
Communication, Documentation and Information Services

Introduction

Information is the lifeblood of research. Modern information and communication technologies are helping to increase the pace, efficiency, and relevance of research designed for sustainable agriculture. The Communication, Documentation and Information Services (CODIS) Unit acts as a two-way bridge between ICARDA and its diverse partners (scientists, donors, policy makers, NGOs, extension personnel, farmers) for the selection, exchange, processing and dissemination of information. CODIS is also responsible for media activities and producing ICARDA publications, as well as for providing training in information management and scientific writing to NARS. Since all CODIS activities are driven by ICARDA's research portfolio, the Unit has strong linkages with all MegaProjects, support units, and regional programs.

Achievements

- **Website:** At the time of the fourth EPMR in 1999, the Center had just gained access to the Internet and its website was still in its infancy. Since then the site has developed into a key tool for information dissemination. It provides information on the research strategy, facilities, ongoing research activities at headquarters and in regional programs, major achievements, full-text of key documents, and links to several major databases, namely, the United Nations Food and Agricultural Organization's (FAO) AGRIS and CARIS, USDA/NAL, AGRICOLA, CAB International, CRIS/USDA for Current Research Projects and CGIAR'S SINGER. The number of hits rose from a few hundred in 1999/2000 to 8000 per day in 2005. An Arabic version of the site was launched in 2002. The daily average hits for the Arabic version stood at 1250 in 2005.
- **Media activities:** Promotion of ICARDA's work in both regional and international media received increased attention, with stories appearing in English and regional languages. These are posted on the website. BBC covered the Center's research on Sunn pest, and the Canadian Broadcast Corporation and New Scientist on rebuilding agriculture in Afghanistan, Iraq, Palestine and other countries affected by conflict. Within the framework of activities of the Future Harvest Consortium to Rebuild Agriculture in Afghanistan (FHCRAA), supported by USAID, a new audio editing and recording studio was installed at the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock in Kabul. A documentary film on the activities and achievements of the GEF/UNDP

project on dryland agrobiodiversity was produced by the UNDP TV Unit, in collaboration with CODIS, and featured on major satellite channels throughout the world. In addition, CODIS produced several public awareness videos/DVDs/CDs in-house on the major achievements of ICARDA and distributed them widely.

- **Publications:** A variety of publications, including *Caravan*, the corporate annual reports, *The Week at ICARDA*, and *Ties that Bind* (the series addressed to donors) were produced to meet the information needs of the Center's diverse audiences (list available on ICARDA website). Where appropriate, an electronic version was introduced to replace or supplement the hard-copy version. These products were displayed and distributed at major meetings and events including the Annual General Meetings of the CGIAR, World Summit on Sustainable Development, Global Forum on Agricultural Research (GFAR), and others. At the GFAR meeting in Senegal in 2003, an ICARDA poster on "Linking Research and Rural Innovation to Sustainable Development" designed by CODIS, won an award. CODIS was actively involved in drafting the joint ICARDA/ICRISAT submission, which won the King Baudouin Award of the CGIAR in 2002. As part of the work plan of the Marketing Group of the CGIAR, CODIS led the writing and production of a comprehensive report entitled "Healing Wounds: How the CGIAR Centers Help in Rebuilding Agriculture in Countries Affected by Conflicts and Natural Disasters." The report was formally released in Kabul in February 2005 by the Minister of Agriculture, Afghanistan, and attracted attention from the media, policy makers and others worldwide.
- **CGIAR e-learning project:** CODIS redesigned five ICARDA training modules for online learning, and uploaded them to the CGIAR learning objects repository and learning management system.
- **Image library:** An image library, accessible to users at Tel Hadya from their computers on the local-area network, was launched. Currently, the library holds 4226 searchable images.
- **Library and Information Management:** After testing several Integrated Library Management Systems, the NewGenLib was selected and is under implementation for building a knowledge management infrastructure, automating all library functions, and networking all ICARDA program libraries including those of the Regional Offices. To improve access to the Center's publications and international public goods, a document repository was developed. It is now accessible locally through the ICARDA Intranet and globally via the Internet. The ICARDA Virtual Library was enriched with e-journals, international databases, dictionaries, newsletters, newspapers, and relevant websites. The old system of CD-ROM towers was replaced with a file server, which is faster and more reliable. Through the CGIAR Library Consortium, ICARDA is now able to secure better and wider access to a larger num-

ber of journals than before, and is saving more than 100,000USD per year in subscriptions. CODIS continues to play an active role in the implementation of AARINENA-RAIS (Regional Agricultural Information System for WANA countries), and Global-RAIS, which aims to merge all the regional agricultural information systems being developed by AARINENA, FARA, APAARI, etc. into a Global System. A Twinning Agreement between agricultural libraries in Sudan, Egypt and ICARDA was signed and is under implementation. Another agreement has been signed with the Arab Authority for Agricultural Investment and Development (AAAID) to improve their information system and automate their library, and with the Ministry for Agriculture, Egypt, to evaluate and launch NARIMS (National Agricultural Research Information Management System). An agreement was also developed with the Egyptian National Agricultural Library (ENAL) for better sharing of resources, including exchange of publications and electronic document delivery. CODIS continued to provide technical and logistical support to the Syrian National Center of Agricultural Information and Documentation (NCAID) and the General Commission for Scientific Agricultural Research (GCASR) in Damascus, Syria. Linkages were established with the University of Aleppo to modernize their library system.

- **Human Capacity Development:** During 2000-2005, FAO and AOAD collaborated with ICARDA/CODIS in human capacity building. More than 80 information professionals from CWANA countries received training in information management and web technologies, and 50 researchers in scientific writing.

Current Activities and Future Plans

CODIS will continue to place a major emphasis on upgrading technology in all areas of its responsibility. Participation in the CGIAR ICT-Knowledge Management Program will continue in the following areas: Content Development; E-Publishing; the Virtual Library; and On-line Learning Resources. The Unit will also continue to participate actively in regional networks, in cooperation with AARINENA, GFAR, FAO, CLAES and other partners. Production of interactive self-learning training modules to support training activities of the programs and units across ICARDA will continue. ICARDA's website will be enriched with new information sources, as they become available. Increased efforts will be made to improve the visibility of ICARDA among donors and in the regional and international media. The quality and relevance of publications will be improved, with emphasis on impact and international public goods. Electronic publishing will be scaled up. Human resource development in the use of modern information and communication technologies (ICTs) will continue to receive emphasis.