communication.



Photo: Ilse Köhler-Rollefson

Milking Nari cattle in Rajasthan, India.

2. The ecological and production context

A second phase starts by defining the breeding area. This is seen as the region in which both female and male animals are kept. Asking people to draw a map helps to work out if the region where the breed is found relates to any particular ecological zone. At the same time this will define the main land uses and farming systems in the area, and establish how the breed fits in with these. It is important to understand how animals are integrated into the cropping system (in a farming context) or how they utilize local vegetation (in pastoralist systems). Similarly, breed distribution is often closely linked to soil types and their mineral content, so it helps to understand the basis of the local classification. It is also important to ask where animals graze, at what time of the year,

and which fodder or forage species they prefer. The answers will often reveal the difficulties faced by a breed due to reduced grazing areas.

3. Livelihood significance (“Breeding Objective”)

People shape a breed so that it suits the needs of their livelihood. The “breeding objective” can be defined as the traits that are necessary for a breed to fulfil its role in the production system. In traditional breeds the breeding objective is often a mixture of characteristics and can, for instance, consist of reasonable milk yields combined with the ability to survive in an unfavourable environment. For a sheep breed kept in a pastoral system it could be meat and wool yields as well as the ability to go on migration. Good mothering instincts could also be a breeding objective in extensively raised cattle. The need for social currency (acting as dowry or bride price) could be another breeding objective. By questioning local experts, this phase aims to document:

- the range of products and uses, not just including the obvious but trying also to consider social, environmental and ritual roles as well;
- the production performance under local conditions, focusing on those types of performance which are relevant to the people, and
- the reproductive performance, collecting data on e.g. age at first birth, birth intervals, offspring survival rates, etc.

4. Management of the gene pool

A fourth phase looks at the breeding management. This starts by looking at the local preferences or “breeding goal”: besides the

breeding criteria determined by the overall production system, people usually also have more specific ideas about what constitutes a desirable animal. These culturally grounded preferences for a certain colour, size, or behavioural pattern may be regarded as “breeding goal”. Certain physical traits may in fact be genetically linked to certain performance characteristics.

It is then important to determine what makes this breed different from others kept nearby or from high performance breeds. These special characteristics can relate to disease resistance (or also proneness to certain diseases), to behavioural patterns, or to the use and taste of their products. This, together with the definition of key characteristics, helps to determine whether an animal belongs to the breed or not.

This phase also looks at the breeding mechanisms and strategies, because breeding can be influenced by social considerations or rational strategies. Social mechanisms include taboos on selling female animals to anybody outside the community; the custom of lending animals to poorer relatives, or that of devoting certain male animals to a god or goddess. On the other hand, as “strategies” we consider the practices used to intentionally shape a breed according to peoples’ preferences and priorities. They include, for instance, selection by sex, oral record keeping of the breed’s history, castration of unwanted male animals, or avoidance of in-breeding. Finally, it may be important to try to identify and meet with dedicated breeders who are known for the high quality of their animals.

5. Population size and trend

After determining the breeding area, it is necessary to establish the population size of that species in the region, starting from official data or records and checking it with surveys in a random sample of villages. This is then compared to older census or statistics, trying to determine the general trend for that population. The opinion of older members of the community is vital here.

6. Chances for sustainable use and conservation

A next phase looks at the difficulties which the breed faces that threaten its survival or sustainable use, and at the interest which the local community shows for its revival or conservation. The challenges may include: loss of grazing, changes in the agricultural production systems, loss of traditional institutions, lack of health care, lack of market demand, general lack of interest by the younger generation, drought or other natural catastrophes, conflicts or social upheavals. The interest of the local community may be seen through the existence of local institutions, or because of identity or cultural reasons.

7. Baseline data to monitor social impact

Finally, as the last phase, it is essential to know how many people are partly or totally dependent on the breed, especially when relating the documentation process to a conservation project. A community-based project can only work if local people benefit from keeping the breed, so its objective must be to create opportunities to earn money or produce food. Knowing how many households depend on a breed, before and after a project, is essential for monitoring the success of the activity.

Different methods for collecting information

The different phases use different methods for collecting information, all of them stressing the participation of the population. These include group discussions and informal enquiries or unstructured interviews, choosing community elders

Overview of the LIFE approach

1. Social and cultural context

- Association with the community
- Breeding institutions
- Local perceptions about the origin of the breed
- Local terminology and ethnotaxonomy

2. Ecological and production context

- Breeding area
- Local soil types and classification
- Local farming system
- Seasonal forage calendar, preferred grazing species

3. Livelihood significance (types of products)

- Range of products and uses
- Production performance
- Reproductive performance

4. Management of the gene pool

- Local preferences (breeding goal)
- Special characteristics
- Breeding mechanisms
- Identification of top breeders

5. Population

- Population estimate
- Population trend

6. Chances for sustainable use and conservation

- Pressures
- Interest in revival and conservation by the local community

7. Baseline data to monitor social impact

in some cases and expert breeders in others. In principle, 50 percent of all informants should be female. Group dynamics can also be used for e.g. preference ranking, using photographs of animals with different traits or characteristics. At the same time, participatory observation is also required throughout the whole process, while a search for background information may also be useful.



The LIFE initiative logo.

The main objective is to understand a breed from an insider's viewpoint, something which requires a good relationship and a permanent attitude of respect. Information gathering should be empowering, not extractive: it must go hand in hand with raising the awareness of the local keepers for the value of their own breeds. Needless to say, prior consent from community authorities is essential, as it is to share and check results with the whole community.

Collected information can then be presented in many ways. It can be stored in a book or article, or documented as part of a breeding project, serving as input for the design of a breeding programme. It can become part of a school book, training material, and it can also be presented in small booklets in local languages. Benefits are many, especially if we consider the raised awareness of the value of the peoples' own knowledge and culture, the process of learning new ideas and methodologies, or the learnings which result from working with outsiders.

Safeguarding indigenous knowledge

Documenting indigenous knowledge is controversial. It may lead to outsiders helping themselves to it and exploiting it to make money. Some believe that recording it and making it well known can pave the way for biopiracy. Others argue that by providing a written record of indigenous knowledge, biopiracy can be prevented and attempts at patenting prevented. Some NGOs, especially in India, promote community registers or "people's biodiversity" registers, where documents about people's

knowledge of biodiversity and their conservation practices are kept. Within the context of current intellectual property rights systems, such registers establish indigenous knowledge as "prior art", and the community as the primary rights holder. By documenting indigenous livestock breeds as "prior art", the LIFE method also supports efforts by communities to claim animal genetic resources as their property and avoid them being stolen. It therefore is an important tool in the emerging movement for "Livestock Keepers' Rights" that has been started by pastoralist representatives and their support organisations in order to secure the rights of livestock breeding communities over their animal genetic resources.

In October 2003, representatives of indigenous livestock breeding communities met in Kenya to discuss issues related to animal genetic resources, genetic engineering and intellectual property rights. They issued a statement, known as the "Karen Commitment", which calls for an international agreement recognising the historical contribution of pastoralists and other communities to the development of domestic animal diversity. It also calls for a recognition of the livestock keepers' rights, including the right to access, save, use, exchange, or sell their genetic resources, unrestricted by Intellectual Property Rights; the right to have their breeds recognised as products of their communities and knowledge and so remain in the public domain; and the right to a fair benefit from the use of animal genetic resources in their own communities and by others. It is hoped that scientists too will adopt the LIFE method and include the questions it poses into their research designs. This would certainly be an important contribution to more people-centred approaches to the sustainable management of the world's animal genetic resources.

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This article draws on the presentation of the authors at the 2005 Tropentag, University of Hohenheim, Germany, and on the book of Lokhit Pashu-Palak Sansthan and Ilse Köhler-Rollefson, "Indigenous Breeds, Local Communities. Documenting Animal Breeds and Breeding from a Community Perspective".

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The LEISA systematization process

Marta Madariaga and Marcos Easdale

During part of 2004 and the first half of 2005, the editorial team of *LEISA Revista de Agroecología* ran a pilot systematization project, intending to try out a methodology especially designed to facilitate the process. They wanted to demonstrate that, contrary to popular belief, field experiences can easily be described and analysed, and that there is much to gain by doing so.



Sharing and exchanging the lessons learnt in one of the group discussions.

something which for many different reasons does not generally take place. The process helps those involved to see a project or an experience from another perspective. As such, it can highlight the positive aspects of an experience as well as those which could be improved. Systematization forces us to go through a self-criticism process, and to be open to suggestions and opinions which may come out as a result of the interaction with others.

While many different methodologies have been developed and presented during the last few years, the editorial team in Latin America was interested in developing these further, putting a greater emphasis on the analysis and thus clearly differentiating a systematization process from a mere description. They were also interested in using an easy-to-follow process, hoping this might motivate more people to get started.

The process

The method follows three phases, organising the information and opinions of those involved through a set of charts. This makes it easy to see if the information is complete or not. The first phase is to select and describe the experience or project to be looked at. Not everything that an organisation does can be the subject of a systematization process, and only one particular experience or project can be analysed at a time. Therefore the project needs to be described independently from the rest of the organisation's activities. This can easily be done using the chart shown in Table 1. The title, location, participants, objectives and strategies related to the particular project are clearly presented in columns.

Systematization

A popular word in Latin America nowadays, systematization refers to a process which seeks to organise information resulting from a given field experience (be it a project or activity), in order to analyse it in detail and draw lessons from it. The main objective is to generate new knowledge from an activity, although the processes through which this is done, such as careful reflection and validation, are also objectives in themselves. Although the term is not as commonly known in English as in the original Spanish, the process itself fits perfectly with ILEIA's and its partners' institutional aim of exchanging knowledge and information for the development of low external input and sustainable agriculture, especially in the tropical and subtropical countries.

Systematization is a process which can help in documenting our everyday activities. It makes it possible to look in detail at what is being done and to reflect critically on what is being achieved,

The second phase is to describe the activities and achievements during the period of time chosen. All results should be described here, including unexpected results, difficulties faced, and results or targets that were not reached. By filling out the relevant chart (see Table 2), this should give a complete description of the selected project. From then on, to make the step from pure description into systematization, we move onto the most important phase: the analysis. Here, the opinions, criticisms and value judgements of all participants are gathered and presented in order to critically analyse the project. This is also the hardest part of the process. First it is necessary to define some criteria to assess the success of the project. Examples of such criteria are: community participation, sustainability or replicability of the project. For each criteria, it is then useful to identify some indicators, to measure the criteria in detail (see Table 3). The criteria and indicators should be agreed upon jointly. When filling in the chart, it is essential to include the different opinions of all involved. The analysis looks for the reasons

Table 1. Setting the boundaries

Title	Area / Location	Target group	Starting date and duration	Objectives	Strategy/ approach	Components
Development of a system to support decision making	Patagonian mountain valleys, province of Neuquén	Small scale farmers	Mid 2003, for 3 years	Development and use of a currently non-existing instrument	Presentation of information through simulation models and GIS	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Planning 2. Fieldwork, collection of information 3. Group analysis 4. Final presentation

Table 2. Describing our experience

Component	Activities	Results	Difficulties	Unexpected results
1. Planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Definition of what to compile • Task distribution 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consolidation of the group 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need to leave previous activities behind 	
2. Fieldwork	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Compilation of information • Feedback sessions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identification of key issues; analysis of the information found • Opinions of farmers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Large distances between villages • Lack of time (in the team) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advantages of an interdisciplinary approach become evident
3-

Table 3. Analysis

CRITERIA 1: Participation			
Indicators	Positive aspects	Negative aspects	Unknown aspects
participation of farmers		was planned, but could not take place, farmers not convinced	potential contribution
involvement of the local institutions	a lot of willingness	required constant pressure from the coordination of the project; all very busy	
participation of INTA teams	good, especially the first two years	difficulties to access information, roles not totally clear	the motives for a general lack of interest in the final year
...
CRITERIA 2: ...			
Indicators	Positive aspects	Negative aspects	Unknown aspects
...

behind the results and achievements and should not repeat the information in phase two. The outcome of this phase is the identification of some lessons learnt, and recommendations. A more in-depth look at the analysis allows for the identification of what can be presented as new knowledge as a result of an organisations' project in a specific location.

Finally, these charts are the basis for presenting the systematization of a project or experience in your chosen form, for example, writing an article, a document or even making a video.

Looking for participants (or guinea pigs?)

Having presented and successfully tried out the methodology with several institutions in Peru, the Latin American LEISA team was interested in trying it out with organisations or institutions in other countries. This meant replacing face-to-face

workshops with e-mail and the internet. Therefore, a special section was added to the LEISA website, and an e-mail bulletin was later developed to raise awareness about the pilot project, and invite comments from readers, in addition to the regular communication the editors have with their readers.

It was not difficult to find a few organisations interested in trying the methodology. Many institutions and organisations had answered the readers' survey sent by the magazine in 2003, which also asked if the readers knew of an experience which could be described and analysed. Many ideas were submitted, including ours (referring to "the development of a system to support decision-making"). This was how we were invited to take part in the systematization project, and, as one of the research stations of the *Instituto Nacional de Tecnología Agropecuaria* (INTA), the Argentinian agricultural research institute, we eagerly accepted. Interested in learning more from

our own experience, and at the same time in getting a better idea of how to go about it, we added the systematization project to our list of activities.

Together with eight other Latin American institutions, we started to organise the information we had on our project and activities according to the charts for each phase of the methodology (as described briefly above). We were then asked to send these together with any additional information we might find relevant, and all this was put online. Visitors were then able to see this regardless of where they were, and to give comments which immediately became visible. This generated an interesting exchange, allowing us and all the participants to clarify ideas and adjust what was said. We also got comments from the editorial team, which helped us to complete the description and the analysis, including information which was not originally considered. This helped us look at our own work from another angle, all of which made for a better systematization process, assisting us to reach our original objective: the generation of new knowledge.



One of the authors presenting the results of their work to all other participants.

Photo: Jorge Chavez-Tajur

systematization methodology ensures that the results of our work are more and more successful.

One of the most important aspects of the process has been the possibility of being seen all over the world through the internet and, through the printed version of the magazine, by the more than 10 000 persons who read *LEISA Revista de Agroecología* every trimester (where we expect our coming article to be published soon). The final stage of the methodology allows for the sharing of knowledge, information, and even of the methodology for systematization itself.

But as to the methodology itself, we frequently felt that the terminology used may lead to confusion in many cases, so it may therefore be necessary to clarify or explain it in greater detail. At the same time, the selection of criteria and indicators in the analysis may lead to biases, as the virtues and achievements of the project can easily be prioritised over the errors or difficulties found. The responsibility rests with those in charge of the project or of the experience being analysed.

The internet has proved to be a very good tool for this work, facilitating access to worldwide information and to the simultaneous interaction with many users. But its use is limited to those directly involved in the process. The challenge therefore remains as to how to make readers and website visitors more interested in systematization. This is linked to one of our observations during the process, where some of the experiences being systematized received more comments or suggestions than others, which made us wonder how much this external participation contributes to the final results. Getting more visitors interested has to be linked to a more detailed analysis of their actual contribution to such a process.

The group of organisations or institutions involved in this process consisted only of those interested and willing to go through it. Considering the Latin American universe, with an enormous number of institutions working in rural development and of projects worthy of being described, analysed and disseminated, it may seem that the participants were very few. We therefore think it would be useful to work on the dissemination of the methodology, and to make sure that all those interested in documenting their work have the opportunity to take part in such a process, and receive the necessary inputs and contributions of others.

Recommendations

It is common to associate a systematization process with a final evaluation stage, once a project or programme is finished. Having taken part in this experience, we feel it is advisable to include a similar process at three different moments during a project: when it is being formulated (the planning stage), during its implementation (on-going monitoring), and also at the end (the final review). Similarly, we recognise that time and other resources necessary to run this process effectively need to be taken into account as part of the project itself. They need to be assigned from the very beginning, or there is a risk that they will not be available later.

Our experience has also shown that this is a tool to be used by all those involved in a project, helping them establish stronger linkages among themselves, while at the same time helping them look at their project as a whole. Systematization should therefore not be an activity left to only some of the members of a team.

The whole process was complemented with a workshop held in Lima in August 2005. Apart from meeting all the other participants, the workshop was useful as we were able to present what we had done and achieved with the systematization process, and at the same time analyse the advantages and difficulties of the methodology. We also discussed the advantages of using the internet and e-mail, and the need to have a manual or guidebook which could help us finalise the process and help institutions willing to start a similar process.

Results

As seen in the examples, the whole process enabled us to present our work in a detailed and complete way. By showing this to others we were also able to see it more clearly ourselves. We have therefore been able to learn from our own experience, not only in the sense that we generally learn from our daily activities, but rather by forcing us to take a critical standpoint and look at ourselves and at what we do. Together with this, we feel that following the process increased our capacities to analyse what we do, and we also realise that a systematization process can in fact be very useful. The correct application of a

Our participation in the systematization process

Teresa Santiago and Máximo García

Arte Natura is a small NGO working in the southern Mexican state of Chiapas. We provide advice to local organisations, assisting them in their transition to ecological agricultural production. In 2004 we received an invitation from the Latin American LEISA Magazine to take part in a systematization process. We thought that our many experiences with ecological agriculture would be interesting to look at in detail, and accepted the invitation. We saw this as a good opportunity to get to know a systematization methodology and be part of its further development. This process proved particularly interesting, especially because of the relationships established between all those involved, and the effectiveness of the method.

Participation and interrelationships

Concerning the relationship between all parties, we all shared an interest with the LEISA team in examining our experience and practices in detail. This made it easy to establish a dialogue with them, even though at times we felt that communication between Arte Natura and the LEISA team could have been better. At the beginning of the process we were not clear about the level of communication that was expected. Besides, we were very busy, we did not see the advantages in making time for systematization, and we needed time for our other activities. Looking back, we see that these difficulties were part of the adjustment process at the beginning of a new institutional relationship. We have since made space and time for systematization in

our organisation. This adjustment was easily made because we are a small institution and the people who design the project are the same as those who work on it.

On the other hand, we felt that we were coming up with a lot of negative criticism, which did not help the process. Our intention to reflect critically on our work was at times too extreme, and some of the positive points were lost. We sometimes thought that our experience was not good enough to be shared, while now we know that was not the case. It is often easier to disregard a practice rather than to look for elements in it that may be useful to others.

The methodology

We used the methodology developed by the LEISA team, putting our information on the internet and getting feedback from them and others. We also took part in a workshop in Lima, where we met the other participants and collectively reviewed the method and the results each had after using it.

The methodology was fundamental in helping us understand our reality better, even if this was the first time we had used it. We experienced several setbacks, and the continual assistance of the facilitation team was vital to help us reach the end product. By sharing our experience with the other

participants, we received useful feedback, while also getting to know similar experiences. This helped to answer the doubts we had about the method, and at the same time share related information. It gave us confidence to come up with an article from the puzzle of our experience which can now be published in the magazine.

While writing the first draft, we noticed a difference with other methods that often have open questions listed in chronological order. In this case the charts used are more complex, something that helped us look for an explanation behind each fact. Still, it would be very helpful to have an exercise on writing something concrete, before deciding which information to communicate.

One unavoidable companion we had all through the way was our biased professional viewpoint. We tried to be objective, but realise that we have been trained as conventional scientists. We believe that one of the main results of following the systematization process has been finding a way to understand our situation with a constructive critical view, and, from there, promote new strategies of working with nature.

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Finally, it is worth recognising that there are two main obstacles to a systematization process. Firstly, we found ourselves overwhelmed with information, and the need to establish filters, so that we only read what may be interesting, can eventually result in barriers which cannot be overcome. Secondly, we must recognise that time always seems to be a limiting factor, especially for new initiatives, which are not immediately adopted by those who could benefit from them. Future initiatives should also follow the example here, which tried to encourage projects going through the process at the same time to interact. Considering there are so many organisations who share

common realities and problems, it may be interesting to create a forum where they could meet, exchange experiences and opinions, and enrich the analysis of their work together. ■

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Documenting agroecology: a competition in Brazil

Francisco Roberto Caporal

In 2003, the Ministry of Agrarian Development in Brazil launched a new national policy on technical assistance and rural extension. The policy was developed through a democratic and participatory process which included consultations, public meetings and workshops, involving representatives from social movements, small scale farm families, governmental and non-governmental agricultural extension workers as well as other stakeholders. The process involved more than 100 interested organisations and more than 500 people contributed to the policy. The policy is based on the following five principles:

- To ensure that rural extension and technical assistance are provided as a public service for small scale farmers and other producers in order to strengthen family based agriculture. The service should be free of charge and of high quality.
- To contribute to sustainable rural development.
- To make use of a multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary approach to agricultural development; building on participatory approaches and the principles of agroecology.
- To establish a managerial approach which allows for more democratic decision-making processes and contributes to the strengthening of civil society.
- To develop lasting educational processes for everyone involved in sustainable agriculture.

These principles reflect the government's new vision of sustainable agriculture and development, embracing local knowledge and participatory approaches. This drastic change was partly a response to unsatisfactory experiences with the Green Revolution "packages" of farming technologies. Although based on scientific findings, tested on research stations, and promoted by the extension service, they often were not suitable options for the specific circumstances of small farmers, nor were they based in their reality. The aim of this new policy is also to contribute to the empowerment of rural communities and to change the relationships between farmer families and extension agents to one that allows mutual sharing and learning from everyday experiences. This is, however, only possible if there is a shift in the way people think. The Department of Technical Assistance and Rural Extension therefore developed a series of training initiatives for extension agents, making additional and alternative knowledge and skills available to them. To date, at least 5500 extension agents, representing all states across Brazil, have taken part in some form of training on the basic concepts and principles of the new national policy.

Finding field experiences

In 2004, it was realised that additional strategies were necessary to speed up the implementation of the new policy. As a result, the Department developed an agroecological programme to directly support family-based ecological agriculture. As part of this programme, a nationwide competition for documenting alternative experiences in agriculture was held. Through this competition, which was the first of its kind to be organised by the Federal Government, it was hoped to identify many field experiences related to the implementation of the principles of agroecology. Experiences in agriculture, livestock, small-scale fishery and other aquaculture enterprises implemented

throughout the country, were all welcome. Ultimately, this would provide a comprehensive collection of relevant, real-life experiences and references which could be made available to everyone interested.

