

Harvesting "Grey Literature" for a Greener World

Gail Pennington

The CIAT Information and Documentation Unit (IDU) has received a grant from the Kellogg Foundation to compile and disseminate information on resource management in tropical America.

The project targets "grey literature," information that has never been published, or has been published in a nonconventional form or for limited distribution. Examples include annual reports, surveys, policy documents, statistics, and maps.

"We know by personal experience that many research bulletins, communications, and periodic reports never see the light of day," says Dr. Raul Vera, leader of CIAT's Tropical Lowlands Program. "The quantity of valuable local information may far exceed that of information published internationally in refereed journals."

"Grey literature can contain invaluable information not currently available in conventional literature," explains Elizabeth Goldberg, IDU head. "It can fill gaps. It can document research, or indigenous or popular knowledge that would otherwise be lost."

The information will be compiled with the collaboration of national programs in Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Venezuela. The multi institutional effort will include universities as well as national, regional, and international research centers. Many of the institutions involved are already

among CIAT's research partners.

The 3-year program will begin with analysis of existing information to identify gaps. Then local partners will begin to search for documents. All the information will be maintained as regional and international databases, to be published on compact disc and as alert bulletins. Copies of source documents will be available on request.

"Researchers, extension agents, development specialists, and decision makers in Latin America will benefit from access to this information, Goldberg says. "It will also be disseminated worldwide through the AGRIS database of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations.

Our countries need to consolidate their information systems. To do this we must cooperate with local institutions, neighbouring countries, and the world, says Nancy Andara, librarian at Venezuela's Central University, one of the participating institutions.

The information to be documented will cover resource management in three important agroecoregions of tropical America: savannas, hillsides, and forest margins. CIAT conducts research on all three of these environments. They also coincide with areas covered by the global initiative for Soil, Water, and Nutrient Management of the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research.

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