

EDITORIAL

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Which Future for Tropicultura? (Continuation ...)

Dear readers,

As announced in my last editorial, a special meeting involving representatives of Tropicultura partners and stakeholders in the field of scientific and technical publishing regarding the rural development of the South was organised in Brussels on 25 November 2009. The aim of this workshop was to discuss the future of our journal in order to determine the best ways to continue reaching its objectives in a changing world.

This workshop was organised as the Belgian Cooperation decided to continue its financial support to the publishing of Tropicultura after a five-year memorandum of understanding was signed by the Institutional Cooperation Branches of the Flemish Interuniversity Council (VLIR-UOS) and the Interuniversity Council of the Belgian French Community (CUD-CIUF). Representatives from both organisations (VLIR-UOS and CUD-CIUF), as well as the Belgian Royal Academy for Overseas Sciences (KAOW-ARSOM), all the Belgian faculties and institutes involved in rural development research in tropical countries, and the Directorate General for Development Cooperation (DGDC) of the Belgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs took part to this meeting.

You will find below the answers given to the key questions discussed during the workshop. (i) Is it important for Tropicultura to obtain an Impact factor (IF)? A majority of the participants were in favour of an IF. They considered it as an essential quality indicator and a prerequisite to the long term continuation of the journal's editorial activities. This however should not prevent the journal from publishing papers relevant to rural development by authors in need of coaching. (ii) Should Tropicultura be a springboard for Southern researchers to help them publish in scientific journals with high IF? Participants responded positively to this question and pointed out that the coaching of researchers from the South in scientific writing would still be one of the important roles played by Tropicultura in the coming years in order to reach that particular goal. (iii) How to harmonise the scientific interest of papers and the relevance for development (e.g. indicators)? There is no conflict between scientific quality and relevance for development, to the contrary. Together with VLIR and CIUF, KAOW-ARSOM is currently organising a reflexion group on the evaluation of research in the South. This group should be opened to other partners, i.e. Central Africa Museum. VLIR-UOS and CUD-CIUF use already a set of criteria for evaluating academic projects and project proposals. These criteria can also be useful for the referees of Tropicultura. (iv) Is it still relevant or affordable to publish a paper version? Sub-Saharan Africa is the main target of Tropicultura, and many subscribers from that part of the world still need paper copies as access to Internet is neither easy nor cheap. Besides printing electronic files is costly as well. The Centre for Agricultural and Rural Cooperation (CTA), which publishes Spore Magazine, reported that the readers of paper reviews in the South are 20 times more numerous than their subscribers as the reviews are shared. Moreover subscribers from the North still request paper copies although they have better access to Internet. As the DGDC budget will not make it possible to increase the number of copies of an issue (currently 2,650), a cost-effective strategy has to be implemented to reach as many readers as possible. This strategy will give the priority to organisations and individuals in the South who are located in remote areas. The subscribers from the North will be asked to apply for a renewal of their subscription and encouraged to favour Internet reading (see the enclosed relevant form in this issue). (v) How can dissemination be improved? Beside the solutions already mentioned, an important step forward would consist in Tropicultura becoming a full free open access journal with copyright being the property of authors. Improved retrieval of articles through portals and scientific search engines will also increase the visibility of Tropicultura and boost the citation rate. (vi) How to improve the commitment of researchers of the South and accelerate the editorial process? One of the observations made during the meeting was that a duration of 19 months to publish an article was really too long. To reduce this delay Tropicultura must increase the number of its reviewers and the number of members on its editorial board. In consequence new colleagues from the South will be contacted by the editorial board members and through the VLIR-UOS and CUD-CIUF networks to become referees, and some of them will be asked to join the editorial board.

Earlier this year the board of administrators of Agri-Overseas established a roadmap to implement the actions needed to reach the objectives identified during the workshop. A referee's charter was drafted, and contacts were made to increase the number of referees of the journal. In a very near future each of the articles published in Tropicultura in the past seven years will be available in Pdf format on the website. Thus the necessary improvements have been initiated, and their success will determine the continued publishing of Tropicultura. All constructive remarks regarding the planned changes to the journal's editorial process are welcome. Enhancing our journal's functioning and especially accelerating the speed to process manuscripts should encourage you to further submit the results of your work for publication.

Prof. Dr. Guy Mergeai
Chief Editor