Together with the announcement of the competition, the Department provided basic guidelines as well as some definitions. It was explained that the "documentation of an experience" meant a critical reflection on an experience or

Box 1. Criteria for judging entries in the documentation competition

1. Quality of the text (flow, clarity, structure)
2. The methodology used in all phases of the experience is logical and coherent
3. The experience demonstrates that it is technically and/or economically viable
4. The methodology used contributed to the increased participation of the community (e.g. increased empowerment, involvement in decision-making, and implementation)
5. Level of community involvement in the documenting of this experience – this document expresses the knowledge of all those involved
6. Experience was carried out in partnership between government and non-governmental organisation (s)
7. The experience has potential to be a reference point for others working in this theme
8. The experience shows innovations related to environmental sustainability
9. The experience values the participation of social actors in every phase of implementation
10. The experience values the knowledge of all social actors
11. Social importance of the experience – demonstrates improvement to the life of the community involved
12. Economic importance of the experience – demonstrates improvements in food security, income and job opportunities
13. Environmental importance of the experience – demonstrates evidence of how many of the following gains: a) soil management, with increased fertility and reduction of erosion, b) improvement of water, c) better use of locally available resources, d) reduction in clearing of land or trees, or recuperation of unused land and e) reduction or elimination of the use of fire)

Each criteria was judged on a scale of 0 to 2. For example:

The experience shows innovations related to environmental sustainability

No evidence: 0 points

Some evidence: 1 point

Clear evidence: 2 points.

Box 2. Examples of winning entries

Project: Production and improvement of local variety maize seeds "Crioulo" in family agriculture in Santa Catarina
Organisation: Centro Vianei de Educação Popular

Project: Communal Medicinal Plant Garden
Organisation: MST/AESCA Agricultural Cooperation Association of Minas Gerais

Project: Sustainable Forest management in the interior with small rural producers in Moxotó
Organisation: APNE- Associação de Plantas do Nordeste, Pernambuco

Project: Technical Course in Agroecology and sustainable development – A methodological proposal for vocational training
Organisation: ASSESSOAR – Associação de Estudos, Orientação e Assistência Rural, Paraíba

Project: System of collective commercialisation based in Cooperation and Agroecology
Organisation: ECOTERRA Associação Regional da Cooperação e Agroecologia, Rio Grande do Sul

activity. It would also include examining the steps followed during the experience, and analysing and presenting the material and results logically and clearly, in order to learn from the experience as a whole.

Documentation competition

The competition was announced on the Department's website, and sent to more than 3000 of the Department's e-mail contacts, including almost all of the NGOs working in the rural development sector and organisations in their networks, as well as governmental agencies, university lecturers and some farmer representatives. The fifty best experiences would be awarded a respectable prize of 20 000 reais (approximately US\$ 9000) each. The prize was intended to support the continuation of activities in line with the documented agro-ecological experience, and would be made available to the group or organisation behind the experience after the presentation of a proposal for the continuation.

During the four months that the competition was open, a total of 127 documented experiences were received, prepared by 82 different organisations. The assessment of these entries began in August 2005. With assistance from professionals in this field, a format with thirteen evaluation criteria was developed to support the assessment (see Box 1). In this way, the transparency of the process and the assessments was also ensured. Several people working in the field of agroecology in Brazil, and who had experience with documentation, were contacted by the Department and invited to take up the responsibility of assessing the experiences. Each of the documents submitted for the competition was assessed by two different persons. If these two persons had given widely differing scores, a decisive opinion of a third person was sought. The process of assessing all 127 documents took longer than expected as most of the evaluators had to do this voluntary task alongside their regular daily work.

Sharing the knowledge

Eventually, the 50 winning entries of the documentation competition were announced. The documents were made available on the Department's website, and there are also plans to produce a publication with some selected highlights. All the 127 documents entered in this competition will be made available on the website of *Agroecologia em Rede*, which contains a database with information on research and field experiences in agroecology.

Lessons learnt

The relatively small number of entries in relation to the large number of projects implemented in Brazil indicates that the majority of organisations connected to the Department, whether governmental or non-governmental, are not in the habit of recording the processes that they are carrying out. A contributing factor to the low number of entries may also have been that the competition was only announced on the internet. In a country like Brazil, where many organisations still do not have access to this means of communication, this was clearly not sufficient.

The documented experiences did not, in general, express the participation of the farmers in the process. This shows that the participative processes are not effective, something which deserves greater attention in the training of extension agents.

However, aside from the initial difficulties experienced with any first attempt, this initiative has demonstrated that the government can contribute to encouraging the processes of documentation and dissemination of knowledge based on agroecological experiences. Nevertheless, we think that the government, as promoter of a new competition such as this, should work together with the *Articulação Nacional de Agroecologia* (National Network of Agroecology) and the *Associação Brasileira de Agroecologia* (Brazilian Association of Agroecology).

We believe that the initiative was valid and deserves to be repeated. It is important to continue with initiatives that encourage the documentation and dissemination of experiences in agroecology to increase the awareness of this important theme.

Finally, it is important to point out that initiatives like this can, through an effective method of participatory documentation, contribute to giving a voice those directly involved in agroecological activities, such as social activists, farmers, and technicians. ■

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The results of the documentation competition with the 50 winners listed are available at <http://www.pronaf.gov.br/dater>, as "Resultado do Concurso Nacional de Sistematização de Experiências".

Documenting successes from the People's University

Shree Padre

Adike Patrike is a monthly magazine about farming, published in the local Kannada language and distributed in the state of Karnataka, India. Now in its 18th year, this magazine is unique, as it is written, edited and published by practising farmers. This article describes some of our experiences and learnings as journalists.

Since the mid-nineties, this magazine has considered rainwater harvesting as a subject of top priority. The reason behind this decision is simple: then, as now, it was a very important issue for readers. The groundwater table was declining drastically every year, and in most districts, farmers' hard work all year round was giving them only partial results. Every summer, the water crisis was taking a very heavy toll. The mainstream media, by and large, did not have a working knowledge of rainwater harvesting, and their coverage of the water crisis and drought was rather negative.

As journalists involved in agricultural and rural issues, we were constantly hearing about the need for watershed development and rainwater harvesting. But even science graduates were not always able to make out what it meant. Even worse, the methods described in books or suggested by the government departments showed little relation to the possibilities of ordinary people. Water harvesting meant construction of check-dams that required lots of money, and was therefore unaffordable for many people. We thus started to look out for methods which villagers could carry out on their own.

Building confidence

Fortunately, we were able to find some NGOs developing interesting experiences in rainwater harvesting. Based on these experiences, we wrote our own guidelines for future action. First, we would turn to ordinary people's successes, referring to this as the "people's university". Secondly, we would only cover successes achieved without government subsidy. The third condition was that methods to be documented and published in our magazine had to prove to be repeatable at least in a few villages around.

Since rainwater harvesting was a new concept, our first challenge was building confidence in the readers of *Adike Patrike* that it works. Earlier experiences had clearly shown that ordinary people's success stories are a tremendous inspiration for our readers. Such success stories can be very inspiring because they are more credible from a reader's point of view. If need be, they can visit a certain case and cross-check the information. It tells them that they too can follow the method; it is affordable. The same cannot be said of success stories from government departments.

Another lesson that journalism had taught us was to add some human interest to such stories. Bare statistics and technical details are not very interesting for the reader. We therefore blended people's joys and sorrows, the efforts they made, the lessons they learnt from their experimentation, and the messages they might have for others, into a story. We took care to make sure that each write-up had a few practical messages, food for thought, with some fingers pointed at some of the wrong and unsustainable interventions our people are doing in the field of soil, water, forest and nature.

The publication of these experiences raised immediate interest. As a result, we started to get invited to be resource persons for farmers



Adike Patrike.

and public meetings. Initially, we politely rejected these invitations, feeling we did not have sufficient experience. However, we soon found that we had a bunch of encouraging success stories, all of which conveyed optimism, presenting the message that we, ordinary people, could conserve soil and water with small efforts. This prompted us to accept invitations for various awareness meetings organised by farmers, NGOs and governmental bodies. We developed communication materials like slide shows with "tell-tale" visuals. On request from local groups, the author of this article had the opportunity to travel widely in the states of Karnataka and Kerala, presenting more than 400 slide shows.

Finding experiences

The contacts made during slide shows opened up great opportunities for "smelling out" success stories. We started this by always asking the audience: is there anybody here who can share good results with intentional or accidental rainwater harvesting? Dried up dug-wells are often considered a waste of space and people fill them up with soil: in a hamlet where most of the dug-wells are refilled, is there any well containing water? Are there any farmers who have grown enough grains for their family during a severe drought? Is there any farm or field that does not allow muddy water to flow out whenever it rains? Is there anybody who is confident that on the site of their house or farm there is water enough for the next generation too?

This approach provided us with new success stories. One of the most interesting is that of Mundy Shrikrishna Bhat, a farmer in the state of Karnataka. Several years ago, he allowed construction stones to be quarried out from the hill opposite his house. Eventually, the quarry grew quite big, looking like a huge empty tank which gradually filled up with rainwater. Not surprisingly the water level in Bhat's bore-well in his garden in the foothill increased greatly. While he was not fully aware of the science behind this process, he eagerly followed the suggestion of diverting all the available run-off to this quarry. This step gave him even more water in his well.

Another case is that of Vijayamma, a farmer, who together with her husband, started diverting run-off water from the nearby road to the foot of their coconut trees twenty years ago. Although most of the 45 dug-wells in this area are dry for four months a year, Vijayamma has no worries because of this simple effort. She has even been able to provide water to neighbours during the dry season. During a rainwater harvesting slide show in their village in the state of Kerala, she proudly mentioned that we were discussing things they had been doing successfully for more than two decades.

Over a period of almost a decade, we managed to get story ideas from one-to-one dialogues, group meetings, and casual remarks made during conversations, or from the feed-back we get from time to time from our readers. Many of these have finally developed into success stories of soil and water conservation with very good inspirational value for others.

Documenting the successes

How do we document success stories? More often than not, it is by making a field visit. The vital information we look for in such study visits includes: details on the seriousness of the water shortage in the area; the precise methods of rainwater harvesting followed; what made the farmers select a particular method; the expenses incurred and benefits gained; the lessons learnt from the experimenting process; the changes that have occurred (other than an increase in water availability), and other advice that can be offered to fellow farmers. We take some informative photographs too.

Our available resources do not permit long distance travel, so in certain cases we adopt a different method. On getting a tip-off, we call the farmer on the telephone and cross-check whether the information is true. If so, we discuss the highlights of his success case. This gives us a broad picture, which helps us to write a detailed questionnaire, and give suggestions for photographs. The farmer then tries to fill in the questionnaire and requests a friend or even a commercial photographer to get some pictures taken according to our guidelines. It might take some time, and a few kind reminders, before we receive the written replies and photos. We then have some more discussions on the telephone to get any extra information, to tie up possible loose ends or get clarification on some statements. It is in such final "touch-up" discussions that we often get valuable "quotable quotes" from the farmer.

If need be, we also contact those who learnt about rainwater harvesting from this farmer, those who have seen the benefits personally, and listen to their reactions too. We always try to overcome the shortcomings of this documentation approach with more discussion, until most of our question marks are clarified and we have an in-depth picture of the case in front of us. Finally, this heap of information is edited and boiled down to 800-1000 words, which is put together with a couple of carefully selected pictures for publication in the magazine.

Experiences of Adike Patrike

In September 1996, we started a feature series called *Nela Jala Ulisalu Nooru Vidhi* ("Hundreds of ways to conserve soil and water") in our magazine, where only time-tested, genuine field experiences were selected for publication. The series was wound up more than eight years later, after realising that considerable interest had been generated among people, mainstream media and administration.

In the process, we have learnt many important lessons about effective communication. First is that instead of writing hundreds of theories, it is generally more impressive to show-case a

success story, even if it is a small one. Secondly, a successful model from a familiar local area can help to overcome all mental blocks and prompt the neighbours to follow suit. For motivation, it is even worth repeating a similar story.

Added to this are the linkages water has in a particular context. If a farmer was buying water from outside but has now stopped doing this as a result of rainwater harvesting, water is money for him. In an area where contaminated water is causing a lot of water-borne diseases and health problems (like areas where groundwater has a high percentage of fluoride or arsenic), water is health. Identifying such linkages always helped us to present our story, so that it catches the interest of the readers.

The complexity of rainwater harvesting lies in the fact that only location specific methods can be chosen. As such, we cannot give a blanket solution or go to the level of spoon feeding. So we made it a policy to "keep a bunch of choices", presenting "dos and don'ts" through our magazine, books and slide shows. Each respective farmer is the best judge of their soil type and topography, and the advantages and disadvantages of rainwater harvesting for their area. Taking the principles and practical tips from many success stories presented, they can develop their own plans for conserving soil and water. We have been getting lots of feedback from readers of the magazine who have reaped the fruits of rainwater harvesting. From the 4th year onwards, such proud stories were also given a place in our series. Though the initial successes were individual ones, community success stories slowly started to emerge. Today, there are thousands of farmers and others in Karnataka State who have succeeded in harvesting rainwater and making their lives better. *Adike Patrike* is acknowledged as a pioneer in popularising rainwater harvesting in the state.



Photo: Author

Women are very actively involved in rainwater harvesting.

Mainstream media has started taking interest. Today, in Karnataka, three leading daily newspapers run a weekly column on rainwater harvesting. In Karnataka and neighbouring Kasaragod, a district of Kerala State with a Kannada speaking minority population, simple lessons on rainwater harvesting are even included in school text books. Success with rainwater harvesting at their own houses has prompted the management of some private schools to also carry it out on their premises, so as to educate the students. A "silent" movement of rainwater harvesting is now found in six districts with heavy rainfall in Karnataka, and *Adike Patrike* is proud to have had a direct role in its development.

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Learning through writing

Paul Van Mele

The use of reporting tools, such as the logframe analysis, has become an industry in itself with its own following of consultants, publications and pressure to comply with the 'rules'. The efforts that go into such a system are often not in proportion to the learnings that they generate for project staff, managers and donors alike.

Pressure to regularly submit project reports creates stress among partners and organisations. The critical reflection on achievements, difficulties and opportunities is often limited to that of the person writing the report. Its importance for organisational learning should therefore be carefully re-assessed. In addition, the number of people reading reports is limited. Even colleagues rarely read one another's writings. A general feeling is that official reports are boring, full of donor language, never saying what actually happened or what really mattered. So how could we avoid all these shortcomings?

Reflecting, interacting and documenting

Funded by the U.K. Department for International Development, the Poverty Elimination Through Rice Research Assistance (PETRRA) project managed 45 sub-projects between 1999 and 2004, based in Bangladesh. After a year of intensive interactions, a group of twenty sub-projects focusing on uptake and extension methods became the subject of the book "Innovations in Rural Extension: Case Studies from Bangladesh" (Van Mele *et al.*, 2005). This article presents some of the strategies followed and lessons learnt while documenting each sub-project's experience.

The process began in October 2003, when the twenty sub-projects were given guidelines intended to assist in reflecting and documenting their experiences. The two-page guidelines covered the following eight sections:

- Summary
- Actors and Network: who did you work with, what was their background
- Evolution of the Method: origins of ideas, changes made during project
- Extension Method: the steps involved so that others can apply your method
- Keys for Success: to help others recognize to what extent they have the same ingredients in-house, or what they should look out for in building partnerships
- Potential Pitfalls: to help others avoid some of the hurdles you encountered
- Scaling-up: strategies you used for mainstreaming method
- Conclusion

Under each heading were a few paragraphs explaining how to obtain the desired content. Apart from suggestions to present certain information as tables or diagrams, no indication was given as to the style to be used.

Each of the twenty sub-projects prepared a first draft by early November 2003. During a one-day workshop, the extent of the challenge became clear. Showing and enabling people how to reflect on their experiences would not be achieved overnight, neither would it be possible to turn them all into professional writers. And how would it be possible to work with 20 projects at the same time?

This first short experience resulted in 3 main insights:

- 1) the documentation guidelines needed to give more detail and suggestions for style and format if some uniformity in case studies was to be obtained;
- 2) people needed a project case study to help them better understand the guidelines;
- 3) if the project was serious about the desired output, it would be necessary to work intensively with all partners, over a period of time.

To address these points, one case study example about a community-based seed production project was developed, while at the same time testing and improving the guidelines for authors. The guidelines were expanded to nine pages and included style-related tips such as:

- Write the way you talk
- Use nouns and verbs
- Don't show off your vocabulary
- Quality is in the detail

As project documentation facilitator, I returned to Bangladesh and worked intensively with all project partners from January to September 2004 to help them put their experiences into words and pictures. Above all, as one of the overall project aims was to mainstream the learning from each sub-project, the exercise needed to stimulate reflection.

Formal reports gave us insights into mainly quantitative impacts, but were limited in explaining what really happened. To help us understand the reality of people's work better, and put their experiences in a historical, sociocultural and institutional context, we decided to use a broad range of tools related to innovation systems analysis, such as actor linkage maps and enterprise webs. These tools were used in mini-workshops to further stimulate institutional learning, as well as using photographs (see page 30) and narratives. The idea behind the narratives was relatively simple: let people tell a story while reflecting on key points.

Narratives

Writing helps to internalise our experiences and, as such, a narrative can act as a self-learning tool. Inspired by examples I had seen working with an anthropologist in Bolivia, I used one narrative produced there to motivate the field staff in Bangladesh. Surely this was much more pleasant reading, so rich with details, that it was possible to actually visualise what had happened during his field trips. But could anybody write in this way?

We received some narratives following the example provided. But although people had really enjoyed this new way of expressing their experiences, none of them continued to use this reporting format when not asked to. After all, it was a format that was not part of their formal reporting requirements. In future, project managers could actively encourage their staff to regularly write a narrative and use these as part of their participatory monitoring and evaluation. They could also be asked to include 2-3 of their best narratives in their final report. An example of a narrative from the project is presented in the box.

Action plans, targets and deadlines

Editing a book or writing a chapter is impossible without closely interacting with all actors involved, from project manager to field staff, farmer and dealer. We interviewed lots of



Photo: Author

Using a colour chart to discuss rice.

Box 1. A narrative

Teeth of Gold

Helen Latifun Nessa

At the onset of the session, I asked the women if they use any equipment to test seed dryness prior to storing their rice seed. All of them denied firmly, so I asked once more:

"Are you sure that you don't have any equipment with you to test seed dryness?"

"Yes, we are. We do not use any equipment," they replied.

"Then how do you do the testing?"

"We use our hand, feet, ear and teeth."

"Don't you consider these as your equipment?"

"Oh my goodness!"

They all grasped the message and laughed loudly. When Ms. Rokhsana, the facilitator of the session, asked them to explain their traditional method, they replied:

"A crackling sound comes when we shake seeds close to our ears."

"A croaking sound comes when we bite rice with our teeth."

"The seed feels slippery when we stir it with our feet."

"The seed feels lighter when we test the weight of dried rice."

Despite the range of diagnostic tools, all confirmed that using teeth is the best way. When I suggested they should take utmost care to keep their teeth well and strong, they all laughed again.

Then the practical session began. Women were invited to rate three batches of seed with 11, 13 and 15% moisture content, respectively. They were all excited. One by one they came to the front and slowly started crunching the seed. All had a serious and attentive look on their face while Ms. Rokhsana noted down their opinion.

Participants were still in for a surprise when Ms. Rokhsana brought out a scientific moisture meter to test the validity of their opinion. Once more doubt appeared on the participants' faces. "Do you have any objection?" she asked. Although a little confused, curiosity took over and they soon came forward accepting it as a challenge. Rokhsana explained that the moisture content of rice seed should be less than 12% and if it were higher, seed would require more drying.

Rokhsana took the moisture meter and started testing. The results confirmed the women's opinion. The whole event made them very happy: they realised their teeth are worth gold.

people. As agricultural extension is a highly complex matter, workshops often drew on network diagrams, matrices and a range of other visual exercises.

To keep track of the progress of all 20 sub-projects, clear action plans and deadlines were agreed upon. Although the ultimate reward would be for each partner to have a chapter in the final publication, we initially worked towards another target. All had to present their case studies at a national workshop, held at the premises of the Department of Agricultural Extension in Dhaka in April 2004. The output was captured in a proceedings.

Reflecting on our experiences

This documentation process not only resulted in lessons learnt about how new extension methods had been developed by a wide range of organisations, but also helped to build learning capacities and make the methods more widely known and accepted. However, the extent to which these capacities become an important part of an organisation's culture depends not only on the organisation's philosophy, but equally on its workload. For NGOs that rely heavily on donor funds, it is especially important to assess their "project saturation point". Project overload can have a negative effect, as staff perform up to a certain level, after which the quality of their work starts to decline. Time for reflection, as a necessary element in the learning process, is often lost at the expense of doing more activities and writing more and more boring reports in search of funds.

As the project is committed to optimise ownership of the lessons learnt, facilitation of the documentation process was seen to be as important as the end products themselves. Some of our struggles during the whole documentation process are highlighted below:

- Of all the sub-projects working on uptake and extension methods, many had poor writing skills and lots of interaction was needed to help them explain their experiences.
- People who come in from outside to evaluate the projects do not see the amount of informal discussions that have gone in the whole process of institutional change and method development.
- Each subproject has their own strength, as such reducing the potential to develop general guidelines for case study preparation. This could be difficult for people who have an inflexible mindset when using guidelines, even if creativity and flexibility with structures and style is stimulated.
- As most people are only familiar with formal (and boring) report formats (often in bullet-point style); training is needed on writing narrative stories.
- Starting the documentation process in the last year of a project puts a lot of pressure on staff to comply with monitoring and evaluation and other official requirements.
- High ranking people may insist in taking the lead in writing the case study, rather than consulting field staff within their own organisation.
- Documenting project experiences is like the next step in testing the solidity of a partnership. Existing power relationships become clear; without good facilitation government staff do not consult with their NGO collaborators, even if they may hold the most valuable experiences.

More lessons could be presented, but I don't want to get boring. ■

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Out of heads and onto paper

Paul Mundy, Evelyn Mathias and Isaac Bekalo

Have you ever had to produce written materials – agricultural extension materials, a training manual, or a set of guidelines? There may be a lot of information about your topic, but it is scattered or in the wrong format, and much of it is in people's heads rather than written down on paper. Maybe you need to develop simple extension brochures for farmers, but the only material available is in research reports written in scientific



Participants in a writeshop exchange ideas.

jargon, while useful indigenous knowledge should also be included. Another example is when an organisation has been carrying out development activities for many years, and its staff have built up many rich experiences, but they are not written down anywhere. The staff are excellent in the field, but they find it difficult to write; the risk is that when somebody leaves the organisation, his or her knowledge will be lost. A similar case could be when coordinating a network of partners who implement activities in a certain subject area. The partners would like to learn from one another. They have produced a lot of monitoring reports that tell the story of their work, but pulling out the valuable information is going to be rather difficult: you might need to question each of the authors in detail before you can document it properly.

