

PRACTICAL HANDBOOK



Facilitating and Managing Information for Rural Development

*Information Service Tools,
Methods and Experiences*

Isabelle Gachie, Luce Ruault
with the contribution of Sabine Mendy

É D I T I O N S D U G R E T

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Facilitating and Managing Information for Rural Development

Information Service Tools, Methods
and Experiences

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Introduction

This handbook is destined above all for rural development stakeholders (NGOs, groups, farmers' organisations, etc.) who are setting up or managing information services. Full of examples, it covers the main issues involved in facilitating and managing information in rural areas, and aims to improve information professionals' mastery of the various aspects involved. In it, information management plays a mediation role for development stakeholders. It focuses on how to implement useful information services and products, rather than on documentation centre management.

As part of this general goal, it more specifically seeks to help these professionals:

- ◆ elaborate information and communication strategies that meet their audiences' needs;
- ◆ act in a manner that is pertinent to and effective for the development stakes at work in their geographic areas of intervention; and
- ◆ set up an offer consisting of useful and sustainable products and services.

This handbook was designed to be a practical tool. It is also the fruit of a specific view of information for rural development. Thus, its content also comes from an analysis of the sector's current major stakes. These stakes are multiple and complex. Questions such as the role of information for rural development, professionalism-building for information services, and the use of new technologies are central.

THE ROLE, PLACE AND STAKES OF INFORMATION FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT

The role of information, while often difficult to evaluate and quantify, is decisive in professional practice. Long seen as the private reserve of libraries and documentation centres, information is more and more rightly being seen as one element in a set of services and inputs needed for activity. Information must serve and adhere to an overall goal—the country's development. Thus, in the sector that concerns us here, the first question that must be answered is the role information plays in implementing rural development policies and improving farmers' skills—both necessary for all sustainable rural development.

Accordingly, information services target above all an audience of rural professionals. Addressing professionals means emphasising a specific focus for information in that it must be a tool to help action, resolve problems and innovate.

We will therefore speak of **“operational information”** here—that is to say information that is practical, concrete, and able to help solve existing problems. Practical, because it can help professionals with their activities. Concrete and operational, because it contains real-life, tested, and proven techniques and implementation methods.

This also implies information-finding practices and specific needs. By taking this view, information services develop their offer and emphasise dissemination and mediation, in close proximity with users.

A Few Specificities of the Rural World

The “rural world” differs from the “industrial world” in several ways:

- ◆ production modes: scattered production units, multiplicity of small units, dispersion over the entire territory, dependency on the natural environment;
- ◆ structure: little organised and more complex;
- ◆ the education of its professionals: little formal education for most, poor practical reading and writing skills, language barriers; and

- ◆ finally—and more strategically than elsewhere—professional organisations and support organisations play a central role in structuring the rural world and transmitting information.

These specificities have a non-negligible impact on information for the rural world:

- ◆ The rural world needs considerable support for extension (materials and languages) and information dissemination.
- ◆ The rural world is often on the sidelines of information channels and, most particularly, new information technologies.
- ◆ The target audience is not very solvent.
- ◆ The offer must suit the variety of contexts encountered (specific agro-ecological, sociological, etc. conditions). The context is all the more important because the goal is to provide operational information.
- ◆ Much more strategically than in other sectors, the role of professional and support organisations is central and built around fostering frameworks of dialogue, networking, and the capacity to collect and disseminate information. The capacity to elaborate information strategies that are suited to these organisations is also a factor.

These various elements make it all the more necessary to establish a strong, close relationship with users.

A CHANGING CONTEXT: THE IMPACT AND CONTRIBUTION OF NEW TECHNOLOGIES

All information services today work with new technologies. The changes in the information context that they have brought about are characterised notably by:

- ◆ a larger volume of information available: quantity, but also the juxtaposition of information of different natures;
- ◆ the decentralisation of sources of information;
- ◆ a multiplicity of producers, combined with less distance between information users and producers;
- ◆ faster communication; and
- ◆ greater ease in network operations.

These changes make greater professionalism among information specialists necessary: mastery of search techniques, mastery of tools, ability to determine the reliability content, ability to identify and sort information (Internet is a conduit for enormous amounts of information through information portals, etc.).

On Internet, the distance between end users and the source causes a marked increase in the need for information professionals who know how to communicate with users and act as mediators.

A popular means of communication, Internet has upped the pressure to disseminate information (for example, having a website has, for all intents and purposes, become mandatory). Thus, the question of the information offer is raised, requiring organisations to examine their communication and content creation strategies ("What do we have to offer?").

In rural areas, more so than elsewhere, there are a certain number of technical limitations to Internet use due to network access (connectivity, speed, cost) that make such use more difficult.

FOSTER THE INFORMATION OFFER AND INCREASE PROFESSIONALISM

When it comes to information services, several terms are frequently used for different types of structures and operations: documentation centre, library, information service, resource centre. Whichever term is used, it is important to distinguish between two practices: one focuses on information access and processing (content), and the other focuses on document access and handling (physical material).

