

Collection development in support of a global information network: A case study of LEISA, Low External Input and Sustainable Agriculture

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Abstract

The objective of our presentation will be to show how; over the last 20 years ILEIA has developed a development-orientated magazine, which currently enjoys an international readership and reputation from primarily grey literature sources. Important elements to be highlighted will be the criteria for collecting and evaluating primary and secondary “grey” source material, the methodology underlying the editorial approach and the role of networking in this process. The context for starting and sustaining the magazine is of course the facilitating environment provided by donor funding but this does not explain the magazines current significance or impact.

The mission of the Centre for Information on Low External Input and Sustainable Agriculture, ILEIA, is to contribute to the alleviation of poverty, to enhance ecological sustainability and to safeguard social and cultural integrity of smallholders in developing countries through the further development and promotion of LEISA.

ILEIA has chosen the collection and dissemination of information as a means of contributing to improving the development options available to farmers, by informing those either directly involved in, or indirectly affecting, rural development. ILEIA seeks to be a link that connects local level experiences to global issues and vice-versa, providing a platform for sharing of information and learning from experiences of different countries, regions and continents. The exchange of information has been facilitated through the LEISA Magazine and occasionally through other publications, videos, workshops etc. Information disseminated by ILEIA is freely available to all who wish to use and /or reproduce it.

In the 1980s, when ILEIA started its magazine, the initiatives and interesting developments taking place at local level, where only available in the grey sector, in reports, memos and stories. Consistent search for this material throughout the 1980s resulted in a well-known and established collection that had enough status to attract a wide variety of material both grey and from the commercial press publishing development material.

After 5 years as a relatively simple informative newsletter, a publication emerged that began more systematically to synthesize and analyze LEISA. Concepts were developed and a network was established. This network and the magazine gradually became a source of information and reference for other writers/researchers. This was in addition to providing instructive and learning material for agricultural practitioners. At the moment LEISA magazine has 20,000 subscribers in 173 countries.

Looking back over the years, the LEISA magazine has established a reputation for reliability. Its status today is reflected in the fact that it has generated enough confidence in five organisations in developing countries that they have taken on the task of producing regional editions of the LEISA magazine. Evaluations and request for translation and reprinting rights reflects the status of the LEISA magazine in the world of development-orientated publications. Our magazine is also a much-used source of material for other more journalistic magazines, web sites and policy documents.

Introduction

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