All such situations have certain things in common:

- The information exists mainly in people's heads, but it is needed on paper.
- No single person is the expert on a subject. Many different people can each contribute part of the information, and they may have different ideas about the subject. Agreement is possible, but only if people come together to discuss.
- The information has to be pulled out from a large body of data – reports, research articles, people's memories – and then

translated from one level of language (scientific jargon or farmers' language) into another (e.g., training materials).

- The information needs to be checked by several people – other experts, scientists, potential users – before it can be published.

A solution: a writeshop

A "writeshop" is an intensive, participatory workshop that aims to produce some kind of written output. This may be a set of extension brochures, a bound book, a set of leaflets, or a training manual. Participants may include scientists, researchers, government personnel, teachers, NGO staff, extension agents, farmers and other local people: anyone who has, in one way or another, been involved in the experiences to be documented. These participants are assisted by a team of facilitators, editors, computer operators, artists and logistics staff.

The basic writeshop process was pioneered by the International Institute of Rural Reconstruction in the Philippines and has been adapted by related institutions and the authors of this article (see Figure 1). Altogether, this writeshop method has yielded more than 30 user-friendly manuals on a range of topics (see Box 1).

Before the writeshop, a steering committee develops a vision for the final publication: its target audience, objectives, subject area, etc. The committee lists potential topics within the broad subject area, develops guidelines for authors, and invites "specialists" to write a first draft on a certain topic. These specialists are not necessarily scientists or senior staff; the committee may also invite extension personnel or farmers to write about their own particular area of expertise.

Early in the writeshop, the participants brainstorm ideas for further topics to be included in the publication. These new topics are given to knowledgeable participants for development and presentation during the writeshop. During the writeshop itself, each participant presents the first draft of his or her paper. The other participants have a chance to give comments on the draft and suggest revisions. The facilitator allows as much discussion as possible so that everyone can contribute their own knowledge on the topic. The aim is not really to criticise the manuscript, but to improve it, add to it – and often to remove unnecessary information – so that it fits the end product and is appropriate for the target audience.

After his or her presentation, each presenter will talk to an editor, who has also been taking notes of the discussion. The editor helps to revise and edit the draft and to ask for illustrations, usually line drawings from one of the artists, to accompany the text. The edited text and the illustrations then go to a computer operator, who puts them together as a second draft. The revised drafts of each participant are then presented again and the audience can

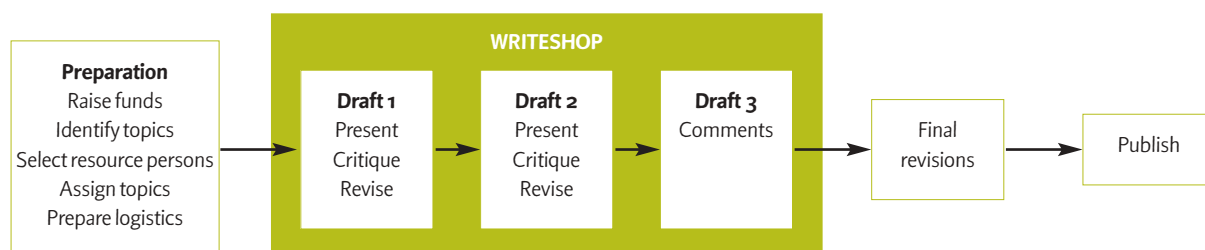


Figure 1: The writeshop process.

provide comments and suggestions for a second time. After this series of presentations, an editor and artist(s) again help to revise the drafts. Towards the end of the writeshop, it may be possible to make this third draft available to participants for final comments and revisions. The final version, therefore, can be completed, printed and distributed soon after the writeshop.

Box 1. Examples of writeshops

- In Asia, writeshops managed by the International Institute of Rural Reconstruction (IIRR) resulted in information materials and books on subjects including indigenous knowledge, low-external-input rice production, ethnoveterinary medicine, biodiversity, indigenous practices in maternal and child health care, coastal resource management, agroforestry, and management of the environment and natural resources.
- A series of major writeshops managed by IIRR in Ethiopia, Kenya and Tanzania resulted in illustrated manuals on ethnoveterinary medicine, sustainable agriculture, public awareness techniques for agricultural research organisations and NGOs, land management, dryland agriculture, gender issues, drought cycle management, conservation agriculture, and food security.
- A writeshop in Palembang, Indonesia, produced 11 extension booklets in Indonesian on agriculture in the tidal swamplands of eastern Sumatra.
- A three-day writeshop in Pune, India, produced a field manual on camel diseases.
- A series of writeshops in Vietnam resulted in an illustrated book in Vietnamese on various aspects of upland farming.
- In Myanmar, writeshops resulted in extension leaflets in Burmese on topics such as the safe use of pesticides and the establishment of a credit cooperative.

Flexibility

The writeshop process is extremely flexible. The repeated presentations, comments and revision of drafts allow for papers to be reviewed and revised thoroughly. The process also allows for new topics to be developed during the writeshop, and topics to be combined, dropped or split into parts. The basic pattern of the writeshop can be varied in many ways. For example, the participants may break into smaller groups to discuss specific topics, write drafts and present them to the whole group for comments. Participants may write examples or brief stories that illustrate a particular point that can be included in a larger chapter. They can also be asked to gather additional information about techniques or processes, resource organisations or reference materials that might enrich the content of the final product. The schedule for only the first one or two days of the writeshop is known beforehand. A schedule for the following day is prepared each evening, and it may even change again several times as the day progresses.

The process can be modified and adapted to suit individual situations. Writeshops have lasted from one-and-a-half days to two weeks in length, tackling from four to more than 100 manuscripts, and with between 15 and 150 participants. Writeshops have been conducted in many languages, and it is possible to conduct a single writeshop in several languages: using interpreters, for example, indigenous livestock healers who spoke only their own languages made major contributions to a book on ethnoveterinary medicine in Kenya. While the approach described here relies heavily on computers, the method can also be adapted for use at the field level where there may not be any skilled operators or a reliable electricity supply. A group of villagers in the uplands of Negros, the Philippines, used a similar

approach in a one-day writeshop to produce a manual on indigenous tree species: all manuscripts and illustrations were prepared by hand, and the final publication is hand-written.

Multiple contributions

Documenting an experience can take a great amount of time. The process of writing, illustrating, reviewing and revising can be long and dull. Writeshops can speed up and improve this process. Having the resource people, editors, artists and other documentation tools together at the same time and place makes this possible. It also allows for all participants' contributions to be included, taking advantage of the diverse experience and expertise of all present. It allows ideas to be validated by a range of experts in the field. Members of the intended audience or readers (e.g., teachers, farmers and extension personnel) can help pre-test the text and illustrations during the writeshop. In essence, each manuscript is reviewed dozens of times by key resource people, all within the same short period of time.

Coordination and facilitation

The number of people needed to coordinate and facilitate a writeshop depends on the number of participants and manuscripts to be processed. For a small writeshop with 20 participants, one facilitator, an editor, an artist and someone to take care of logistics may be enough. A skilled facilitator is vital however. He or she must be able to guide the participants and manage the discussions. They must have a good understanding of the subject area and a clear idea of what types of information need to go into the final publication. Tact is important: some authors may resent seeing a manuscript over which they have sweated for many hours being torn apart by their fellow participants or the editor.

A skilled editor (or editors) is just as important. The editor works with authors, and guides them in rewriting their drafts. Very often an editor will take over responsibility for rewriting the draft based on information provided by the authors. Again, tact is vital, as is an ability to organise and structure information, and to present ideas in a way that is easy for the intended audience to understand.

When is a writeshop appropriate?

Writeshops are suitable for documenting practical illustrated information, in simple language, where a large number of people know a little, but no-one knows all about the subject. A writeshop approach would therefore not be appropriate for narrow subjects or if one person or a small group has all the information needed.

The writeshop approach is a very intensive process, making considerable demands on participants and staff. Writeshops can be expensive, especially if it is necessary to cover food and lodging, airfares and daily allowances. When considering whether to plan a writeshop or use more conventional methods, the benefits of the writeshop approach must be weighed against these limitations.

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New technologies support farmers' documentation

Anne Piepenstock, Orlando Arratia and Luis Carlos Aguilar

AGRECOL Andes is a regional information centre based in Cochabamba, Bolivia. Focusing on agroecology and the sustainable use of natural resources, it aims to share information and to develop the capabilities of different actors. This includes supporting the analysis and documentation of field experiences, especially local initiatives. We give priority to the recovery and documentation of local knowledge, without overlooking the importance of outside knowledge. AGRECOL refers to all this as knowledge management.

Documenting local knowledge implies a respect for the tradition of transferring knowledge across the generations, trusting the creative and innovative capacities of men and women. Documentation which is based in words and images allows for a communication and information exchange process between communities; more so if it is done in their language and from their own perspectives. This article presents a participatory communication process which used information technologies (ITs) in the knowledge management activities of rural communities in Bolivia. This is the result of a project called "ITs for documentation and exchange of experiences in ecological agriculture", funded by the International Institute of Communications for Development (IICD). Started by AGRECOL in mid 2003, it was carried out with 15 organisations from five departments in Bolivia, concentrating on topics such as soil management, natural resources, management of native forests, ecological agriculture, irrigation management and fruit growing. This project aimed at showing the effectiveness of a documentation methodology where farmers, with the help of digital cameras, were to be in charge of the whole process.

Background

Before trying to include the use of IT in its work, AGRECOL already had lots of experience with farmer-to-farmer exchange visits. For more than five years it had organised exchange trips, where farmers from one community would visit another. Farmers were able to get specific information from other areas, motivating them to copy the agroecological techniques they had seen. These experiences, based on the Farmer-to-Farmer model, showed many interesting results, but they also faced several limitations. Perhaps the most obvious is the cost of each visit, especially when trips are long. But there were other limitations: it is difficult for women to leave their houses and participate, and there is frequently little exchange of information between those who go on a trip and those who do not.

Over the years we had observed that some farmers took a small tape recorder, and many more took a camera on their field trips, eager to show what they had seen to their friends and relatives. It became clear that photographs are very important to farmers, often generating conversations, and also promoting reflection and debate. In a society that for centuries has expressed itself through visual images and symbols, photographs complement the traditional paintings, weaving patterns and ceramics as communication and documentation methods. Images are



Photo: AGRECOL

Farmer from the village Muruqu Marka, in Ayllu Layme, in the north of Potosí, practicing taking pictures using a digital camera.

important to keep the collective memory of a community alive, and photography is increasingly contributing to this. This is especially relevant today, when local knowledge is rapidly being lost as a result of migration and the undervaluing of local traditions and culture.

On the basis of our experience and the social and cultural context, the project decided to introduce digital cameras as the main technology to be used in the documentation of farmers' experiences. Digital photography has several advantages: digital cameras are very simple to use and it is quite easy to get a high quality photo. Film is not needed, nor are laboratories necessary for developing the photos; images are visible almost immediately, and may be duplicated at no extra cost. Having chosen the technology, we had to think of a participatory method which would help us get the whole community involved in the documentation process, and which would ensure that the process responded to their needs and interests. Our challenge was to come up with a method which would be different to the usual ideas about how to document local experiences. Farmers were to take the photos instead of being photographed, changing from passive receivers to actors in the knowledge management process. In short, farmers were to be the authors of a documentary, based on their own experiences and knowledge.

The method

This method is divided into three main parts:

1. The documentation proper

The first phase consists of the collection of concrete experiences on sustainable agriculture. Contact with the communities was usually established by a local NGO or project. The process starts with all those involved describing the experience. Next, a script is written, defining the main things to be documented and the technology to be used. Having agreed on a basic structure, the documentation is carried out by facilitators chosen by the community (previously trained for the use of the equipment) together with the farmers involved in the experience.

2. Editing the document

The information gathered as audio files and images is organised and put together in a PowerPoint presentation. Once again, this is done by the local facilitators, who have taken part in a training workshop on basic computer skills. With the help of AGRECOL staff, a first version is finalised.

3. Checking and sharing

The process is completed with the presentation of the documentary to the community, where anyone may comment, add or correct what is being presented. The document is later spread throughout the community, and is also shown in other areas as part of a new experience-exchanging trip. PowerPoint programmes can also be translated into other document types which do not need a computer or projection equipment, such as handouts or leaflets.

Through these basic documentation activities it was possible to present local experiences, and at the same time generate new knowledge. In the project's initial two years, 15 organisations from different regions of Bolivia were able to document 34 cases. Most of these were presented in the 12 field trips which were organised afterwards. Each group chose another experience to visit, and took their own document on the trip. During the trip the visiting groups also documented their impressions, so that exchange became a "giving and receiving" event that was possible to share afterwards.

After this first attempt, several communities asked to continue and document other experiences. Not only was the process interesting, but it also proved very useful for sharing the activities done and the lessons learnt within a household (with their own children), or when trying to get the attention of the local authorities. In some cases, the whole experience proved useful as a marketing technique for their produce, or as part of the material needed for training other farmers. It was therefore necessary to establish certain basic conditions so that the process could continue independently. As a result of these efforts, for example, farmers in the municipality of Colomi now organise their own workshops and use photos in CD and DVD format to present their experiences in ecological agriculture. In many places, DVD has become a common technology as it is cheaper than video recorder and cassettes. In the Yungas region, women use the documentation process to promote their natural health products. Farmers working on soil conservation techniques in Northern Potosi have started to present their experiences at different events, and these activities have helped them to prepare a new project proposal. These examples give some ideas about what the documented experiences can be used for.

The first step was to make the necessary technology available: a camera and a computer. Interested organisations were offered a computer, as long as they bought a digital camera with their own money. Four organisations were thus helped; all of them also provided housing facilities for the equipment and for a small documentation centre in their communities. Specific training courses are also held in these centres now for those interested in learning more about computers.

Image-based collective documentation

In the course of two years we have seen that a documentation process based on images is relevant and works well, no matter what the culture, language, age or education level of those involved. It adjusts itself to different themes, needs and specific interests. At the same time, it facilitates a collective approach. Every photo puts across a special meaning, and each one carries

a little bit of each one of the participants. We all have something to show and something to say; we are all part of the community. This is how local knowledge is understood, as a collective knowledge which can be shared with other communities and which enriches itself from the same practice. In this sense, a documentary prepared by a farmer with a digital camera needs no further elaboration. The message –or what farmers try to express– does not need to be translated or shaped according to a given structure. Photographic technicalities are not more important than the meaning of an image.

Information technology is increasing in the rural areas, especially due to the greater spread of telephone communications. But this widespread connectivity is not related to a greater capacity in generating relevant local information for sustainable local development. This methodology of farmer documentation provides a greater access to information, as well as possibilities for storing and spreading it. More importantly, it is helping them to strengthen their communication abilities. The documentation process emphasises the creation of a collective living memory among the different local people. It is also useful as an instrument to strengthen their relationship with the local authorities and with other development organisations.



Photo: AGRECOL

Farmers learning how to handle information technology in the new telecentre of the Ayllu Majasalla Mujlli, Japo k'asa community, Tapacari Province, Cochabamba.

There is therefore significant potential for the use of digital technology in the sustainable development process. The challenge facing all those involved is not only related to the access that rural communities have to information technologies, but also in achieving a self-sustaining process. In this sense, having finished the first phase of the project in 2005, AGRECOL now wants to share it with other interested institutions and organisations, and then consolidate a communication network which can facilitate an increasing exchange of information and experiences. ■

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Photographs from the field

Paul Van Mele

“A picture is worth a thousand words.” Although there is plenty of truth in this popular saying, photos can do more than communicate or be published. This brief article describes how photos from the field have been used for many different purposes with farmers, project partners and colleagues.

Farmers and their innovations

Stimulate pride. Most farmers love it when you take photos of their innovations, and they are even more excited when receiving a copy later. I used this approach in Bangladesh to gather community feedback on multipurpose seed drying tables. Using a second-hand 20 dollar colour printer that I carried with me, digital photographs were printed on A4 sheets (the size of this page). Once laminated, they were displayed in a village photo exhibition.

Creative thinking. Later on, a local NGO in Bangladesh used some of these photos to encourage innovations in other parts of the country. But before showing the photos of the drying tables, women were given laminated A4-size colour photographs, showing daily drying activities, and were encouraged to describe the advantages and disadvantages of each of these. These sessions were held to stimulate the creative thinking process. Only then were the photos of the drying tables shown. Of the 570 participating women, 60-70 percent of them made their own multipurpose seed drying table.

Women-to-women. Apart from the high adoption rate in project villages, 5-10 percent of women in neighbouring villages made a drying table. Not bad, but it could have been better. Selina Akhter, one of the participants said: “I can motivate anybody to make a table, and if I would have a photo of my drying table, I would show it and discuss with others whenever I go out.” This has not been explored so far, but surely opens up new routes for women-to-women extension.

Ownership in participatory research. In another project, staff took regular photos of farmers at their “Insecticide” and “No insecticide” plots of their field. They were glued into the farmers’ field note books to visualise differences in crop performance and to stimulate ownership of the trials.

With partners in the field

Mirror, mirror on the wall. I have also experimented with showing people photographs of their own performance during group activities and farmer interviews. Each team had to evaluate the positive and negative points in terms of facilitation and participation. After 10 minutes groups swapped photographs until all had commented on all photographs. The session ended with a discussion after each had presented what they had learnt. Interpretations varied, but photos surely proved a useful self-evaluation and learning tool.

Getting focused. While documenting various PETTRA sub-projects (see “Learning through writing”, page 24), I asked staff to show me photos of their activities. This helped to narrow the communication gap in some cases, but more often it allowed me to ask more relevant questions.



Photo: Author

Zabed and Hatem Ali present photographs of their seed drying tables. They proudly show the photos to others in their own and neighbouring communities.

Tact and subtlety. However, taking good photos requires skills and practice. Photographers need to be aware of cultural and social sensitivities. Also when photographing farmers during training events, subtlety is required. On one occasion I attended a farmer-to-farmer extension session. My visit to the project as an outsider coincided with the project team preparing themselves for a seminar. There were four or five cameras being used. This, of course, was an exception: in most projects there is often no camera at all. As with participatory video, a photo camera could be handed over to one of the farmers to document their activities.

Back in the office

Apart from the polite ‘How was your trip?’, colleagues rarely ask more detailed questions. Showing them a few selected photos often starts a good discussion on an unexpected topic. Colleagues see things that you had not noticed, or see the same thing through a different pair of glasses.

Suggestions for project managers

We recommend project managers to assign part of their budget for monitoring and evaluation to strengthen a project’s capacity in documenting, reflecting and learning. Providing field teams with a basic digital camera (3 megapixels) should be accompanied by a short training course on how to take good photographs, how to file them, and how to use them as a learning tool. As shown here, they can be very useful. On top of all this, photographs nicely complement narratives and make reports more attractive to read.

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Participatory Video as a documentation tool

Chris Lunch

Local initiatives are often documented and disseminated by outsiders, who make their own interpretations in the process, and use them for their own ends. Or, they are not documented at all. Participatory Video provides an opportunity for rural people to document their own experiences and knowledge and to express their wants and hopes from their own viewpoints. Insight, an NGO based in Europe, was set up in an attempt to enable communities and groups around the world to carry out their own form of sustainable development based on local needs. Insight tries to do something which is very straightforward and very obvious – placing video cameras into the hands of those who know best. It doesn't matter if they are literate or illiterate, if they are rich or poor, male or female, old or young – the visual method allows everyone to record and tell their story, and to get their voice heard. If a picture speaks a thousand words, then a video must speak a million!

All people in a community can use video to document and communicate their experiences and perspectives. Participatory video is a potentially strong addition to existing farmer-to-farmer and community-to-community mechanisms for exchanging information, such as story-telling and local markets. The completed films can be used to promote awareness and exchange within the same community and in other communities.

Why participatory video?

Participatory video can be used in improving documentation and communication skills, in advocacy, and in problem-solving, all of which contribute to community empowerment. Participatory video is based on visual and verbal communication. As such, it has great potential to add to indigenous means of communication and documentation which are also primarily visual and verbal. Participatory video provides a way for farmers to communicate their ideas, innovations, theories and decisions not only to each other but also to formal researchers and development agents. The films produced give real insights, going beyond statistics and reports. These films can be shown to villages, groups, politicians, scientists, aid organisations and decision makers locally, nationally and globally. Participatory video presents an "inside" view in a lively way.

Clearly, special equipment is needed to make and show videos, but a growing number of NGOs and even community-based organisations now have access to this equipment. Video films can also be easily copied onto CD-ROMs and can then be viewed using a laptop computer or via the internet. In this way, participatory video can bring local experiences and knowledge into a global network, allowing all relevant actors to learn from each other.

The participatory video process

The process is, in essence, extremely simple, and the equipment required is increasingly affordable. This is the way the process works:

- Local people learn how to use video equipment through games and exercises facilitated by outsiders.
- Facilitators help the participants to identify and analyze important issues in their community by adapting a range of participatory tools and then planning how to show this on video.

- The video messages are directed and filmed by the local groups.
- The footage is shown to the wider community at daily screenings.
- A dynamic exchange of community-led learning, sharing and exchange is set in motion.
- Completed films are used for communication with and between many different people and organizations.

Example from Turkmenistan

A recent example of participatory video is the Insight project carried out in Turkmenistan, Central Asia, in association with the European Union Tacis programme. Between 2001 and 2003, Tacis had set up five Voluntary Farmers Associations. The aim of the activities was to help strengthen these new community-based organisations. The approach was to enable members from two of the associations to communicate what was involved in setting up such an association and what they regarded as the benefits. By explaining the aims and objectives of the farmers associations in a clear way to local and national policymakers, researchers and international donors, the idea of farmer-led innovation was promoted and support for the Voluntary Farmer Association concept was gained. This process also helped villagers to identify challenges and opportunities for development and to explore ideas for the future.



Photo: Author

Handing over control of the camera and the process.