This handbook focuses on information services defined above all by the notion of service, developed within (or in close connection to) rural support structures (umbrella organisations, local chambers of commerce, trade, etc., educational establishments, agricultural workers unions, etc.).

Indeed, independent documentation centres do not seem to be a solution to the issues alive in this field.

► ***The Right Approach***

The information profession is not cut off from information users' activities.

All information specialists should know the sector(s) in which they intervene.

Unprofessional information specialists stay in their offices and never get out and meet professional associations and producers.

Professional information specialists take an interest in rural development issues and the stakeholders that address them. They have practical knowledge of these stakeholders' day-to-day activities and have met them in the field.

Traditionally, in a number of countries, the focus was mainly on making documents (books, articles, etc.) available; these countries supported the creation of libraries and documentation centres—places attended primarily by students, teachers and researchers, but not very geared to professionals, nor to the notion of service.

Today, the sector appears largely devastated: in part because of the lack of means allocated by government authorities, and in part because of the focus on document conservation.

This all too frequently leads to a lack of connection with the professional environment: no specialisation, focus on collecting and conserving, but very little attention to dissemination, no connection with the environment and its needs, no assertive mediation and dissemination for professionals.

On the contrary, the major stake for information services is elaborating an information offer (products and services) that fits the needs of a specific audience of professionals—information produced by and for professionals.

This handbook was written with this aim, and we hope that it will help our readers implement or expand information for rural development services that are forward-looking, useful and lasting.

IN THIS HANDBOOK

This handbook starts with a look at professional information services' audiences. In order to provide relevant, suitable and adequate information one must know what is in demand. Thus, this handbook proposes an analysis of the types of audiences to help you better identify your audience and its needs.

The second section looks at communication and fostering the flow of information, particularly in regards to what products or services you can create and how to do so. It provides the keys you need to elaborate and assess your offer, using concrete examples and experience analysis.

The third section addresses methodological issues and provides advice on collecting and finding information. It also identifies the primary sources for rural development and explains how to enrich your documentary fund at little cost.

What would an information service be if the information is not classified, catalogues and organised? The fourth section aims to provide you with the methodological tools you need and examples of how to "manage, classify and process documents".

The fifth and last section addresses finances: information services often suffer from inadequate, or even non-existent, financial management, without which it is nearly impossible to offer optimal and lasting products and services.

This last section recommends tools to ensure that your management is healthy and your real costs are considered.

Know Your Audience and Build Loyalty

Information services aim to build an offer in response to identified needs. The challenge is not so much obtaining a large volume of data, but rather obtaining useful information. This is why we speak of the information offer, and not of document collection and management.

It is all the more important to think in terms of what you offer—that is to say, in terms of targeted, specifically adapted products and services—because a large percentage of these needs comes from an audience that is not used to visiting documentation centres or looking for information to solve its problems.

The knowledge and demands of information services' audiences should guide all their services. This is crucial to their viability and determines:

- ◆ the focus of the subjects chosen, types of information, and level of information processing;
- ◆ the assessment of the activity and its adequacy in relation to demand; and
- ◆ the ability to demonstrate the usefulness of the service and, therefore, obtain funding.

Information services all too frequently neglect two vital things: thematic specialisation and targeting a priority audience, and the elaboration of a strategy. The question of means is often substituted for the latter.

Rural development involves numerous, diverse fields. Information services must attempt to address all of these fields or, at the least, guide users to reliable existing resources. In function of the type of audience, they will place

Information for Rural Development: the Different Areas in Demand

- ◆ **Policy and General Rural Development:** agricultural policies (both national and international), donors' policies, decentralisation policies, context and environment, natural resource management, the local and regional environment. Requires you to have on hand basic information on the rural sector, both nationally and internationally.
- ◆ **Technical Information and Technologies:** production techniques and processing technologies. This information must be practical in content and provided in different formats suitable for the users' levels of instruction and languages. It is often available in existing books, journals or technical factsheets. Relies more specifically on extension skills when processing information.
- ◆ **Commercial and Market Information:** prices, distribution channels, suppliers, outlets, standards and quality, customs regulations. This information is not generally available as such. Among other things, many countries' statistic collection systems are deficient, making price information unavailable. Internationally, data exist but must often be bought, or are difficult to access. Without necessarily doing your own detailed market studies, satisfactory information can be collected if you identify good sources, process the data, and know resource persons. Raises the issue of information availability and cost more specifically.
- ◆ **Information on Activity Financing:** This is a recurrent demand because of the lack of business financing instruments. Calls more specifically for you to develop watchdog capacities.
- ◆ **Orientation, Addresses:** addresses of suppliers, exporters, resource organisations for certain fields. In general, the data selected must be annotated. More specifically requires the capacity to identify and capitalise information in an ongoing manner.
- ◆ **Legal and Fiscal Information:** This information, while generally available from each country's official publications, needs to be processed by a specialist and accompanied by initial advice. Requires specific legal knowledge.
- ◆ **Management Information (Accounting, Finances, Human Resources):** The information available in books and journals is often too general or too academic, and cannot therefore be used directly by professional organisations and businesses. These information requests could be met initially with workshops and working groups. Related to training and support-advice dynamics in which your information service could participate.

more or less emphasis on this or that type of information. This chapter discusses how to assess your audience's needs and structure your information offer by identifying and prioritising themes accordingly.