One of the main problems identified by the villagers was that many of them had little knowledge of family farming. For 70 years, a centralised state-farm system had prevailed, in which each person's task had been very specialised. With the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 and the gradual deconstruction of the state farms, the villagers now lease land from the State and are responsible for every aspect of the farming process, including repairing irrigation systems and growing, harvesting and selling the produce in the newly-emerged free market. The villagers emphasised the need to learn from the more experienced local farmers and to re-discover traditional methods of conserving water, storing produce, or drying

fruit. This traditional knowledge still exists, but is held by only a small number of individuals. There are also some individuals in the villages who were highly trained in their given area during the Soviet period and who are now applying this knowledge in their own household plots. The members of the Voluntary Farmer Associations were quick to understand the potential of video to record and disseminate the various kinds of knowledge more widely and to give less experienced farmers the chance to learn from the village “experts”, innovators and keepers of traditional knowledge. Within a very short time, they were already planning and shooting their own short training films, showing tools they had developed, explaining how they were made, giving tips and advice on how to care for particular plants, and so on. They also decided to make a film with a local elder who was highly regarded as an innovator and specialist in growing flowers to sell on the market (see box). During the process of making these short films, footage was regularly shown to the wider community in evening screening sessions. The villagers were proud to see themselves and their neighbours in the films and felt that their knowledge and experience were being recognized and valued. These community screenings also generated a local exchange of ideas and experience and encouraged others to become involved in the participatory video project.

Babakuly's film

Babakuly wanted to make a short film, involving neighbours, friends and relatives, to explore the benefits of using greenhouses to optimise production on small household plots. He started his film by interviewing his uncle, the first in the region to build a greenhouse (30 years ago) and now successfully growing roses and cut flowers for the local market. The uncle explained the importance of sharing experiences since there was so much to learn. Babakuly then arranged a filmed discussion between him and a neighbour, in which they calculate that one fifth of the total yearly income from greenhouse-grown products (which sell for five times the price of seasonal vegetables) can cover all associated costs. Babakuly ended his film by explaining that, despite obvious financial benefits, many farmers cannot use greenhouses because of either lack of knowledge or lack of funds for building materials. He suggested that locally made videos could be used to convey information to the farmers, and that small, short-term loans should be made available to help them start.

Working with women

In Turkmenistan, as in many other countries, it is often a challenge to include women in the process of community action research. The team that was facilitating the participatory video process included a female trainee. Her assessment was that the participatory video methods were able to achieve results in situations where other methods of Participatory Rural Assessment had failed. She gave, as an example, the first workshop which local women attended. “The women didn’t want to draw anything or discuss any issues. They told us they were too busy and wanted to go home. We then started to use participatory video tools and they became very excited. We did the ‘Name Game’, where each person has the chance to interview and film and speak into the camera. When we watched it together, they found it funny and were proud of what they had achieved. It really broke the ice and they became more confident and interested in our project. The next day they invited us to their house and gathered more women.” Local women were soon taking the video equipment around the village and conducting interviews with other villagers (generally women). They also produced short films. One of these focused on the mini milk processing plant installed by Tacis. Milk production and processing is an increasingly important means of income

generation. Not all women know how to produce high-quality products and many are inexperienced in dealing with the needs and opportunities of a free market. Once again, video in the hands of local people was able to illustrate and share the ways in which old and new knowledge is equally important in post-soviet Turkmenistan. These and many other essential aspects of village life and indigenous knowledge could not have been represented without the full participation of local women.

Using the videos for learning

Within a month, the facilitator of the participatory video process in Turkmenistan compiled and edited a collection of the short videos. This version was first shown to villagers in the communities where the films had been made. It was then used in workshops in other villages as a tool to provoke self-evaluation and situation analysis. The villagers could identify with the video messages made by people in the same situation as they were in. There was an approving murmur amongst the men in the audience when one farmer in the film displayed the tools he had developed for working in his greenhouses. Animated discussions followed the part of the film when a woman describes to her husband behind the camera how they prevent flies from damaging stored grapes by smoking them with a special plant (it transpired that this method was not practised, or had perhaps been forgotten, in this other village). Copies of the video were left with key people in the villages and with local video-lending shops.

In Ashgabat, the capital of Turkmenistan, the participatory video facilitator arranged a screening of the completed film to 30 guests at the British Ambassador’s residence. These included high-level representatives from a number of international donor agencies, embassies and local organisations active in the agricultural sector. The reaction was unanimously positive, a lively discussion followed and several donor agencies pledged to continue supporting the development of Farmers Associations throughout Turkmenistan. The day after the film screening, the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe invited the participatory video facilitator to take part in a discussion group where plans were made to develop a micro-credit scheme in these and other farming communities. This was largely motivated by Babakuly’s film. The film was also shown to two senior officials in the Turkmenistan Ministry of Agriculture. They were very interested in the achievements of the Tacis programme and expressed their support for the continued spread of the Voluntary Farmers Associations model.

Major lessons learnt

The project in Turkmenistan has shown that local people are quick to take control of the participatory video process and to recognize its potential as a tool for sharing experience and local knowledge between different groups of farmers. Participants develop greater self-confidence and a sense that they can improve their own lives. Participants on a recent course in Ghana stated, during the evaluation, that they realised the value of participatory video for community documentation and participation, and that it allows the reality of community experiences and life to be explored and shared. However, how can these methods be brought in to mainstream political decision making? We think these methods hold the key to delivering those often repeated, hollow slogans: inclusion, participation and people-led research and development. ■

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Recording the useful plants of tropical Africa

Jan Siemonsma and Leo Oyen

Plant Resources of Tropical Africa, PROTA, is an international programme which aims to compile and document the existing knowledge on around 7000 useful plants of tropical Africa. Under each documented plant species, detailed information is given on the use and properties, production and trade, botany, agronomy, processing and genetic resources. The information is made available in various forms (see also LEISA Magazine 20.1, March 2004) and will be published in a web-database, a 16-volume series of books and on CD-ROMs.

The PROTA programme networks with organisations in Africa and in Europe as well as with an extensive informal group of authors, of which more than 50 percent are from Africa. The main PROTA office at Wageningen University and Research Centre, in the Netherlands, coordinates two offices in Europe, in the United Kingdom and in France, as well as one office in Nairobi, Kenya. The PROTA office in Nairobi, in turn, coordinates the work of people in 15 African countries, all documenting “grey literature” on plant resources.

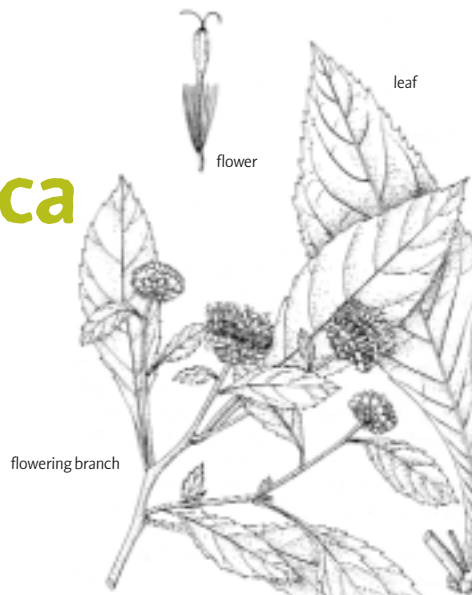
Documentation process

About a dozen standard books have been used to list the estimated 7000 useful plant species of tropical Africa and to divide these into 16 commodity groups on the basis of their main use. Examples are the commodity groups “Cereals and pulses”, “Vegetables” and “Dyes and tannins”, all of which have already been published.

Two experts are appointed as editors for the coordination of the work on each commodity group; generally, one editor from Africa and one based in the Wageningen office. In consultation with members of the PROTA network, the editors assign the plant species of their commodity group to external authors, selected on the basis of their proven knowledge. For some of the plant species, authors are (still) sought through “calls for authors” on the PROTA website. Becoming a contributing author gives an opportunity to participate in this knowledge synthesis. For species on which information is very scarce, PROTA itself makes an effort to write an account.

To assist its authors, PROTA has two databases of scientific literature on useful plants of tropical Africa. WORLDREFS (with over 375 000 records) comprises references to the more easily accessible, international literature. The second database, called AFRIREFS (with currently 16 000 records), is being compiled by staff in different African countries. This database contains references – with abstracts – to less-accessible literature and records. Selected information from both databases is available for PROTA authors.

When species accounts have been written, they are reviewed by the editors. The editors can decide to make use of additional sources of information, considering topics such as pharmacology or wood anatomy, to complete the account. In the entire documentation process due attention is given to intellectual property rights. Whenever unpublished information is included, care is taken to ensure that no rights ensuing from the information are violated. The accounts of the major species are accompanied by one or more illustrations, such as photographs, distribution maps as well as botanical drawings. A review by an



Vernonia hymenolepis, a plant species from tropical Africa. Its leaves are eaten as a vegetable in many West African countries. Redrawn and adapted by Iskak Syamsudi, in “PROTA 2, Vegetables”.

English language editor finalizes the English version of the account, after which it is translated into French.

From documentation to impact

PROTA started in 2000 and to date the PROTABASE (freely accessible at www.prota.org) has about 500 records of species, belonging to the 3 completed and published commodity groups mentioned above. Since most plants have multiple uses, the web-database will give search results for any of the 16 commodity groups. For instance, a search for “medicinal plants” will show that 330 out of the approximately 500 species documented have a medicinal application, and a search for “fruits” will indicate that 73 species also yield an edible fruit. The web-database is fully bilingual (English and French) and many of the articles are richly illustrated.

The completion of a commodity group is followed by an international consultation process with different interested parties, in order to arrive at some practical recommendations for optimal use of the information compiled to six target groups: rural development agencies including extension, the private sector, vocational training, higher education, research, and policymakers in government. After the completion of the PROTA volume on vegetables, in 2004, this consultation process led to a special product: a guidebook with the title “Vegetables of tropical Africa: Conclusions and recommendations based on PROTA 2”. This product consists of ten modules; four general modules categorising all information on vegetables and six modules addressing the interests of different user groups. One module of this guidebook on “Candidate technologies” is intended for practitioners in rural development and vocational training. It has already resulted in the implementation of 4 small projects in tropical Africa, funded by the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

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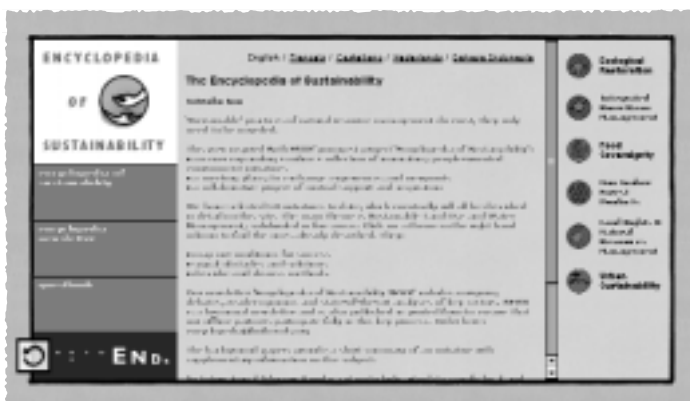
The complimentary CD-ROM, which is enclosed for LEISA Magazine subscribers in Africa, contains 39 review articles, representing a selection of species from each of the 16 commodity groups. Because PROTABASE is continuously updated, it is recommended to also consult the web-database for the most recent version of these accounts. For those in Africa who have no adequate access to the internet, printed and off-line electronic products are available. Please contact the PROTA Network Office Africa, c/o ICRAF, P.O. Box 30677, Nairobi, Kenya; E-mail: prota.kenya@cgiar.org, or the PROTA Network Office Europe, c/o Wageningen University, P.O. Box 341, 6700 AH Wageningen, The Netherlands; E-mail: prota@wur.nl

The Encyclopedia of Sustainability

Tamara Mohr

There is a growing awareness worldwide that conventional natural resource management approaches have given rise to serious problems of injustice and social conflict, and to the slow disappearance of local management systems. Many of these problems have been analysed and documented, and campaigns have been developed around them: for instance on the impacts of the Green Revolution or of large-scale agricultural production for export, or on the impacts of genetically modified organisms. Groups of concerned people have become organised to discuss, coordinate actions and campaign in order to prevent further damage and to overturn policies that promote these approaches.

Over the years, Both ENDS, a Dutch environment and development organisation that supports inspiring environmental initiatives all over the world, realised that most of the requests it received for information, or for support in fundraising and campaigning, focused on these problems. At the same time, it became clear that many of the organisations that contacted Both ENDS had been developing natural resource management initiatives using approaches based on local realities, knowledge and needs so as to preserve or restore fragile ecosystems which support local livelihoods. This showed that “sustainable” practices of natural resource management do exist; they only need to be revealed.



The Encyclopedia on the internet at <http://www.bothends.org>.

Documenting practical solutions

After extensive consultation with partners, Both ENDS and a number of other NGOs and local organisations worldwide agreed to start a long-term project, called the “Encyclopedia of Sustainability”, in support of those initiatives. This is a new instrument which supports environment and development NGOs and grassroots organisations in documenting their experiences, in capacity building and information sharing, as well as in facilitating public debate. The cases described in the Encyclopedia allow local organisations and networks to demonstrate concrete examples of solutions to environmental management problems, showing ways to achieve social and ecological sustainable development. They also aim to help generate more recognition for the many valuable initiatives that rarely get any attention.

Initiatives that are selected to be included in the Encyclopedia of Sustainability are rooted in local people’s experience and

knowledge, are managed bottom-up, and combine traditional knowledge with modern techniques. The aim is to establish a long-term working relationship with such an organisation or initiative. Thanks to the support of Oxfam Netherlands and the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Both ENDS is able to provide financial support in the form of small grants that enable organisations to invest in activities that are not often supported by conventional donors. Some examples include: organising exchange visits, developing manuals, establishing networks or coalitions among organisations for mutual strengthening, and developing joint policy proposals based on concrete, viable initiatives.

Encyclopedia in practice

An important part of the Encyclopedia’s work is the development of a case description of around seven pages. A specific format for the case description and some advisory support is provided, but the organisations or groups formulate most cases themselves. The format not only provides the opportunity to present the highlights of an experience, but also the socio-economic and ecological context, as well as obstacles and challenges and how people respond to these. The whole documentation phase can take as much as several months to over a year, as the focus is not only on the end product, but also on the process and the discussion it raises between the documenters, local stakeholders and Both ENDS.

Documenting inspiring initiatives is an exercise in itself. It can generate discussions that contribute to the internal processes of an organisation, and about the content of their work, as well as on how to present themselves. But it is also very difficult for most organisations to clearly and briefly translate complicated processes into words, especially in relation to the socio-economic background or achievements. For the organisations or groups involved, the circumstances in which they do their work are so obvious and familiar that it is difficult to take the necessary distance to be able to explain it clearly to outsiders. The second difficulty arises because it can be hard to define exactly what can be seen as concrete achievements in an ongoing process. Another frequent challenge is the requirement to include an analysis of the economic viability of the specific initiative.

The Encyclopedia focuses on six main themes: Food Sovereignty, Ecological Restoration, Integrated River Basin Management, Land Rights and Natural Resource Management, Non Timber Forest Products and Urban Sustainability. The final case descriptions include pictures, website links, information on the organisation, and suggested reading materials. They are published on Both ENDS’ website in Spanish, English, French and Indonesian, and are used in several ways. Hard copies are distributed among related groups and used for an international audience, at conferences and to provide input during policy discussions. Some organisations use their case description as a background paper for fundraising.

What follows shows two of the cases included in the Encyclopedia: the first looks at a successful biological pest control initiative in Bolivia, where “bio-regulators” are used as a viable, and now officially recognised, alternative to using agrochemicals. This example also highlights the role of the women involved as the main agents for change. The second example

Box 1. Objectives of the Encyclopedia

The overall objectives of the Encyclopedia are: to offer adequate support for local/regional natural resource management initiatives within the framework of the Encyclopedia based upon a common understanding of local/regional priorities; to exchange such experiences and lessons with other NGOs and grassroots organisations; and to bring these examples to the attention of policy makers and other sectors as a means to gain recognition and influence policies. The Encyclopedia of Sustainability encompasses three Phases: Phase I (1998-2000) aimed to develop and test the approach and to identify and document a range of strong initiatives. Phase II (2001-2003) focused on expanding the range of initiatives and to support organisations in strengthening their cases. Phase III (2004-2006) aims at promoting policy reform by presenting a convincing body of evidence which shows that locally rooted sustainable strategies for development are often viable and superior to conventional non-sustainable approaches.

describes the Analog Forestry model, a method to restore deforested land, the implementation of which has been documented in two different ecosystems (Ecuador and Sri Lanka).

Biological pest control

In Bolivia, the intensive and irrational use of synthetic fertilizers, pesticides, fungicides and herbicides are a constant hazard to soil fertility and productivity, to the quality of food products, and the health of the population. At the same time, indigenous crops have been replaced by various high yielding species promoted during the Green Revolution. The high susceptibility of these market-oriented crops to pests and diseases, coupled with the growing resistance of pests to chemicals, has alarmed farmers because of the significant losses they have seen in their harvests. International manufacturers of agro-chemicals and “commercial” and genetically modified seeds only try to increase the farmers’ dependency on these inputs.

Therefore, fifteen years ago, the Bolivian NGO PROBIOMA decided to establish a bio-regulator diagnosis and production centre. This centre is developing the mass production of “bio-regulators”, promoting the natural balance already existing in nature, but which has worsened and/or been lost by the excessive use of agro-chemical products. This technique is based on the use of over 300 fungus and nematode species that are capable of controlling over 40 pests and diseases in more than 38 crops. This initiative is the first in Bolivia and one of the first in Latin America. They also succeeded in officially registering bio-regulators in Bolivia.

The transfer of bio-regulators to farmers is carried out in field demonstrations to local farmer organisations. To this end, a strategy was designed to cover different areas and regions by involving facilitators. A facilitator is someone external to PROBIOMA, who is trained in the use of biological control agents. The facilitator covers a particular area which is not always within PROBIOMA’s area of influence; he or she receives a percentage of the revenue for the sale of products. Using this strategy, around 3000 farmers were reached during five years of transfer efforts and covering an area of over 70 000 hectares in Bolivia. Biological control is now also being applied by the soya bean industry in Bolivia on an area of

40 000 hectares, with a subsequent performance improvement of 15 percent.

Restoration of degraded lands

The Neo Synthesis Research Centre (NSRC) was established as a non-profit organisation to facilitate research, and is based in the village of Mirahawatte, in the Uva Basin of Sri Lanka. Their primary concern has been to develop methods of land management which reduce erosion, permit soil formation, enhance water quality and biodiversity, and provide farmers with a source of income. Since its establishment, NSRC has worked with scientists, students, agriculturalists and government representatives from Sri Lanka as well as other countries. NSRC hopes to reverse the trend of global forest loss and environmental degradation through education. The power of the market place is also used to bring about changes in land use patterns that are sensitive to social, economic and ecological conditions.

Analog Forestry is the name for one particular model of agroforestry and sustainable ecosystem management being promoted by NSRC. This provides options for restoring deforested and degraded land, while at the same time offering people new sources of food, income and other essential needs. Analog Forestry systems are an imitation of the architectural structure and function of the original forest vegetation. The Analog Forestry system was developed by building on a blend of local traditional knowledge and modern science. It recovers and values indigenous knowledge, creating systems that are familiar to traditional societies. At the same time, they can meet the present needs of local communities, in terms of maintaining biodiversity while providing food and income to their increasing populations.



Photo: Furare

Reforestation project at the Information Centre in Los Bancos, Ecuador. One of the projects documented and included in the Encyclopedia of Sustainability.

Impact of the Encyclopedia

Based on the documentation of the success story on biological control methods in Bolivia, support was found for a responsible management program for soya bean products, which involves 2000 small soya bean producers. In addition, more experiences on organic soya bean production are being documented, while support has been obtained for the documentation of research into the opportunities for biological control as a means to restore degraded and contaminated soils. Another result of the inclusion of PROBIOMA's case in the Encyclopedia, is the frequent visits to the PROBIOMA website by many organisations and corporations from all over the world seeking information about the biological control of different crop pests and diseases. The impact of soya bean production is an important issue on the advocacy agenda of both PROBIOMA and Both ENDS, which acts as the secretariat of the Dutch Soy Coalition. PROBIOMA's practical work contributes to the discussions on responsible soya bean production in South America and to the ongoing struggle against the use of genetically modified organisms.

The distribution of the case studies on Analog Forestry contributed to generating interest in the technique and to the formation of the International Analog Forestry Network, which offers the opportunity for groups to exchange experiences as well as seeds and seedlings. This network also organises training for groups interested in learning about Analog Forestry, and is setting up an international system for certification of forest garden products. They are also promoting the model to as many governments, NGOs, research institutes and other interested parties as possible.

In Sri Lanka, Both ENDS is collaborating with the Dutch government, various local organisations, a public partner and a commercial tea estate in scaling up the Analog Forestry method to plantation level. "Rainforest tea" will be produced, sold and labelled as "ecologically sustainable, socially sound and economically viable".

Influencing policy-makers

It is difficult for grassroots organisations and NGOs to obtain scientific attention or political support and funds. For example, in crop pest management, where such organisations promote Integrated Pest Management techniques, mainstream activities tend to receive whatever donor aid may be available. In the face of dominant lobby groups with strong inside interests (e.g. commercial contractors, politicians) ecological alternatives often meet with doubt, prejudice or even opposition.

Besides strengthening development work at the local, regional or national level, the aim of the Encyclopedia of Sustainability is also to join forces at the international level and to convince policy makers. For instance, representatives from two countries promoted the Analog Forestry model at international gatherings. After a presentation at the UN conference on desertification in 2005, the government of Zimbabwe showed great interest in supporting the replication of Analog Forestry projects in dryland

areas. The Cuban government also wants to start large scale Analog Forestry implementation to restore degraded lands. In Sri Lanka, the Government Water Board now supports a large scale Analog Forestry project with local farmers, in order to clean the ground water for drinking wells and large water reservoirs for city water consumption. In addition, a system of certification of forest garden products was successfully set up and forest products have entered the local and international market. The model is also used in areas hit by the tsunami, for restoring natural barriers and increasing food security for vulnerable groups.

Over the years, advocacy efforts based on cases documented in the Encyclopedia have led to the development of joint project proposals such as one on river basin management, in which organisations worldwide present innovative, locally initiated basin management strategies, that show how bottom-up, ecosystem-based approaches can be repeated and scaled up to effectively influence decision-making at national and basin level. Both ENDS has also joined several Encyclopedia partners in preparing and presenting their work and views at international meetings such as the World Water Fora, the World Summit on Sustainable Development, and several Conferences of Parties of the UN. Both ENDS also facilitates networking among similar initiatives or helps groups to inspire others to replicate their work. This leads to the establishment of coalitions and networks residing in different countries or even continents. Examples are the International Analog Forestry Network, the Association for Responsible Mining, and the Non Timber Forest Products Exchange Programme, aiming at the exchange of information and experiences and at strengthening local initiatives related to this issue in Southeast Asia. Support from Both ENDS can, however, also result in cooperation between local groups, such as in the case of the Legal and Environmental Advisory Forum in Bastar, a southern district of Chattisgarh State in central India.

The Encyclopedia project is an ongoing activity and this documentation of initiatives plays an important role in other projects and programmes of Both ENDS. On many occasions, it forms the basis of our work, as we recognise the value of the documentation process itself as well as the necessity to be able to make use of documented experiences in many circumstances. Writing your work down and analysing what you do increases the visibility of your work and views. One of the challenges that remain is how to document initiatives in such a way that it will convince policy makers and will catch the attention of other players in the field. ■

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More information:

- Association for Responsible Mining: <http://www.communitymining.org>
- Non Timber Forest Products: <http://www.ntfp.org>
- PROBIOMA: <http://www.probioma.org.bo>

Visit our website: www.leisa.info



Roshan Numa being interviewed by Hussn Bibi in Shimshal, Northern Pakistan.

Listening to individual voices

Siobhan Warrington

"I learned how to listen. I found out that listening is more than just hearing. I thought I knew about the issues, but with getting stories from the individuals themselves, I was enriched."

Lenka, fieldworker and oral testimony interviewer, Lesotho

It is important for a group of people sharing the same natural resource base to be able to record and communicate their knowledge and understanding of their environment. Within communities who have traditionally been dependant on their surrounding environment for their livelihood, there exists a huge amount of wisdom about the resources themselves, as well as different ways to manage and sustain these, and about the way these resources and their management have changed over time. While there are many different ways to record and communicate such environmental knowledge, the purpose of this article is to present a methodology that Panos London has been using since 1993: the oral testimony.

Panos London works with the media and other actors to stimulate informed and inclusive debate around key issues in order to foster sustainable development. Its aim is to ensure that the perspectives of the people whose lives are most affected by development (mainly the poor and marginalised) are included within decision-making and that decisions are subject to their scrutiny and debate. *"Listening for a Change: oral testimony and development"*, published in 1993, paved the way for Panos to use and promote the use of the stories of individuals in the development context.

Why Oral Testimonies?

While "testimony" can have legal or other meanings, Panos refers to oral testimonies as the result of open-ended, in-depth interviews,

usually carried out on a one-to-one basis. Although drawing on direct personal experience and memory, this methodology focuses on development themes rather than on an individual's life history. Panos thus prefers to use the term "oral testimony", rather than life story or oral history. The interviews are recorded and then transcribed word-for-word. A topic list and key questions are used rather than formal questionnaires, but the interview is also guided by the personal knowledge and experience of the person being interviewed. We use the term "narrator" rather than "interviewee" to reflect the fact that they are narrating their story, rather than answering the interviewer's questions.

A commitment to the process – the way the testimonies are gathered – as well as the product (the oral testimonies themselves) has influenced Panos' approach, and so community involvement and capacity building are key objectives. Panos trains and supports local organisations and people to record and disseminate the views and experiences of those usually excluded from the international development debate. The communities we work with are often marginalised by illiteracy, poverty, gender, disability, caste, religion or ethnic identity.

The use of participatory research tools is widespread and creative, and there is an increasing use of "voices" in the communication of development issues. Many participatory research tools are designed to be used with groups of people and they work towards some sort of group agreement. Whilst working with groups has its own merits, taking an individual approach helps everyone to understand how different individuals within the same community can experience or view the same event or situation in different ways. Oral testimony does not rely on consensus; rather it celebrates the at times awkward differences and contradictions between individuals. And it does

not replace more formal, quantitative research, but it complements and illuminates it. Oral testimonies are vivid, personal and direct; they challenge the generalisations of development literature and explain to planners and policymakers about what it feels like to be at the sharp end of development.

What's different about Oral Testimony?

This method shows some specific advantages. One is that the interviewees are men and women from the same or similar communities to those where they will be collecting testimonies. This means that interviewing is done in local languages, in relaxed settings, between people who share aspects of each other's backgrounds. Interviewers need to be good listeners, non-judgemental and patient, encouraging and willing to learn, and they need to understand the issues affecting the narrator's life. In other words, good interviewing is as much, if not more, about personality as it is about training and skills. So even though interviewers are "insiders", they must still be willing and open to learn new things. And as listeners, they should expect to gain in understanding and sensitivity.

At the same time, oral testimony shows the many different parts of an individual's experience. While development interventions are often based on a sector approach (one NGO dealing with health issues, another with the environment), there are no such neat divisions between the many aspects of people's lives. Because of the focus on the individual - rather than on particular development themes - an oral testimony interview lets us see the hidden connections between different aspects of people's lives (for example, between environmental changes and economic decisions, or between the environment and health). Narrators are asked about their past experiences and their hopes for the future as well as about the current situation; this long-term view can provide a deeper understanding of change. For example, Qandoon, a female narrator in her 40s, from Shimshal, Northern Pakistan, talks about the importance of livestock for livelihoods, culture and traditional development strategies:

"We derive a lot of benefits from the livestock. I will tell you in detail. From the wool we fabricate socks, coats, trousers and

"bett" (long woollen overcoat)... Even today we make woollen "bett" and caps for the weddings of our children, which reflect the cultural heritage of this village. In our houses we use the carpets made out of yak's hair, which is very durable. We also sell these carpets in the market. We prepare butter and qurut (dried cheese) which we use in our every day food. So we obtain almost all the necessities of life from the livestock and those who possess more livestock offer part of their livestock and butter to "nomus" (system of donating resources for a community project in the name of a relative), which facilitates development in the village."

Oral testimony helps us to understand the reality of everyday life; the personal stories behind the broad development problems and issues; the kind of information that is often lacking from other development debates. In addition to increasing the representation of the poor and marginalised, the testimonies therefore increase our understanding of certain issues by providing new learnings and viewpoints. The majority of the questions in an oral testimony interview are open-ended; as well as encouraging narrators to do most of the talking, such questioning also allows the unexpected to emerge.

In group discussions or activities it is often the more confident or vocal members of the community who come forward to participate, so these sometimes reinforce the existing power structures within a community. This, combined with the fact they occur in public spaces, can discourage certain individuals from speaking. In contrast, oral testimonies are one-to-one, unhurried, and take place at different times and places that are convenient for the narrator. This approach can increase the likelihood of reaching some of the quieter members of the community - those who are usually spoken for by other people, or may be slightly apart from the centre of community life, because of, for example, gender, age, education, religion or ethnic identity.

Oral testimony is recognised as an effective methodology to access the viewpoints and experiences of women. For the reasons described above, but also because women's lives may be less divided up than men's, the loose form of the oral testimony

Case study: Mount Elgon, Kenya

With support from Panos London, the Kenya Oral Literature Association (KOLA) coordinated a testimony collection on the upper and lower slopes of Mount Elgon, Kenya as part of the International Oral Testimony Mountains project. Given the area's relative fertility, people's concerns were less about the environment, and more about poor access to markets and development facilities, and political marginalisation.

People that time looked at success in terms of the number of livestock one owned...one did not require education to command a big herd of cattle! In fact those who had gone to school had depleted their herds....Right now the population has increased and there is no space for keeping large herds. This has made it imperative for many people to go to school so that they are able to gain employment....Sabaot [people] have...discovered that the power of the pen is mightier than a herd of cattle.
Retired primary school teacher, 57 years old.

...when it comes to the sharing of the national cake, nobody remembers us...Our location in a mountainous region can be an excuse to deny us development, but it can not convince anybody.
Teacher, 36 years old.

We respected the forest because we understood that it attracted the rainfall. We Sabaot [people] also loved honey and we collected honey

from...the forest. We were also hunters and the wildlife in the forest was also a source of meat. Another important thing is that the forest provided us with herbal medicine... this made it imperative for everyone to think of preserving the forest. Anybody cutting down trees unnecessarily would be admonished by the community."
Village elder, 90 years old.

"The Sabaot also want good roads constructed for them because these days we are farmers but we've no roads for taking our produce to markets."
Retired primary school teacher, 57 years old.

At the local level, KOLA published two books based on the testimonies which, being some of the first publications in the Sabaot language, are now being used by local schools and literacy groups. These booklets were launched at a large community event which also brought together local MPs and NGOs working in the region. KOLA also published an English booklet based on the testimonies for NGOs, the media and policymakers. Since their involvement in the Panos project, KOLA has continued to use and advise others on using the methodology in the context of development. All testimonies in the Kenya collection are available worldwide at <http://www.mountainvoices.org>. So are the edited versions in the booklet "Voices from the Mountain: oral testimonies from Mount Elgon, Kenya", available from <http://www.panos.org.uk>.

Box 1. An oral testimony project step-by-step

In general terms, the method follows four major phases:

Training workshop

A 5-day oral testimony training workshop for a team of around 10 local men and women, covering aspects such as: topic development, questioning skills, the interview relationship, ethics and consent, equipment, and the recording and transcribing of a practice interview. Towards the end of the workshop interviewers are involved in planning the projects and outlining initial ideas for dissemination.

Testimony collection (recording and transcription) and translation

The partner coordinates testimony collection – each interviewer records around 3-4 interviews, each ideally lasting 1-2 hours. Interviewers transcribe their testimonies word-for-word into a local or national language. If necessary the partner will arrange for these to be translated.

Review meeting

Half way through the testimony collection the partner, with support from Panos, will organise a review meeting, where all the interviewers will come together to share their experiences of interviewing and do some initial analysis in terms of key themes coming out in the collection and checking the representativeness of narrators in terms of sex, age or identity. This is also a chance for Panos to provide some feedback to the interviewers in terms of interview content and technique.

Making the most of the testimonies

At the local level, testimonies are returned to the individuals and communities who contributed their knowledge and time. Partners are supported to find appropriate ways to share the testimonies to local audiences in order to stimulate discussion and debate. For example, community meetings, radio programmes, newsletters or local language booklets. Nationally, our partners employ different strategies to engage national audiences in the outcomes of the testimonies: roundtable meetings with policymakers; quality media coverage; national language booklets. At the same time, Panos works with English translations to reach international audiences who we believe should read the testimonies. Key outputs have included radio docudramas, booklets, and an online archive (<http://www.mountainvoices.org>), but beyond these, we use testimony extracts as a resource in key debates, events and publications.

interview more clearly reveals women's complicated areas of activity and concern. Indira Ramesh, the coordinator from our India project, reflects upon the interview experience for female narrators:

"I think it was a very important way of telling a woman that she was important and that her views were important... Her life story was important, the way she dealt with day-to-day problems, the social milieu, with depleting forests and grass and fodder, the livestock disappearing and eventually leading to the migration of men, all these things that I'm sure no one has ever asked them before. They've always asked the views of the men..."

One additional point is the importance given to recording the interview. Doing this allows the interviewer to give the narrator their full attention, it also makes sure that the interviewer is able to check and repeat exactly what the narrator says. During the interview the narrator will be encouraged to speak at length about issues and their experiences. It would be impossible for the interviewer to write everything down, making the record of the interview the interviewer's version of the discussion rather than a true record of what the narrator said. And the recorded interview,

transcribed word-for-word, will always be more powerful than a set of notes taken during an unrecorded interview.

Challenges

The use of "insiders" as interviewers can produce high quality testimonies – intimate and insightful testimonies that only someone familiar with the community could carry out. However, working with ordinary men and women who have no prior experience of research or interviewing, means that the quality of some testimonies can be disappointing. The importance of the process as well as the products means that this is a risk that Panos is willing to take.

Similarly, carrying out one or two hour interviews, transcribing these word-for-word, and then producing information outputs based on these, means that oral testimony projects are labour intensive and time-consuming. When testimonies require translation there are additional time and quality issues. The commitment to people being interviewed in the language they feel most comfortable speaking can present challenges. Spoken languages may not have a written form, and interviewers' language skills may prevent them from preparing an accurate transcript in the national language. In these instances testimonies may be translated and transcribed directly into English from the local language audio versions.

The time-consuming nature of the method may lead some to consider other means of recording and communicating voices such as participatory video and community radio. Whilst these methods have some advantages over oral testimony, what an oral testimony collection has in its favour is the level of detail, an archive which can be used in many different ways, and that it is a long-lasting and comparative resource.

In some projects there has been a longer than ideal gap between the recording of the testimonies and the sharing of them with different audiences. One of the ways we are overcoming this problem in some cases is by developing a short community newsletter to be published every two or three months. The newsletter will be prepared by the interviewers and should serve to generate wider awareness of and interest in the project throughout the community.

But the most fundamental and on-going challenge is to make the most of the testimonies; getting more effective at communicating the testimonies in order to influence change and development. With this in mind, Panos is experimenting with new ways of involving local media in the projects and new ways of disseminating and "packaging" the testimonies for different audiences. Although we strongly feel that the testimonies speak for themselves, there is a need to communicate their value to different target audiences (media, policymakers, NGOs) to encourage them to read and take seriously these personal first-hand accounts, alongside other more "formal" documentation/information sources.

Some of the elements of this approach and method may be adopted or adapted to enhance other's ways of working. Recording, recognising the importance of talking to individuals as well as with groups, improving your questioning skills to gather more personal and in-depth information, involving people from the community as researchers/interviewers – all of these can be undertaken without carrying out a full-scale oral testimony project as described above. ■

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Strengthening agroecological innovation networks

Adriana Galvão Freire, Paulo Petersen, Luciano Marçal da Silveira and Manoel Roberval da Silva

Small scale farmers are often trying to adapt their farming practices, with the resources they have available, to their specific and often changing context. In this way, new practices or improved techniques are developed, contributing to agroecological innovation. AS-PTA, an advisory NGO working with family farmers' organisations in Brazil, has been trying out different methods to make it possible to document these innovations and so enable an increasing exchange of information about farmers' experiments with agroecology. AS-PTA has also tried out different ways of facilitating communication and stimulating farmer-to-farmer exchange of knowledge. Videos, pamphlets, bulletins, photo displays, theatre and other methods are used to exchange the knowledge gained from experimenting with local practices. This knowledge is based in farmers' real experience and is therefore often directly relevant to other farmers. As such, documentation of these experiences is essential to enhance the value of these learnings and knowledge and to make it available to others.



Information sheets in use during a training.

The whole method is founded on a basic assumption: in rural areas, knowledge is traditionally passed between generations and people in general through informal exchange networks. These networks work best in communities where the technical know-how is part of the cultural heritage. However, the introduction of standardised technological packages for agricultural modernisation promoted by conventional rural development programmes, has contributed to the weakening of local knowledge. The introduced packages are based on the logic of top down technology transfer, as well as on the assumptions underlying industrialised agriculture, seeking to maximize yield with the help of external inputs. Rather than contributing to knowledge generation and knowledge exchange among agricultural families within their local context, these packages lead to increased technical and cultural dependency. As a result, the processes of knowledge management within the communities are undermined.



Example of information sheet: Marlene's story.

Information sheets

One simple yet effective documentation method that has been tried and used successfully is the *Boletim Informativo da Agricultura Familiar*, or Family Agriculture Information Sheet. This is a two to four page printed information sheet, where a family, group or individual describes their story or experience related to the agroecological programmes and activities they take part in. The families, or groups of farmers, were assisted in describing and interpreting their reality through informal conversations together with members of AS-PTA or other organisations in their network.

This helped them prepare the text and the content of the information sheets, including photos and diagrams. Produced with minimal resources, and reproduced many times locally, the information sheets try to put the experiences of the interviewed farmers into words and images. In addition to presenting the technical innovations, these sheets give visibility to the life stories of farm families, or to the development of a local group. They show the difficulties they faced, the solutions they found, and, above all, the paths they followed in the development of a specific innovation. This makes it possible to show how innovative local groups and individuals are in dealing with the problems they face in their daily lives. Examples of titles of the information sheets include "Water management on our property: the experience of João Miranda and Terezinha's family", "Home-made remedies and enriched flour for treating malnutrition: Zui's experience" and "The community seedbank: the experience in the town of São Tomé, Alagoa Nova".

To allow the farmer-experimenters to feel that they have the ownership of the material produced, the final version has to be true to their ideas, words and thoughts and their culture and values have to be respected. When finalised, the information

sheet is therefore returned to the farmers so that they can read the content and give comments and corrections. This is the important moment when the experimenting farmers assume ownership of the documentation of their experience. This is important, because it is the farmers themselves who will distribute and present the material in local communities, at fairs and in meetings. The documented material is always based on personal experiences and this gives it great significance and value for other farmers who receive the information.

Information sheets in knowledge exchange networks

The experiences in the state of Paraíba, have shown that it is possible to effectively exchange knowledge. One example of when the information sheets were used to great effect, was at a large state-wide regional meeting on home gardens. A group of women farmer-experimenters had discussed the importance of having such a meeting to give visibility and value to their work and to show their experiences of growing crops in back gardens and on small areas of land nearby. The idea was brought up and discussed during the thematic committee meeting (see Box 1), and accepted.

Box 1. Agroecological innovation networks

Polo is one of the networks of formal and informal organisations in sixteen municipalities in Paraíba, who AS-PTA advises. Its mission is to develop and carry out rural development projects in the region, working with small scale family agriculture based on the principles of agroecology. Recognising the importance of the social dynamics in agroecological innovation, Polo organised itself into thematic committees. These committees were based in local communities and municipalities, with the task of promoting local networks of experimentation. The themes of these committees were defined according to important and innovative agroecological practices, and the specific conditions of the local agroecosystem within which they worked: water management, agrobiodiversity management, rearing of animals, ecological cultivation, human health and nutrition. The thematic committees are composed not only of local leaders but also of experimenting farmers with significant knowledge in each subject area. In monthly meetings the committees monitor and plan technical, methodological and political strategies. Exchange visits, meetings, and courses as well as the technical and methodological content of each event are planned in these monthly committee meetings.

In order to improve the use of their limited physical space, the farmers firstly tried to understand the different components of their cropping system, their functions and the problems caused by lack of space. For the three months leading up to the regional meeting, the thematic committee took part in exchange visits to communities, looking for real examples and experiences which could provide ideas and solutions to the difficulties experienced. After these visits to discover local innovations, seven different experiences were chosen to be presented during the meeting – medicinal plant gardens, recycling of waste, rearing of animals, use of live fences, use of home remedies and enriched flour (*multimistura*), processing of local fruits and improved use of space in the gardens.

Bringing attention to people's stories and their innovation processes, was an important consideration when choosing which documentation method to use. In many cases, the innovations described may not be directly applicable in contexts other than the specific ones in which they were developed.



Marlene's sketch of her back garden in Floriano, Lagoa Seca.

However, in making clear the principles and fundamental elements associated with the innovation, other groups or individuals can be encouraged to adapt the techniques to their specific realities, and carry out their own experiments.

A mix of communication tools was used to encourage knowledge exchange during the meeting. A scene was built to represent the back garden, which the experimenting farmers would use when talking about their practices. Already willing and prepared to share their experiences, the farmers, on their own initiative, also took samples of home remedies, enriched flour, plants used in live fences, medicinal plant seedlings, native fruits and the jams and sweets made from them, along to the meeting. At the end of each presentation, the farmers distributed their information sheets to the public, explaining all about the history and development of their experience. The sheets had been written by the individuals actually involved in the experience described. In this way, the information sheets complemented the other communication tools, providing something concrete that people could take away and refer to later.

Learning from practice

The production of information sheets enables farmers to document their experiences, and to promote and share their agroecological innovations. In turn, the use and exchange of these information sheets has strengthened Polo's social communication system. By having the information sheets available at meetings, trainings and similar events farmers get directly involved in the experiences of other farmers. Before an intense process of experimentation, or when farmers think it is necessary to readjust the contents of the documentation, they will document their experiences themselves or look for new ways of documenting their knowledge, making the process of communication and knowledge exchange more dynamic.

In Paraíba, this approach of producing and exchanging information sheets has also been taken up, by other organisations who are part of the Semi-arid Network of Paraíba, a forum of organisations and individuals who promote improved ways of living in the semi-arid areas. Today, there are more than 150 information sheets contributing to the various local and state-wide knowledge sharing networks. And there are hundreds of farmers sharing their knowledge.

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Learning with Innovation Histories

Boru Douthwaite, Alok Sikka, Rasheed Sulaiman, John Best and John Gaunt

Constructing an “innovation history” is a method for recording and reflecting on an innovation process. People who have been involved in the innovation jointly construct a detailed written account based on their recollections and on available documents. The process of preparing this history stimulates discussion, reflection and learning amongst all those involved. Others can also learn, either by studying an individual case or by comparing experiences. Future planning can build on the lessons learned, prepare a shared vision and act as a mechanism for change.

Designed and first tried out by the International Centre for Tropical Agriculture, this method uses two techniques that can be used as group exercises: (a) the “innovation timeline”, which lists the key events in the history of the innovation; and (b) the “actor network analysis”, which identifies the key links between all those involved in the innovation process. This article describes an experience where this method was used as part of a workshop aiming to learn from various cases. The “innovations” studied were unusual partnering arrangements among different organisations.

A joint analysis

Working in partnership is now recognised as a successful strategy for improving livelihoods of the rural poor, as it allows for two or more organisations to make the most of each other’s strong points. However, the formation of effective partnerships can be a challenge. Organisational cultures may reflect the strengths which one member brings to a partnership but may also fail to value the strengths of another partner.

The Natural Resource Management (NRM) directorate of the Indian Council for Agricultural Research and the Natural Resource Systems Programme of the British Department for International Development have both supported research projects that have tried new partnership arrangements, with some good results. Both saw the possibilities of highlighting the lessons learnt by such projects with a four-day workshop, where participants could also explore ways to promote good partnering practices. Similarly interested was the World Bank-funded National Agricultural Innovation Project, which from 2006 will set up associations of different types of organisations to work in partnership to promote rural development throughout the country.

The workshop was held in November 2005 in New Delhi. Its objectives were to identify: (a) the benefits of working in partnership; (b) the enabling and constraining factors; and (c) the policy and research management strategies required to foster partnerships. The workshop set out to achieve these objectives through a joint analysis of four NRM projects, all of which were selected for their innovative partnering arrangements. The group of organisations involved included NGOs, international organisations such as CIMMYT, IRRI, the Aga Khan Rural Support Project, as well as farmer federations, input providers and governmental organisations.

The four projects were analysed using a slight adaptation of the “innovation history” approach – the full version of the approach involves two workshops and writing a description of the innovation history. One adaptation, due to time and budget constraints, was to drop the first workshop and to ask all participants to prepare their timelines and network maps beforehand. One of the authors also interviewed policy makers and senior research managers, looking for their opinions in

relation to partnerships in the context of NRM research and development. A second adaptation was to have a policy panel discussion as part of the workshop: eight senior and mid-level policy makers were invited to react to the workshop’s findings and their policy implications. Participants analysed the projects in the first two days. They then became the resource people on the third day, when other colleagues joined in to help the group prepare for the panel on day 4.

What actually happened?

The first phase of the workshop brought together representatives from each of the organisations involved in the case studies (some 25 participants in all). The plan for the first day was to split the participants into their four respective groups to develop a single combined timeline for each case study in the morning, and similar combined actor network matrices in the afternoon. This generated more debate than expected, as the participants in each group discussed their differing views of what happened. The first group, for instance, learnt a lot by exchanging opinions regarding the importance of leadership, while the second group identified the importance of being flexible with budgets. Many partnership lessons could be drawn out from this discussion, although it was not possible to finish the actor network matrix exercise. The lessons were then grouped under four headings:

- a) *time*: significant time is required to build relationships (between 3 and 6 years); policy makers, donors, and others do not realise that it takes time to build trust between colleagues;
- b) *flexibility*: working in new partnerships creates potential for research and flexibility to respond to demands; it is necessary to allow for mid-term corrections; project management must be flexible; flexibility must be built into project documents; government institutions are restricted by guidelines and so are not flexible;
- c) *leadership*: importance of strong leadership to push for flexibility; and
- d) *conflict*: recognition that conflicts are inevitable and that methods are needed to sort them out and maintain communication.

We began day two by splitting the participants into two groups, with each group made up of people from all four case studies. We presented each group with the list of lessons learnt from day one and then asked each group to: (a) give more details, add to, or question the lessons and the headings assigned to them; (b) identify evidence from each of the case studies; and, (c) identify benefits of working in partnership and how to measure these benefits. One group ended up working on the first two points, while the second group concentrated on the last one. This was all presented during the third day, when the group was joined by other NRM researchers and development professionals. After a general discussion, all participants were asked to write on a card the policy question they would most like to put to a senior policy maker. The facilitators grouped the questions into categories and presented them. Participants were asked to look at these questions, and prepare for the panel discussion, which took place during the last day. The panel, formed by four senior and mid-level policy makers, was asked to comment on the changes needed to the existing systems to make the forming of partnerships easier, to nurture existing partnerships, and to enable the scaling up of partnerships.

Results, feedback and evaluation

Adoption of the “innovation history” method proved useful. We were able to present clear conclusions, such as those referring to:

- complementarity and comparative advantage: the strongest

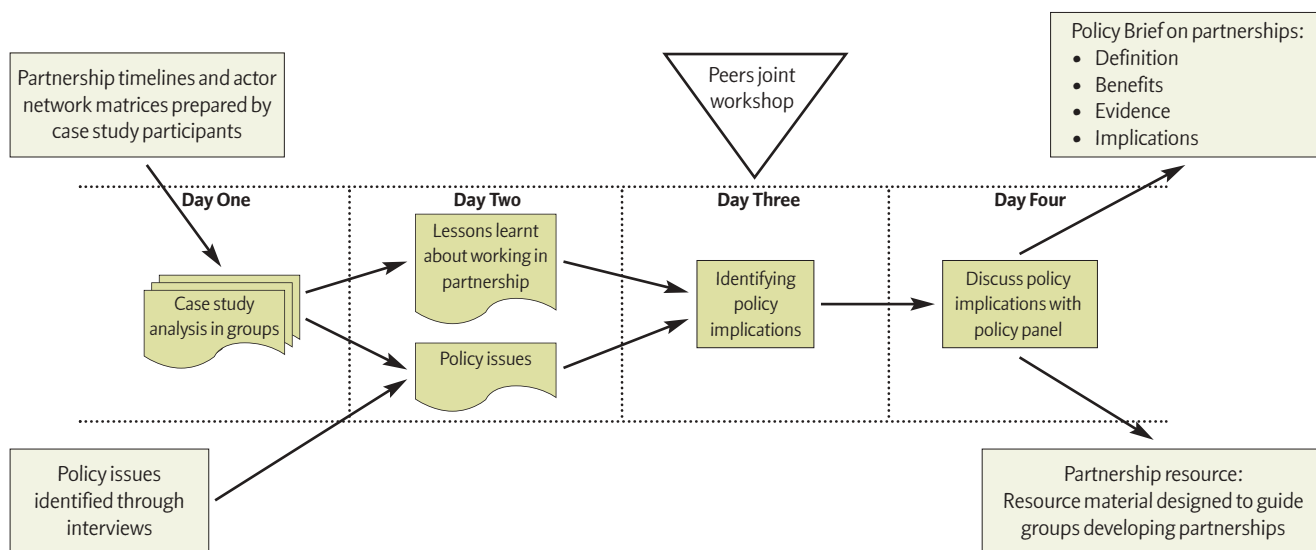


Figure 1: Organisation of the Workshop.

partnerships are those that explicitly recognise and build upon the strengths of the partners;

- building relationships with farmers: successful partnerships depend on the integration of communities in the planning and implementation of partnership activities;
- leadership: successful partnerships are characterised by having vibrant and dynamic leaders, but they usually embrace the principle of decentralised decision-making;
- public-private partnerships: building formal and informal relationships among key public and private stakeholders can help agricultural research organisations achieve the objectives of agricultural research partnerships; and
- transparency: successful partnerships are characterised by openness in planning, decision-making and financial management.

These conclusions were reflected in the policy brief and in the resource materials for working in partnerships which were presented as a final product of the workshop.

The workshop was also successful in the eyes of the participants. We asked for feedback and reflected on how the workshop was progressing, through a barometer group meeting after the first day, an after-action review carried out by the facilitators on the third day, and also through an end-of-workshop evaluation. Participants, for example, said they liked the workshop structure, and its flexibility, which they felt led to real participation and a free and honest exchange of ideas. This flexibility was partly a result of on-going discussion amongst the facilitators and key resource people about how the workshop was progressing, and also of the long discussions between the facilitators in planning for the following day.

The policy study carried out before the workshop was useful and created an awareness of the workshop and its outputs amongst the policy makers and senior research managers. The timeline exercise worked well. It stimulated dialogue between case study resource people, in particular those from different organisations, as to which were the significant events, and why. Asking case-study participants to identify the people related to each significant change encouraged them to think about partnerships without necessarily having to construct the actor network maps. Having other researchers join the workshop helped to focus the work of the first two days, and the same can be said of the final panel session. Presenting their findings first, and then analyzing these further in preparation for the policy panel, helped build ownership amongst participants. The interaction with the policy panel itself

immediately began the process of communicating the workshop findings to policy-makers.

What to change next time?

The main dissatisfaction voiced by participants was with the facilitation and attendance at the policy panel session. People felt that the discussion could have better addressed the issues identified in the first three days of the workshop. Our expectation was that the panel discussion would help workshop participants learn about policymaking and how to influence it, in order to refine the planned policy briefs and materials. In this respect, the workshop was successful. However, having strongly focused on policy messages and key issues, some participants expected the workshop to lead directly to policy change, and that pathways to that change would be explored. At the same time, some participants were disappointed that some of the more senior members invited to be part of the panel were absent.

Quite a lot of time and effort was spent on preparing individual timelines and actor network matrices before the workshop. The idea was to give a voice to people who could not attend the workshop. But actual preparation of these inputs was patchy, and they created a false expectation that individuals would have an opportunity to present their projects. More time and resources should be allowed for advising on and following up the preparation of these inputs prior to such a workshop.

These difficulties, however, are minor when compared to the overall results. The adaptation of the “innovation history” method to a single workshop was judged by participants and facilitators as something that worked well and is worth repeating. It has the important advantage of being much cheaper and quicker than the full method, while still being able to highlight and share lessons from innovative experiences. As such, it provided space for the representatives of the organisations to track and analyse the institutional changes needed to make the innovations (the partnership arrangements) effective and then to communicate their findings to a wider audience.

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Toward sustainability: monitoring farm progress

Karl North and Donn Hewes

Northland Sheep Dairy is a small grass-based dairy farm currently supporting a flock of fifty dairy ewes, their lambs, and four draught horses on relatively poor upland soils in New York hill country U.S.A. Its commercial products are cheese, meat, sheepskins, yarn and knitwear, and occasionally apple cider. We have been managing the farm since 1985, and during its development we have become interested in how to measure our progress towards sustainability.

Many different tools are currently being developed for measuring sustainability. One of the most interesting of these tools is the one using web graphs for visually summarising sustainability patterns. These graphs are multi-dimensional, containing as many axes as there are sustainability indicators that the farmer thinks are important to measure (Figure 1). This technique was found being used in Cuba, trying to capture the dynamics of progress toward sustainability in farms redesigned to be integrated agroecosystems. The case presented by Fernando Funes and Marta Monzote in LEISA Magazine (vol. 18-2), for example, included indicators such as milk production (measured in tons/ha) or wildlife diversity (in total number of species). Their idea was to capture an easily read visual measure of the overall progress of a system with a small number of variables. These variables are usually defined so that a move along an axis away from the centre indicates progress in that indicator. In this way, an increase in the area of the web indicates overall progress.

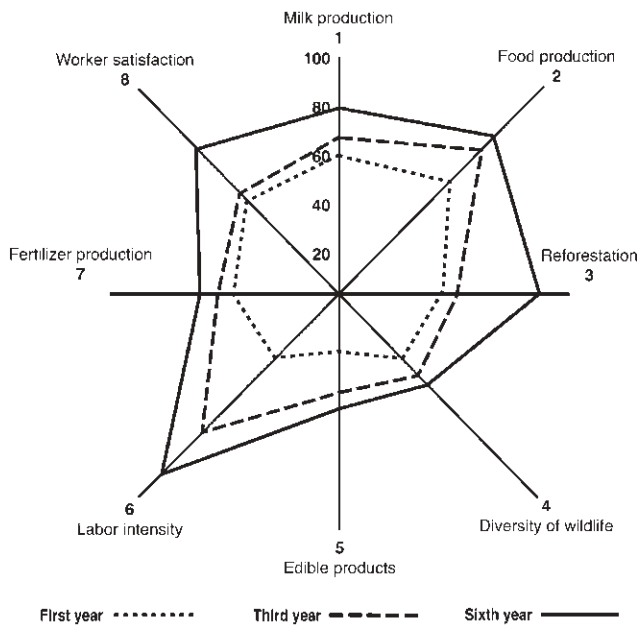


Figure 1: Web graph of progress in sustainability on a Cuban farm.

These graphs can be based on a rough set of estimates, easily sketched at any given moment. Indicators are measured with a 1-100 scale on each axis, an approach that enables qualitative measures like “farmer satisfaction” to be included. The Cuban graph, although derived from absolute numbers and careful calculation, shows a common scale for all indicators, and is thus more reader-friendly.

This tool forces a number of management issues out into the open. First, it shows whole system progress/regress over time, something crucial to understanding how systems work. The web graph forces us to see and think about the changing relationship of all indicators, and is a reminder that all these variables *are* interdependent. It also shows how important it is to consider what to measure, and through which units. The indicators the Cubans chose, for example, reflect a particular approach to input self sufficiency, considering energy efficiency and disregarding monetary profit.

A web graph for our farm

Trying to apply the same technique, we soon realized that there is an almost limitless number of things you could use to measure sustainability. We began by listing more than twenty indicators, including references to soil organic matter production, soil fertility, plant diversity, cheese and lamb production, financial profit, animal diversity, and reforestation. To make a representative graph we tried mixing and matching several indicators at a time, considering how they relate to each other, how they reflect other measures that could be left out, and most important, how they demonstrate what we feel are the most important aspects of sustainability for our operation. By a process of trial and error we gradually came up with indicators we thought fitted our farm and goals very well.

1. Farm productivity. Farm income is often used to represent productivity, but we wanted to avoid this as our farm income comes from an economy that does not reward sustainability, and therefore puts prices on our products that may be different from how useful they are. Our farm plan compensates this with off-farm income, low inputs, efforts at labour efficiency and value-added products. Since cheese is our most important product, we settled on pounds of cheese/acre as a convenient indicator for productivity.

2. Sheep health. Next we considered animal health: if it can be maintained or improved while reducing medical intervention, excessive labor, and expensive inputs, we are achieving some measure of sustainability. Animal health also directly reflects our efforts to build soil fertility and forage diversity because our livestock are almost totally dependent on our own forage. We chose the percentage of ewes and rams without health problems in a given year as a measure of sheep health.

3. Lamb growth. Since in our sheep dairy we wean lambs to pasture at 3-4 weeks, we have managed to grow only a portion of the lamb crop to market weight in a single season. The rest are sold as feeder lambs, at considerable economic loss. Lamb growth is important to overall farm productivity. In addition, we thought lamb growth, measured by percent of lambs reaching market weight in one season, would combine a number of other sustainability concerns, including control of farm internal parasite populations, ewe fertility and mothering ability, pasture health and forage nutritional quality.

4. Input self-sufficiency. We express this with an indicator that shows progress in reducing the major purchased inputs: hay, custom hay work, medical expenses, seed, livestock feed supplements, maintenance, and fertilizer. Despite our concerns with the use of market values, we decided to gauge input self-sufficiency by net income achieved as a percentage of gross income. In so doing we are also tracking an important indicator of profitability.

Table 1. Units, scale, and progress in sustainability indicator.

Indicator	Units	raw scale	relative scale	% 1992	% 1996	% 2002
1. Farm productivity	lb. of cheese/acre	0-50	0-100	62	70	48
2. Sheep health	% without health problems	0-100	0-100	79	78	94
3. Lamb Growth	% reaching market weight (70 lb)	0-100	0-100	40	19	23
4. Input self-sufficiency	\$ net income as % of gross income	0-100	0-100	28	42	36
5. Fertilizer production	Spreader loads of compost/acre	0-15	0-100	16	20	17
6. Energy self-sufficiency	Animal traction hrs as % of energy \$ spent	0-50	0-100	26	14	10
7. Labor efficiency	hours/day/acre of land under management	0.48-0.12	0-100	63	83	98
8. Worker satisfaction	% of quality of life values satisfied	0-100	0-100	60	65	70

5. Fertilizer production. We agree with the Cuban view that to make farming sustainable we must maximize on-farm fertilizer production. We decided to indicate this separately from overall input self-sufficiency because of its importance. Our unit of measure is spreader loads of compost per acre, as a percentage of the fertilization rate we estimate we need to maintain our soil at its maximum fertility potential.

6. Energy self-sufficiency. Here again we created a separate indicator because energy drives all activity and is of paramount importance. While the ratio of calories produced to calories consumed in farm production seemed good, we chose a simpler, although less accurate indicator: hours of animal traction used as a percentage of dollars of energy purchased. For now we are rather arbitrarily setting the ideal benchmark at 100 percent. Despite the lack of dimensional equivalence we think this adequately tracks our efforts toward energy self-sufficiency in the near future, hoping to develop a more accurate measure later.

7. Labour efficiency. While a sustainable management of biological systems commonly requires more labour than when following industry-based methods, we can lessen and perhaps even overcome these losses in labour efficiency by finding sustainable ways to put nature to work. We can monitor this fairly easily by tracking changes in the hours worked/day/acre, estimating an ideal total. An upper benchmark of 0.12 hours/day/acre was found considering that 2 people should be able to run our 100 acre farm working 6 hours a day each. Since these two people cannot work more than 48 hours/day, we set the lower benchmark at 0.48.

8. Worker satisfaction. The survival of agriculture requires an adequate quality of life for the farmers, but worker satisfaction is perhaps impossible to quantify. We measured it by estimating how well our farming activities satisfy quality of life values in our holistic goal, and representing that on the web graph as a percent of 100 percent satisfaction.

These indicators, even if their units of measurement are quite basic, they nevertheless serve the function intended: to show rough trends in the variables and even patterns of interdependency that stimulate better management. Table 1 shows the measurement units for each indicator, the upper and lower limits in the units shown, how the raw data relates to the 0-100 scale, and the percent of the ideal achieved in the years 1992, 1997, and 2002. This is all summarised in Figure 2.

Sustainability at Northland Sheep Dairy

Our web graph failed to show the steady outward progress toward sustainability which was clearly visible in the Cuban example. This had different explanations. Some of our indicators, like sheep health and lamb growth, are sensitive to annual changes in weather and other factors, so general trends should better take

into account the averages over several years. On the other hand, the decrease in lamb growth over ten years accurately reflected a gradual increase in the sheep parasite populations on the farm. This came from a tactical decision that has kept us in business since 1985: our wish to maximize dairy production, our main income source, even when it is much more difficult to implement our parasite control plan with a sheep stocking rate that is too high.

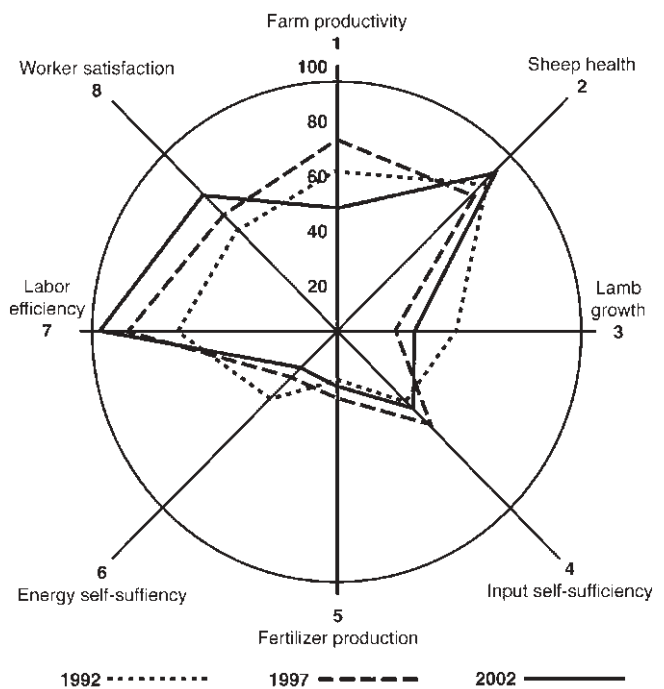


Figure 2: Web graph of progress in sustainability on Northland Sheep Dairy.

But there are more general reasons for the variations found over the years. Our land had not been productive for decades, after many previous decades of extractive agricultural practices. We were practically beginning farming there, while there were no models of milking sheep for us to follow in this country. We often undertook farming practices that were risky because they had been rarely tried in the region, or because they might build a sustainable system in the long run, even if it meant slow progress in the first few years.

Even so, the graph shows some progress on many indicators from 1992 to 1997. A later decrease in certain indicators is due to our decision to use the same indicators for 2002, when we began to rent land that almost doubled our total farmland. The data for 2002 shows that indicators behave differently when measured on a per

acre basis. The increase in the land base throws farm productivity and fertilizer production, both measured per acre, into regression, at least temporarily. Measuring these variables another way might still show progress, for in absolute terms we are still increasing both. By measuring them per acre we remind ourselves of the challenge of achieving both the sustainable production potential on the new acreage, and a restoration of its ecological capital, which we had already partially attained on the original property.

At the same time, labour efficiency, also measured on a per acre basis, increased in 2002 almost to the ideal, because we worked twice as much land with only a little more labour than before. The challenge revealed here is to maintain this somewhat artificial labour efficiency as we build production to its full potential on the new land. Can we design management practices that save labour or add labour-saving devices without losing ground in other indicators like input self-sufficiency? This indicator lost ground in 2002 as we began to invest in the new acreage in ways that will yield results only in the long term.

Our indicator of energy self-sufficiency, hours of animal traction as a percentage of purchased energy inputs, shows a steady drop over the time period of the web graph. By measuring only animal traction among farm-generated energy products, we give a deceptively low value to this indicator, although by original design the farm was remarkably energy efficient in comparison to most farms. Nevertheless, this indicator accurately portrays a failure to compensate for rising energy prices with increases in farm energy production.

Finally, worker satisfaction, though improving slightly, still measures far below the ideal, despite high quality of life on the farm. This is due to the holistic nature of the indicator, reflecting not just what happens in the minimum whole that we can control, but the state of the nation and other larger wholes as well, reflecting our understanding of the ultimate interdependence of all these. In our estimation, the state of the nation and the world became a lot worse over the ten year time period, offsetting high and increasing quality of life on the farm.

Benefits to farm management

The simple decision to use a sustainability monitoring tool helped us plan our activities, aiming at making progress in the indicators we chose for the initial model of the web graph. Over the years, our farm saw some changes as a result of our reflections. The inclusion of an indicator for on-farm fertilizer production, for example, sharpened our focus on making compost. We now add sawdust bedding in the horse barn to improve the quality of the compost end product by increasing the carbon component. This will not only add more carbon to the soil, but also improve the retention of nutrients in the composting process. Although it is an input to the farm, sawdust is a plentiful and cheap by-product of the local lumber industry.

Similarly, we have several plans for progress toward farm energy independence that came from thinking about that indicator. We are gradually shifting from draught horses to mules because mules do more work per unit of feed. We are planning large and small-scale use of wind power to generate electricity (10 kW) and to pump water from ponds. We dug a second pond to collect surface water for gravity feed provision to livestock, and to minimize deep well pumping. On a smaller scale, we plan to collect rainwater to irrigate some of the greenhouses and gardens. A cheese cave currently in construction will reduce our electricity use for refrigeration. We are considering an ice house and a smoke house to further reduce reliance on energy inputs.

Reflections on how to maintain and build soil fertility without increasing inputs led to a project to plant trees in forage fields. In the long run we hope their deep roots will recapture soil nutrients that currently leach below root levels of our forage species. So far we have planted honey locust (*Gleditsia triacanthos*), a legume tree that should also increase nitrogen fixation. We are doing trials to discover the tree spacing and density that will allow machine harvest of forage to continue and provide shade for livestock, but spread the manure from resting livestock widely around the field. We are considering coppicing the trees to keep some of their vegetation within reach of the livestock for feed.

A final change in farm management since we began using the web graph addresses the indicators of livestock health and productivity. We now use the Famacha eyelid indicator more than fecal analysis to get better measurement of sheep parasite loads. And since the addition of rented land we can keep the parasite-vulnerable lambs on worm-free pasture from birth to market.

Conclusions

Despite increasing attention, a survey of the literature on sustainability assessment suggests that this topic is still in its infancy. Our attempts to create a tool are also not finished, so we have therefore not made quantitative measurements of the effects of the changes described above to add a new web to the graph, preferring to rethink what indicators work best and what measurement units could be better suited.

The area of sustainable social relations may be where the web graph needs the most revision. We need a more comprehensive measure of social health than worker satisfaction. We believe that building and maintaining social capital is important to sustainability. For example, we need a local community of neighbours who will eat our products without the shipping and packaging that we do now. Proper indicators must measure not only the health and welfare of people on the farm and their relations, but also the strength of the farm's relations to the surrounding community and the health of its social and economic order.

Graphic display of changes in important sustainability indicators on a single page reveals not only progress/regress in the whole, but also some of the dynamics of interdependence in the variables. In this way it helps us to make decisions that benefit the whole, rather than some parts to the detriment of others. Accurately quantified web graphs are a way for scientists who take a systems approach to evaluate on-farm research experiments over time. Used in a simplified, rough-and-ready fashion, they can help farmers think more holistically in their management, as we have tried to show in a first attempt of a web graph of progress toward sustainability at Northland Sheep Dairy. ■

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A previous version of this article was published on the Managing Wholes website, <http://managingwholes.com>, and is also available on the Northland Sheep Dairy site, <http://www.geocities.com/northsheep/index.htm>.

Learning together from our experiences

Doug Reeler

The Community Development Resource Association (CDRA) was established in Cape Town, South Africa in 1987. As a non-governmental organisation, our aim is to build the capacity of organisations and individuals engaged in development and social transformation with disadvantaged communities in Southern and East Africa. CDRA operates as a 'Centre for Developmental Practice' and is a learning organisation, advancing conscious and continuous learning about development processes and the art of intervention.

Almost every month, the practitioners in our organisation take a week-long reflective pause from fieldwork, participating in a process which we call our "home week". This is a conscious process, centred on our practice, where we aim to learn from each other. We reflect on our work, and on the experience of the previous few weeks in the field. We try to draw learnings to deepen and improve our practice, to share, to plan or re-plan, to adjust or re-think our strategy, to perform necessary organisational maintenance tasks, to build our inter-personal relationships and to re-charge our batteries.

When asked not long ago to describe the essence of our organisation, we all responded that it lay in our home weeks, especially in the way we relate to and learn from each other. It is our simple belief that to be a learning organisation we have to set aside regular, dedicated time for learning.



Photo: CDRA

CDRA has been working with The Surplus People's Project, which was formed in the days of apartheid to assist people resisting forced removal from their land. SPP now works with communities in the Western and Northern Cape Provinces of South Africa, supporting their efforts to gain access to land and to use land to improve their livelihood.



What is our home week and what shape does it take? Over the years it has taken different forms, but at present has the following flexible pattern:

Monday: a day to slow down

We begin, as the whole staff, with sharing breakfast, a light social occasion which becomes a sharing of what has been happening to us over the past month: stories from our lives, some from the field, some from home life – a free and human space. Sometimes a poem is read to set a thoughtful or challenging tone.

We then assemble for a lively creative session, usually with an invited artist who comes to work with us, over a few monthly sessions, bringing creative processes for us to explore and learn from. Painting, drawing, clay sculpting, movement, storytelling and drumming are examples. The purpose is both for team-building and to help us to develop our artistic senses to experience creativity, lateral thinking and working with the unknown, as a resource to our activities.

In the afternoon, the practitioners spend time alone writing a reflective report on our work experience over the past month. This is in preparation for Wednesday. This is really the most important, though quite simple, process of documentation we have.

Tuesday: a quicker day

This is usually a day for business and dividing the work to be done. Part of the morning is spent in a staff business meeting, dealing with the operational issues of running an organisation of 16 people. The practitioners meet in the afternoon to respond to the various requests we have received over the past month from potential clients, or from collaborators proposing joint work, as well as to look at opportunities heading our way.

These meetings, like all during the week, are chaired by a revolving chair – every staff member will in turn chair the processes that she or he participates in.

Wednesday: a slow day

The day is dedicated to the reflective reports written on Monday afternoon, where we read each others reports. Essentially a feedback session, we work hard at being non-judgemental, at helping the writer to see their practice more clearly. A gentle yet challenging mirror.

This is the heart of the week, and by this, perhaps the real heart of the organisation. However, it is also the most individual and

personal process we have, where each of the practitioners exposes her or his practice to colleagues for examination, vulnerable to their feedback. The purpose is for honest learning from our own and from each other's practice and yet its consequence is that we also become accountable to each other through this. Many of the deeper ideas we put into the world through our consultancy approach, writings, courses and other interventions, emerge from these sessions.

Thursday: a more energetic day

This day varies, but is set aside for such things as case studies, strategy discussions, the sharing of tools or methods, design sessions (of a new course or a difficult workshop someone is about to facilitate). Sometimes we work with a reading that someone has proposed.

Every few months, space is given for sessions where at an individual level we help each other to take stock of the balance between our personal and professional lives, review our personal development plans and work through any issues that we are individually struggling with. The practitioners each choose their own supervisor.

Friday: a grounded day

Various meetings happen on this day which draw together all the issues that have arisen from the week to ensure that they are not left at a loose end. Time is also set aside for team meetings for particular joint internal or external programmes or projects.

Looking at the balance of activities we see that learning from practice and learning about practice takes up about half the week, with the remainder focused on organisational maintenance, work planning, business and staffing issues. Because this arrangement gives us a lot of time to focus on "pure" learning, much of the business and strategy decision-making meetings are informed by this learning. This makes these meetings less complicated, less time consuming, more fulfilling and filled with more "will" than the average strategy and/or business meeting, because a lot of the practice issues have been clarified.

The account of the home week offered here illustrates how regular learning practices in an organisation impact on the nature and functioning of the organisation as a whole. As a result of our experience with home weeks, we sense that it is possible to think of the nature of organisations differently from the conventional and quite static ideas that are mirrored back to us by management scientists. The monthly home week is a rhythm that creates and renews two-way learning relationships at both formal and informal levels, that is the basis of CDRA more than any other structure, process or function. These learning relationships, and the processes that bring them into being, are the foundations on which we understand and develop trust for each other, on which we improve our practice together, through which we account to each other, and with which we maintain and develop the organisation.

Over the years, the home week has undergone many changes. There have been times where its strategic functions have been most prominent and others where it has been focused largely on the field practice of the organisation. It is not a static design but has to be changed as we change. Finding the right balance between the self-reflection of a home week, a safe home to which all staff can return, and openness, a programme that challenges, stretches and motivates both staff and visitors, remains a constant challenge to pursue, in order to keep the space alive.

When asked to justify setting aside what amounts to 15 percent of our time for reflection on practice, we respond that the

practice we are involved in is complex and difficult, without an established discipline. We have to learn our way to a better practice through a committed learning process and a different understanding of the productive use of time. Our personal experiences of other organisations, working the normal four weeks a month, are of many burnt-out over-stressed individuals working at cross purposes, with fractured relationships, frequently learning the hard way, repeating mistakes, unproductively in and out of meetings all month. By spending a week a month in the way described above, productivity and qualitative working can be doubled, with new lessons guiding us, practice deepening, work being continually re-focused and work relationships strengthened. The work we do at CDRA, largely responsive to requests and opportunities from outside our control, is essentially irregular, and so exhausting and stressful. Home weeks help to restore balance to our work life, and to some extent our home lives, in their rhythmic regularity. The week prepares us for three clear weeks ahead of pure work, without business meetings, with re-charged batteries, restored relationships, renewed and clearer focus, and always with new ideas and resources to enrich our practice.

As an organisation, almost every idea we have is had during, or as a result of, the home week, which shows how valuable it is. Recent examples include our strategic shift to being a centre for developmental practice, and physical changes made to the building. In the same way, many of the ideas that end up in our annual reports, our key insights around the distinction between development and developmental, and, crucially, our view that learning is at the heart of a developmental practice (it comes full circle) are also a result of the home weeks. This led us some years ago to redefine ourselves as having learning at the centre, as the core activity, rather than as an addition to our work.

In our own reflection on this internal practice we ask ourselves how our own experience with learning rhythms can help us to

Call for articles

Issue 22.3 September 2006: Building knowledge through farmer innovation and participation.

Research and development in agriculture is mostly led by institutions and researchers. To become more relevant and participatory they try to involve farmers in their research processes. However, it is still the demands of the scientific research process that guides the work, and more often than not, the subject of the research is decided upon beforehand. Farmers, on the other hand, are observing, adapting, experimenting and innovating as part of their daily work and in response to changing circumstances. As a result they have for centuries been responsible for the development of landraces and local practices well suited to their environmental and social context. Today, however, the circumstances are changing faster than ever before, the competition for resources is increasing and slow, local adaptation is not enough to keep pace with these changes. New knowledge is urgently needed to support small scale farmers. However, the scientific research results produced by research institutions mostly has very little to offer small scale farmers in their complex environments. How can the gap between research methodologies and farmers' realities be narrowed? Is it possible to get researchers or organisations interested and involved in farmers' realities? Can new

rethink the nature of effective organisation and how organisations can discover, build and nurture the peer learning practices, culture and rhythms that are appropriate to their own context and practice. It is these guiding questions, more than any structure or model, that we take with us into our work with participants, donors, colleagues and associates.

Documentation in our learning

The world of work in this modern age, with its many technologies, insists on lots of documentation. Perhaps there is a sense that our fragile memories will lose valuable experience and that this must be captured for future reference, learning or accountability. There is an easy logic to this, but the trouble is that it places the emphasis on the product that is saved, filed, emailed, and often left unread in our endless electronic in-trays, and not on the value of the process of writing itself.

At CDRA we like the word “writing”, as a process or activity, as more of a verb than a noun. At the heart of our learning process, our home week, are two “writing” spaces. The first is on the Monday afternoon, as part of the work day, where we are given space to write a very personal account of 2 to 3 pages of our recent work experience and some reflective thoughts and feelings about this, as well as the questions that emerge from this. There is no demand for a precise, impressive report, only for honesty and curiosity - if a report is too polished, it can lose the looser edges that can reveal interesting uncertainties in our work. When we try to express things too well we often obscure or avoid those more interesting things that are difficult to communicate, because of the limitations of words to convey inner experience. This is true of written and oral expression. For this reason we also encourage the use of images, whether as word pictures or metaphors or even drawings in this and other processes. The process of writing this reflection is one of revealing, of pausing, of re-creating, of exploring. Most important is its very personal nature, written in the first person

– so that the focus is on what was happening inside of me when I was doing this work or having that experience.

The second process is the use of these reflective reports in the group process as described under Wednesday above. We each take each other’s reports, find a quiet spot to read them and then write down our responses, new thoughts or questions, whatever was stimulated by the reflection, as preparation for discussion. In the talking and sharing process, there is much informal note-taking: the beginnings of new writing in the future. At the end of the whole process we gather our bigger learnings together and these are captured as the basis for the monthly letter posted on our website. More importantly, we each take away our own notes, some on paper, some stuck in our heads. It is these that creatively feed our work.

These reflective reports are filed away, because they might still be used, perhaps as the basis for a short article, or “Nugget” for our website - but the reality is that their purpose is largely achieved already in being actively processed through discussion. The reality is that the majority of them will never be looked at again.

Strangely enough, once we have grasped an important learning we tend let it go into our “forgetteries”, the subconscious melting pots of our minds. Here it can combine with other knowledge and re-appear as informed thinking which contributes to our field activities or other writing processes like reports, articles or books. Clever documentation and “knowledge management” cannot substitute for this kind of process, though it can lend it some reference support. The important thing is to keep our writing and conversation processes alive, so that they continually feed our thinking and development.

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understandings and information through a two-way interaction process between different knowledge systems such as local knowledge and scientific knowledge lead to more relevant research? What contributions has this interaction made to generating new understandings about LEISA? Alternatively, farmers own networks or social groups are another way of validating innovations in a specific location. This issue will look at examples of innovation, adaptation and effective collaborations or linkages for the generation of knowledge.

Deadline for submission of articles: 1 June 2006.

Issue 22.4 December 2006: Making the most of ecological processes

Trying to develop sustainable agriculture which builds on ecological processes is an ongoing challenge. Though some of the basic ecological principles are well known (for example, nutrient cycles or nitrogen fixation), we know very little about how these processes work in detail and about how the different ecological processes interact with each other. Most of the knowledge on ecological agriculture therefore builds on practical experiences and trial and error – or success. Examples where

farmers are managing ecological processes include intercropping, plant density and arrangement, use of shade, and seed soaking. The system of rice intensification (SRI) is one example of an integrated ecological approach that has been very successful in increasing rice yields of small scale farmers while reducing the need for commercial inputs and saving on natural resources like water (see also earlier articles in LEISA Magazine, volumes 15.3, 15.4 and 18.3). First described in the early 1990s, this approach is now spreading all over the world, mostly through informal exchanges. Farmers try it out in different contexts and with different levels of input and management. But how are these experiences developed? How have farmers and communities reacted to this rather revolutionary approach? When has it been successful and when hasn't it? What adaptations have been made to the system? Could a similar approach be used for other crops?

This issue of LEISA Magazine will look at the experiences of SRI so far, as well as at other examples of how the broadening of our thinking, by including ecological processes in the development of sustainable agriculture, can have positive and dramatic effects.

Deadline for submission of articles: 1 September 2006

Next issue: Agriculture in transition

Vaccination of small ruminants contributes to poverty alleviation

Ikpegbu Ekele

Olokoro is a rural community in Umuahia, in the state of Abia in Nigeria. Most of the residents are engaged in mixed subsistence farming, growing mainly cassava and yams. Some combine this with goat and poultry rearing. In 2000, staff from the Centre for Grassroot Agriculture Development (CGAD – Nigeria) started visiting these farmers. Their aim was to find out what difficulties farmers were facing in feeding their families adequately, and in trying to make enough money for their children's education from their agricultural activities. They focused especially on female headed households.

It was discovered that families here depend on crops for food, while small livestock keeping is for income generation. Part of the income they generate is not only used to provide for family needs, but also to buy farm implements and inputs. They keep between three and fifty goats and sheep, depending on inherited wealth and family size. The family size is an important factor because of labour requirements: the need to collect grass or take the animals for grazing. Younger members of the family usually do these jobs. So when, for instance, the youngsters go to high school, the flock is reduced to a number that can be managed by the older family members. Another important bottleneck mentioned by the community was a goat disease they fear, which they call "running nose".



Photo: Author

Mr Okpechi checking on his goat flock together with extension staff.

Goat plague, known as *kata*, is an acute, highly contagious disease of domestic as well as wild small ruminants. The ailment is characterised by discharge from the nose and eyes, diarrhoea, dehydration, and pneumonia. Ultimately, it causes the death of the animal. It is one of the most important health problems affecting small ruminant production in West Africa. Goat plague is endemic in Nigeria and can be encountered all year round, with peaks during the wet season and the cold *harmattan* periods, when the mortality rate can be as high as 90 percent. Animals rarely survive this disease, because their owners generally go to animal health workers when the disease is already too far advanced. In addition, animal health workers also respond too slowly. This is mainly because farmers often refuse to pay for the cost of the drugs if the treated animal dies. Instead, farmers resort to selling an animal to the butchers, for a very low price, once they suspect infection with the much dreaded "running nose" disease.

The vaccination option

In 2001, we started encouraging farmers to take their animals to the fields and let them graze, tied to stakes in nearby bush while farmers work close by. Those people who are engaged in petty trading were asked to collect wastes in the market, like cassava, yam and plantain peels, maize cobs, or legume pods, or anything that could be used to feed their animals and so reduce the time and energy needed to collect feedstuff. But as to the presence of *Kata*, it was not easy to convince the farmers that this disease can be prevented with the use of a vaccine: farmers could not believe that animals can be vaccinated just like humans.

Mr. Nnamdi Okpechi, a farmer and once the owner of 50 goats and sheep, was willing to experiment with vaccination after he lost more than 30 of his animals to the "running nose" disease. Desperate to protect the remaining few animals of a rare breed that produces twins and even triplets regularly, this farmer requested CGAD – Nigeria to vaccinate his animals. We decided to do the vaccination at no cost since getting this farmer to treat his animals was strategic as he is an opinion leader on animal production in his community.

After about nine months of not experiencing "running nose" in his vaccinated flock, this farmer started to tell other farmers to vaccinate their animals. The interested farmers were first asked to contribute about half the cost of the vaccination while the centre made up the remaining amount. Now that vaccination is widely accepted, the farmers pay the full cost for the vaccines. CGAD – Nigeria has also advised farmers who lost much of their livestock to the goat plague to replace them. Some have bought stock from Mr. Okpechi, who now cautions them to always vaccinate their goats if they want their flock to survive and multiply.

Advantages

The cost of treating one sick animal is more than the cost of the vaccines for 100 goats, while the market price for a healthy goat (US\$ 70) is about five times that of a sick goat. With the acceptance of an annual vaccination programme for "running nose" disease, livestock farmers in the community can now rear animals and sell them at festive periods when they get the best prices. This system of disease control through prevention has restored farmers' confidence in keeping small ruminants as an asset the family can fall back on when the need arises, thus contributing to poverty alleviation. The role of extension services cannot be overemphasized if rural development is to progress at a rapid rate.

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The Centre for Grassroot Agricultural Development (CGAD) – Nigeria is a not-for profit organization whose aim is to disseminate information on improved agricultural innovation to rural poor, especially women, thereby help to provide food for all and alleviate poverty.

Self-sufficient agriculture : labour and knowledge in small-scale farming by Robert Tripp, 2006. 242 pp.

ISBN 1844072975. Earthscan, 8-12 Camden High Street, London, NW1 0JH, U.K.

E-mail: earthinfo@earthscan.co.uk, <http://www.earthscan.co.uk>

This book examines the contributions and limitations of Low External Input technologies (LEIT) for addressing the needs of resource-poor farmers. It offers a balanced analysis of the contribution of LEIT for sustainable agriculture, with in-depth case studies, an analysis of the debates, an extensive review of the literature and practical suggestions about the management and integration of low external input agriculture in rural development programmes. Robert Tripp concludes that the innovations described under the rubric of LEIT offer important contributions for making agriculture more productive, protecting the environment and empowering farmers.

But he emphasises the weakness of many unconnected projects. To strengthen smallholder farming, funds, dedication and ingenuity need to be transferred from isolated, technology-specific efforts to building local capacities.



Learning to practice, learning from practice: participatory evaluation in projects supported by the Royal Netherlands Embassy by K.S. Gopal and E. van Walsum, 2005. 72 pp. AME foundation, No 204, 100 Feet Ring Road, 3rd Phase, Banashankari 2nd Block, 3rd Stage, Bangalore 560 085, India.

E-mail: amebang@giasbg01.vsnl.net.in, <http://www.amefound.org>

This book is about rural life and learning. How do organisations working with small farmers become learning organisations? How can fieldworkers play a central role in learning from and with the farmers, men and women? And how can they share this learning with their organisation? This book presents the key elements of the experiences of the staff of three rural development projects in South India engaged in a joint learning process.

Tools for influencing power and policy: Participatory learning and action no. 53 2005. 96 pp. ISBN 1843695723.

IIED, 3 Endsleigh Street, London WC1H 0DD, U.K. E-mail: pla.notes@iied.org <http://www.planotes.org>

This special issue of the periodical Participatory Learning and Action (formerly called PLA notes) is guest edited by Sonja Vermeulen from IIED, who coordinated the power tools initiative mentioned in *LEISA Magazine* 21.4. The authors of the articles in this issue analyse and suggest ways forward in the adaptation and application of tools in participatory action and learning situations, where participants must deal with powerful institutions and individuals. Instead of waiting to be consulted by government or other policy processes, many people actively want to take their own values, priorities, analyses and demands to those with power. The tools aim to help less powerful people and their allies achieve positive change in natural resource policy through understanding, organisation, engagement, resistance and persistence.



World resources 2005. The wealth of the poor: managing ecosystems to fight poverty UNDP, UNEP, World Bank, WRI, 2005.

254 pp. ISBN 1569735824. World Resources Institute, WRI, 10 G Street, NE, Suite 800, Washington, DC 20002, U.S.A. Full report available at <http://www.wri.org>; the resources database is accessible online at <http://earthtrends.wri.org>.

The World Resources 2005 report details the steps necessary to empower the poor to use ecosystems both wisely and for wealth. It provides case studies and examples and presents a wealth of statistics on current environmental, social and economic trends in more than 150 countries.



Small farmers economic organisations and public policies: a comparative study by D.M. Elsner, 2005. 152 pp.

ISBN 9990563136. Plural Editores, Rosendo Gutiérrez 595 esq. Ecuador/ Casilla Postal 5097, La Paz, Bolivia. E-mail: plural@accelerate.com

In Bolivia, small farmers economic organizations (OECs) are increasingly talked about as actors that could play a key role in channeling proposals and programmes for sustainable agriculture. This publication, based on four case studies, contributes to our knowledge of the role of OECs and how they operate, as well as how they can contribute to the debate on policies that work for small producers and their organisations.



The state of agricultural commodity markets 2004

2004. 52 pp. ISBN 925105133X. FAO, Viale delle Terme di Caracalla, Rome 00100, Italy. E-mail: publications-sales@fao.org <http://www.fao.org>

With this report, FAO presents the first issue of a publication series that aims to present commodity market issues in an objective and accessible way to policy-makers, commodity market observers and all those interested in agricultural commodity

market developments and their impacts on developing countries. It is intended to raise awareness of the impacts of international commodity price movements on the livelihoods and food security of people in the developing world as well as the economics of developing countries that depend on commodity exports or on food imports.

Bt cotton in Andhra Pradesh, a three year fraud...

2005. DVD 30 min., produced by the Deccan Development Society DDS, India. Available from IIED, 3 Endsleigh Street, London WC1H 0DD, U.K.

E-mail: info@iied.org <http://www.iied.org>

This film about the problems of Bt cotton farmers in Andhra Pradesh, India, is made by women filmmakers of the DDS Community Media Trust. The women traveled to Warangal to talk to farmers, especially women, and film the interviews. They have filmed the poor performance of Bt cotton at every stage and analysed the reasons with farmers. This film has sensitively captured the images and voices of the Bt farmers in crisis. It documents the reality of Bt cotton farmers in Warangal.



Innovation histories: a method for learning

from experience by Boru Douthwaite and Jaqueline Ashby.

ILAC Brief 5, July 2005, 4 pp. The Institutional Learning and Change Initiative, ILAC. E-mail: j.watts@cgiar.org

Available at: <http://www.cgiar-ilac.org/downloads/Brief5Proof2.pdf>

Preparing an "innovation history" is a method for recording and reflecting on an innovation process. People who have been involved in the innovation jointly construct a detailed written account (sometimes referred to as a "learning history") based on their recollections and on available documents. The process of preparing this history stimulates discussion, reflection and learning amongst participants. Subsequent planning can build on the lessons learned, formulate a shared vision and act as a catalyst for change. Based on the initial detailed account of the innovation process, more concise informational products can be prepared that summarise the innovation process for wider dissemination of findings. These may include public awareness materials, policy briefs or articles in professional journals. This Brief describes a methodology for recording and learning from innovation histories that is currently being developed at the International Center for Tropical Agriculture (CIAT).

extension and assesses their potential for replicability and scaling-up. It includes four thematic sections with people-centred case studies and a conclusion with practical applications of the transaction cost theory.

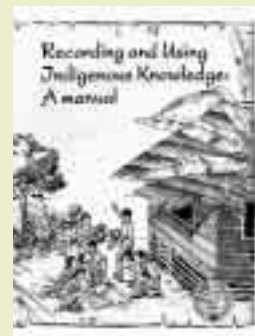
Recording and using indigenous knowledge: a manual

by D. Abbass, E. Mathias, A.R.J. Montes, P. Mundy and T. Willard (eds.), 1996. 211 pp.

ISBN 0942717708. International Institute for Rural Reconstruction, IIRR, Y.C. James Yen Centre, Silang, Cavite 4118, The Philippines.

E-mail: information@iirr.org

This manual draws on the varied experience of IIRR staff, representing decades of participatory development field work. It does not present a new methodology for recording IK, but rather attempts to describe how existing methods can be used to do that. It does not provide ready-to-use approaches, but offers "building blocks" which users can put together to meet their specific objectives. As mentioned by the editors, it is heavily biased towards participatory methods as these are useful for capturing information on IK, but it also recognizes the limitations of participatory approaches and the value of other methods such as sample surveys and in-depth interviews. The bulk of this manual is the result of a participatory workshop held in 1994, involving many participants.



Documenting, evaluating and learning from our development projects: a participatory systematization workbook

by Daniel Selener, Christopher Purdy and Gabriela Zapata, 1996. 107 pp. ISBN 9978042415.

International Institute for Rural Reconstruction, IIRR, Y.C. James Yen Centre, Silang, Cavite 4118,

The Philippines. E-mail: information@iirr.org;

P.O. Box 66873, Westlands, Nairobi, Kenya.

E-mail: admin@iirr-africa.org

Many development practitioners are departing from the traditional practice of measuring only project results, and are

seeking a more comprehensive understanding of its processes as well. Systematization is a continuous process of participatory reflection on a project as processes and results, undertaken by both project staff and participants. This systematic analysis generates lessons which are fed back to improve the project, strengthening the learning and organisational capacities of development organisations. The project experiences are documented and can be shared with other organisations. This practical workbook provides an understanding of the concept of systematization; methods to plan for, follow-up, evaluate and improve project processes and results; and some useful tools for conducting the systematization process.

Innovations in rural extension: Case studies from Bangladesh

by P. Van Mele, A. Salahuddin and N.P. Magor (eds.), 2005. 320 pages. ISBN 0851990282. CABI Publishing, CAB International,

Wallingford, Oxfordshire, OX10 8DE, U.K. E-mail: orders@cabi.org

During the past five years, the PETRRA (Poverty Elimination Through Rice Research Assistance) project has explored the development of innovative extension mechanisms through a learning-by-doing process with multiple service providers. Partnerships linked government, non-government and private sectors as appropriate. Topics addressed by the project included seed production and distribution systems, crop and soil fertility management, postharvest technologies, mobile pumps, aromatic rice and integrated rice-duck farming. The methods used included women-led group extension, whole family approach, participatory video, "Going Public" and picture songs. This book examines these approaches to

The 'Most Significant Change' technique: a guide to its use

by Rick Davies and Jess Dart. Version 1.00 – April 2005. 104 pp.

This document is freely available in PDF format at

<http://www.mande.co.uk/docs/MSCGuide.htm> and at

<http://www.clearhorizon.com.au>. Hard copies can be ordered by

E-mail: editor@mande.co.uk

This publication is aimed at organisations, community groups, students and academics who wish to use the "Most Significant Change" technique to help monitor and evaluate their social change programs and projects. The technique is applicable in many different sectors, including agriculture, education and health, and especially in development programs. It is also applicable to many different cultural contexts. The guide gives a clear overview of the methodology, and presents a step-by-step guide to using it. It also compares this technique to other approaches and epistemologies.

Documentation of farmer experiments: a key strategy for achieving food security on a sustainable basis

by Edward D. Ruddell, 1994. 48 pp. World Neighbors/Vecinos Mundiales, Area Andina. Casilla 20.005, Santiago 20, Chile

Based on the work of World Neighbors in the Andean area, this document highlights on-farm experimentation with potatoes. As the author notes, extensionists do not often systematically record the methodology followed, the conditions and exhaustive results of on-farm trials. This manual deals with the design and execution of randomised blocks for trying out various treatments, identified together with the farmers. The actual execution of the trials was monitored by knowledgeable extension workers, which proved to be very necessary, as many erroneous conclusions can be drawn from faulty observations. The author states that farmers carried out procedures in a correct manner in spite of the fact they had no previous experience with such complicated trials. To what extent these findings may be generalised for other parts of the world, remains very much to be seen. The manual has an appealing home-style lay-out.

Organisational Learning in NGOs: creating the motive, means and opportunity

By Bruce Britton, 2005. Praxis Paper No. 3, 57 pp. INTRAC, PO 563, Oxford OX2 6RZ, U.K. E-mail info@intrac.org Available (in English, French, Chinese, Russian and Spanish) at <http://www.intrac.org/pages/PraxisPaper3.html> This paper explores the importance of organisational learning in NGOs drawing on examples gathered from interviews (mainly with Northern NGO staff) and from an extensive review of the literature. In this paper the author examines why NGOs need to provide the motive, means and opportunity for organisational learning, and introduces practical examples of how pioneering NGOs are doing this. Recognising that learning is understood differently across cultures and contexts but that most current models are based on a Western understanding, the document concludes that there is a need to engage with capacity building practitioners to explore innovative approaches which are relevant, appropriate and accessible across a wide range of cultures and contexts.

Successful communication: a toolkit for researchers and civil society organisations

by Ingje Hovland, 2005. 60 pp. Research and Policy in Development (RAPID) Programme, ODI 111 Westminster Bridge Road, London SE1 7JD, U.K. E-mail: rapid@odi.org.uk The Overseas Development Institute's RAPID Programme has been looking at the links between research and policy for several years. It is now beginning a process of identifying, developing, distributing and delivering tools, resources and training support that can help researchers inform and influence the policy process. This handbook presents work in progress on communication tools, specifically geared towards the needs of researchers in civil society organizations. The tools are grouped under the headings of Planning, Packaging, Targeting and Monitor tools.

Insights into participatory video: a handbook for the field

by Nick and Chris Lurch, 2006. Insight U.K. 3 Maidcroft Road, Oxford, OX4 3EN, U.K. E-mail: nlurch@insightshare.org, <http://www.insightshare.org> This handbook is a practical guide to setting up and running Participatory Video projects anywhere in the world. Participatory video is a tool for positive social change; it empowers the marginalized; and it encourages individuals and communities to take control of their destinies. Readers will find the nuts and bolts of this technique: from how to set up a new project, to the key games and activities to use. Helpful tips

for the facilitator clarify how to use video to encourage a lively, democratic process and not just as a means to an end. The authors draw on nearly two decades of experience of facilitating participatory video projects in the field, and share case studies and useful anecdotes, as well as responses to their work from diverse sources. The key messages are further highlighted by



illustrations, cartoons and photographs. A selection of participatory videos and a training film are included on the accompanying CD-ROM.

Giving Voice - Practical guidelines for implementing oral testimony projects: Panos Oral Testimony Programme

Panos Institute, London, U.K. Available free on request in English (PDF version) and in Spanish and French (hard copy) from the Oral Testimony Programme, The Panos Institute, 9 White Lion Street, London N1 9PD, U.K. E-mail: otp@panos.org.uk

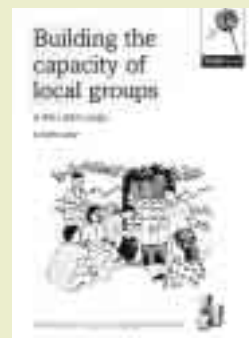
Giving Voice aims to provide practical guidelines for implementing an oral testimony project. It should also serve the purpose of a training manual. Most of the manual has been written for the "coordinator" or "project manager" of a potential oral testimony exercise, who may also organise or facilitate a training and planning workshop for interviewers. Throughout the text there are pages which have been designed to be photocopied and used as handouts for participants during such a workshop – key points, checklists etc.

Building the capacity of local groups: a pillars guide

by Isabel Carter, 2001. 52 pp. ISBN 0950638579. Tearfund, 100 Church Road, Teddington, TW11 8QE, U.K. E-mail: isabel.carter@tearfund.org

This guide is designed for use in small group situations where one or more people are literate and confident enough to lead others in the group discussion.

It aims to increase confidence among group members, so that they can successfully manage within their own situation without the need for outside intervention. It tries to build on existing knowledge and experiences among the members or within the community, so that different ideas can be tried out and adapted, adopted or abandoned.



Learning Histories: a handbook for an exciting experience

Compiled by Toelis Tekst & Publicaties, in association with Kessels & Smit, The Learning Company. 2004. 14 pp. PSO, Capacity Building in Developing Countries, Scheveningsweg 68, 2517 KX Den Haag, The Netherlands. Available in English and Dutch at <http://www.pso.nl/en/knowledgecenter/learningzone.asp?dossier=13>

This brief document presents the Learning Histories process as a tool for learning from experience. A learning history gathers together the most important experiences of everyone in an organisation who was involved in particular activity. They explain in their own words how they perceived the process or project, as well as their evaluation of it. This could be on successful cooperation with a partner in the field of humanitarian assistance, or a lobby campaign which did not go as well as hoped and where the organisation would like to understand why that was so. The individual experiences are recorded in a living document which provides the basis for group discussion and joint reflection.

Visit our website: www.leisa.info

Deccan Development Society

www.ddsindia.com

101, Kishan Residency, 1-11-242/1, Street No. 5, Shyamal Buildings Area, Begumpet, Hyderabad - 500 016, Andhra Pradesh, India. E-mail: hyd1_ddshyd@sancharnet.in
The Deccan Development Society (DDS), is a twenty-year old grassroots organisation working in about 75 villages with women's Sanghams (voluntary village level associations of the poor) in Medak District of Andhra Pradesh. The 5000 women members of the Society represent the poorest of the poor in their village communities. The Deccan Development Society is developing a working model for the people oriented participative development in the areas of food security, ecological agriculture, and alternative education. One of its core programmes deals with media and communications. As part of this programme, women have established a Community FM Radio Facility, controlled and operated by themselves, and have produced a series of videos with which they raise dialogues within their Sanghams and inform the outside world of the accomplishments of their fellow women.

Info Agrar

www.infoagrar.ch

Länggasse 85, 3052 Zollikofen, Switzerland.
E-mail: info@infoagrar.ch

InfoAgrar is the agricultural information and documentation service of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC). Its aim is to facilitate access to relevant information, based on the needs of professionals dealing with agricultural issues in international development cooperation. The target public of InfoAgrar's services are members of staff within SDC and its partner organisations, in Switzerland and abroad. InfoAgrar also responds to the needs of other public sector institutions, NGOs, the broader public, and private businesses that are involved in international agricultural development.

Agroecologia em Rede

www.agroecologiaemrede.org.br

Agroecologia em Rede is a Brazilian database which presents agro-ecological field experiences, research information, persons and organizations. Freely available on the internet, this site was designed and constructed with the objective of facilitating interaction and stimulating learning among practitioners, academicians and decision makers. Information is presented according to the region or to a specific topic and is thus easy to find (in Portuguese).

PSO

www.pso.nl

PSO is an umbrella organisation for capacity building of civil society organisations in developing countries. It aims to contribute to the structural alleviation of poverty by strengthening the capacity of civil society organisations in developing countries. PSO achieves this by supporting Dutch organisations and their partners

in developing countries. It does so by helping local organisations to extend their knowledge and strengthen their capacity. Its "Knowledge Centre" acts as a knowledge broker and makes existing expertise in the field of capacity building more widely available. It also promotes learning and tries to develop new tools and methods to facilitate capacity building processes. They organise expert meetings, workshops and training sessions, and initiate communities of practice on key issues of capacity building.

FAO

<http://www.fao.org/bestpractices/>

<http://www.fao.org/askfao>

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations has added two new sections to its website: FAO Best Practices and AskFAO. The FAO Best Practices section provides a series of summaries that introduce some best practices in FAO's areas of expertise. These have been adopted successfully in more than one region and are interdisciplinary, reflecting the complex nature of the problems addressed. The examples chosen have emerged from consultation with FAO staff both in the field and at headquarters. The site also provides links to further resources with supporting technical information. AskFAO provides answers to specific queries related to the organization's areas of expertise. This provides a mechanism to communicate directly with technical experts in a particular field of interest.

Honey Bee

http://www.sristi.org/cms/honeybee_newsletter

The Honey Bee Network joins like-minded individuals, innovators, farmers, scholars, academicians, policy makers, entrepreneurs and non-governmental organisations. The Honey Bee Newsletter, the creative mouthpiece of the network, is published in six Indian languages, and is defined as a dialogue on the creativity of farmers, artisans, pastoralists and other grassroots innovators. It was launched in 1989 to network innovators, scientists and policy makers; it now has readers from more than 75 countries. They read stories about grassroots creativity, resilience of local knowledge systems, pressures faced in natural resources management, ingenuity in the conservation of bio-diversity, and lessons from organic farming. Newsletters also carry the queries of the readers along with the response from the editorial team. The queries come from experimenting farmers and young students about the problems they face in farming practices.

SRISTI, Society for Research and Initiatives for Sustainable Technologies

www.sristi.org

B/h Pharmacy College Mess, Nr. Boys Hostel Campus, University Area, Navrangpura, Ahmedabad - 380 009, Gujarat, India. E-mail: info@sristi.org

SRISTI is a non-governmental organisation set up to strengthen the creativity of grassroots innovators engaged in conserving biodiversity and developing eco-friendly solutions to local problems. Based in Ahmedabad, Gujarat (India), SRISTI is devoted to empowering knowledge-rich economically-poor people by adding value in their contemporary creativity as well as traditional knowledge. It was set up in 1993 in order to support the activities of the Honey Bee Network to respect, recognize and reward creativity at grassroots.

Integrated Centre for Integrated Mountain Development, ICIMOD

www.icimod.org

G.P.O. Box 3226, Khumaltar, Kathmandu, Nepal. E-mail: icimod@icimod.org

ICIMOD promotes the development of an economically and environmentally sound mountain ecosystem and the improvement of living standards of mountain populations, especially in the Hindu Kush Himalaya region. Its work includes the publication of a newsletter and a series of policy briefs entitled "Issues in Mountain Development". As part of its activities, the centre includes a Documentation, Information, and Training Service, which originally concentrated heavily on the library and publications' functions. This gradually evolved, developing the existing documentation activities and expanding networking in the member countries to strengthen the various dissemination activities.

ACICAFOC, Central American Indigenous and Peasant Coordinator of Communal Agroforestry

www.acicafoc.net

50 Sur y 50 Nor-Este de Pizza Hut, Los Colegios de Moravia ó detrás de Apartamentos Los Colegios, San José, Costa Rica. E-mail:oficinaregional@acicafoc.net

The Central American Indigenous and Peasant Coordinator of Communal Agroforestry is a non-profit, social community-based organization from Central America, which brings together small and medium agro forestry producers, indigenous peoples and farmer peasants. Together with CIFOR, the Centre for International Forestry Research, it ran a “self-systematization” project, defining the process as a “creative methodology by means of which local groups reflect upon, appropriate and tap their experience as the first step toward improving their current management models”. Through “self-systematization”, the project tries to mobilise a critical mass of local stakeholders capable of processing their own experience and thus generate new knowledge.

CIAT, International Centre for Tropical Agriculture

<http://www.ciat.cgiar.org/>

A.A. 6713, Cali, Colombia. E-mail:ciat@cgiar.org

The International Centre for Tropical Agriculture, CIAT, promotes the flow of knowledge and learning in research and development organisations, and the creation of communication networks in rural communities. Among its activities is the development of the “Innovation histories” methodology. The process allows people to co-construct a written account of an innovation process in which they have been involved, based on verbal testimony, reports and publications. It allows those involved in the process to reflect on what they did in order to improve their performance in the future. The methodology is currently being scaled up in different countries such as Honduras, Colombia, Bolivia and Nicaragua.

IICD, International Institute for Communications and Development

www.iicd.org

P.O. Box 11586, 2502 AN The Hague, The Netherlands. E-mail:information@iicd.org

The International Institute for Communication and Development (IICD) assists developing countries to realise locally owned sustainable development by harnessing the potential of information and communication technologies (ICTs). IICD works with its partner organisations in selected countries, helping local stakeholders to assess the potential uses of ICTs in development. The collection and dissemination of best practices and lessons learnt is an important tool in IICD's role as a knowledge broker. Its main activities include the promotion of local networks of information partners in the countries where the institute works, and the distribution of the “ICT Stories”, which seek to capture the learning process accompanying the introduction and implementation of ICTs for development.

iConnect

<http://www.icconnect-online.org/home>

P.O. Box 11586, 2502 AN The Hague, The Netherlands. E-mail:editor@icconnect-online.org

The iConnect website, together with its monthly e-Bulletin, is a major source of information on the use of knowledge, information and communication technologies in sustainable development in all sectors. The site was set up by the International Institute for Communications and Development in order to promote the sharing of experiences and lessons learnt among local partners. One of the most interesting aspects of the site is that all articles are written by IICD's Southern partners.

Regional Community Forestry Training Centre for Asia and the Pacific, RECOFTC

<http://www.recoftc.org>

P.O. Box 1111, Kasetsart University, Bangkok 10903, Thailand. E-mail:info@recoftc.org

RECOFTC is an autonomous, not-for-profit international organisation that works closely with partners to design and facilitate learning processes and systems to support community forestry and natural resource management. Among its various activities, it provides capacity building consulting services,

which include training needs assessments for organisations and institutions involved within natural resource management. RECOFTC sees itself in a unique position to facilitate national capacity building strategies and processes due to its specialised experience with training and capacity building initiatives. RECOFTC is also working at a number of levels in numerous countries, exploring opportunities and achieving outcomes for best-practice in curriculum development of community-based natural resource management for the higher education sector.

The Plain English Campaign

<http://www.plainenglish.co.uk/>

PO Box 3, New Mills, High Peak, SK22 4QP U.K.

E-mail:info@plainenglish.co.uk

The Plain English Campaign is an independent pressure group fighting for public information to be written in plain English. At the moment it has more than 10,000 registered supporters in 80 countries. It defines “plain English” as something that the intended audience can read, understand and act upon the first time they read it. The golden rule is that plain English should be used in any information that ordinary people rely on when they make decisions. The website is organised into 10 main sections, including examples, guidebooks and specific information, some of which are free to download for personal use.

Mountain Voices

<http://www.mountainvoices.org>

This website presents interviews with over 300 people who live in mountain and highland regions around the world. Their testimonies offer a personal perspective on change and development. The interviews on this site have been gathered by the Oral Testimony Programme of the Panos Institute in partnership with local organisations. This programme aims to amplify the voices of those at the heart of development: people who are disadvantaged by poverty, gender, lack of education and other inequalities. Referring to many different themes, the collection includes testimonies from the communities in the Himalaya (India and Nepal); the Andes (Peru); the Sierra Norte (Mexico); Mount Elgon (Kenya); the highlands of Ethiopia and Lesotho; southwest and northeast China; the Sudety mountains (Poland); and the Karakorum mountains of Pakistan.

The Communication Initiative

<http://www.comminit.com>

5148 Polson Terrace, Victoria, British Columbia, V8Y 2C4 Canada.

The Communication Initiative provides a forum to share, debate and advance effective communication for development progress. One of its programmes, the Drum Beat (also known as *Son de Tambora* in Spanish) is a weekly electronic publication sent by e-mail, exploring initiatives, ideas and trends in communication for development. The aim is to provide a space for debate and to develop more effective development communication practices.

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The LEISA Magazine has had a comprehensive website for more than a year now. At present, this website is visited by around 10 000 persons every month. On the website you can find more than 2000 articles published in the magazine over the past 22 years. All articles are available, for free, as PDF files. Articles are easy to find; whether through the title, the name of the author or by using keywords. You can also search directly for a specific word or phrase.

This site also includes a lot of useful information, presenting the books and links which are included in every issue of the magazine. Many of the links will take you directly to other sites of interest. It is also possible to find upcoming events, special news, or to participate in user-run forum exchanges. The issues of E-LEISA, our electronic newsletter, are also available and you can subscribe to it directly via the site.

The latest development of the site is the inclusion of a new section on documentation. We want to build on this issue and encourage more documentation efforts, and are therefore presenting a methodology for documentation which ILEIA has been working with. By following this methodology step by step you can document and analyse your own experiences. The section also includes detailed examples from other projects. You can find the new section under "DOCUMENTATION" on the main menu.



In agreement with ILEIA's partner organisations, websites are being developed for the regional editions of the LEISA Magazine. Two of these are already online, <http://india.leisa.info> for *LEISA India* and

<http://latinoamerica.leisa.info> for *LEISA Revista de Agroecología*.

These sites include all articles, as well as regional information and all the sections mentioned above in the language of the respective magazine, English for *LEISA India* and Spanish for *LEISA Revista de Agroecología*.

Visitors can subscribe to the magazine directly by filling in the respective form and clicking the submit button. If you already are a subscriber to the magazine and receive it regularly, please think of friends and colleagues who may be interested in receiving their own copy and invite them to subscribe.

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