IDENTIFY YOUR AUDIENCE AND ITS DEMANDS

Before formalising their offer, information services need to define their target audiences, know them, and set priorities regarding the capacity to respond to demands from varied audiences. This implies qualifying the demand, which is done in three stages:

- ◆ **Identify your audiences and the different types of audience** (this identification is given below in the form of a relatively general panorama of all stakeholders habitually encountered in the rural world).
- ◆ **Know your audiences and their demands:** that is to say, analyse your audiences' demands and information practices, match the different types of audiences with the types of information demanded, and in function of this also match the type of information with the level of processing required.
- ◆ **Determine the size of your service:** choose one or a few target audience(s), according to your service's means, location (both geographic and institutional), and skills.

The Various Audiences in the Rural Development Sector

- ◆ **Small Individual Farmers** – farmers and stock farmers, individual processors, individual craftsmen: a population that, overall, is characterised by poor education—even illiteracy (or, literacy in only local language(s)), limited financing capacities, and little if any practice reading and writing.
- ◆ **Farmers, Groups and Project Implementers** – farmers and stock farmers, individual processors, individual craftsmen, farmers' groups, processors' groups: people with secondary, or higher, education whose financing capacities are also limited, but who are sufficiently proficient in reading and writing.

- ◆ **Small and medium rural enterprises** and agrifood enterprises: this audience is willing to pay for useful information as long as it is well targeted and immediately operational.
- ◆ **Professional Associations and Farmers' Organisations, Agricultural Workers Unions** (here, the term "farmers' organisations" refers to regional or national organisations): these groups play a role in information, in addition to promoting the interests of their members.
- ◆ **Support and Advice Organisations** – training, supervision and extension organisations, administrations, management centres, chambers of agriculture, NGOs, consultants, projects. These structures are used to seeking information. Their needs are varied, ranging from technical to policy information. This audience is in demand of both local and international information.
- ◆ **Teachers and Students:** They visit specialised information services because existing libraries and documentation centres are often inadequate for their needs.

Most research organisations, for their part, have operational documentation centres. Among other things, they may be members of regional and international networks that allow them to broaden their sources of information.

Match the Audience to the Type of Information

To identify your audience's information needs, you must simultaneously:

- ◆ know how it obtains information (or not) and through which channels;
- ◆ know what types of information it is looking for; and
- ◆ know what level of information it uses.

This list shows that information services are called to meet diverse information processing needs. Existing documents only partially meet the demand, no so much because they are "off topic", but because they can not be used "as is" by certain audiences: they need to be summarised, reformulated in more practical language, etc.

Information services that target professional development stakeholders centre their strategies around the link between information and action. Users do not come looking for information on a given subject, but rather for specific answers

TYPE OF AUDIENCE	MAIN TYPES OF INFORMATION SOUGHT	PRIMARY READING SKILLS UTILISED
small farmers	technical	videos, radio programmes, extension visuals (such as drawings or photos)
farmers and groups	technical, financial, commercial, addresses	summarised, short, practical, illustrated information local information
small enterprises	legal, managerial, commercial, technical and financial	summarised, brief, practical, illustrated information possibly national or international information
professional associations	commercial, financial, policy	complete, practical information in the form of handbooks, reflection documents, and policy summaries regional, national and international information
support and advice organisations	all types	complete, practical information studies, reflection documents, and policy summaries methodologies and applied research results regional, national and international information
teachers & students	technical and general information	general and scientific information

to questions or solutions to problems they have. This means that requests are most often individual, and that users' needs are very specific.

To provide suitable responses, you will need to compile data from several sources and have summarised (and therefore pre-processed) information on hand that covers the various elements at work to facilitate decision making, choices, and action.

Information Needs to Be Summarised Two Examples

- ◆ For a question on how to maintain soil fertility, a general, 150-page book on soil and soil conservation will not necessarily be consulted much, whereas a 6-page, illustrated technical factsheet that explains how to mulch will be immediately useable.
- ◆ For an apparently simple question such as “How can I export essential oils to Europe?”, providing information that will be useful for the Malagasy essential oils producers’ union requires you to seek and summarise diverse information: importers and their requirements (production volumes, etc.), quality standards, required packaging, prices, customs regulations, etc.

These examples show that information services that cater to the demands of professionals must develop suitable products such as information packs, a question-and-answer (Q&A) service, factsheets (preferably short and practical), address lists, etc. They can not be content with making books and periodicals available.

The value of the information communicated depends heavily on how operational and readable it is. The service must therefore deliver concise, appropriate and directly useable information, which requires considerable pre-processing.

SAMPLE “OPERATIONAL” QUESTIONS

- ◆ How can I export my mangoes to Europe?
- ◆ What is Mali’s seed policy?
- ◆ How should my farmers’ organisation present its financial records?

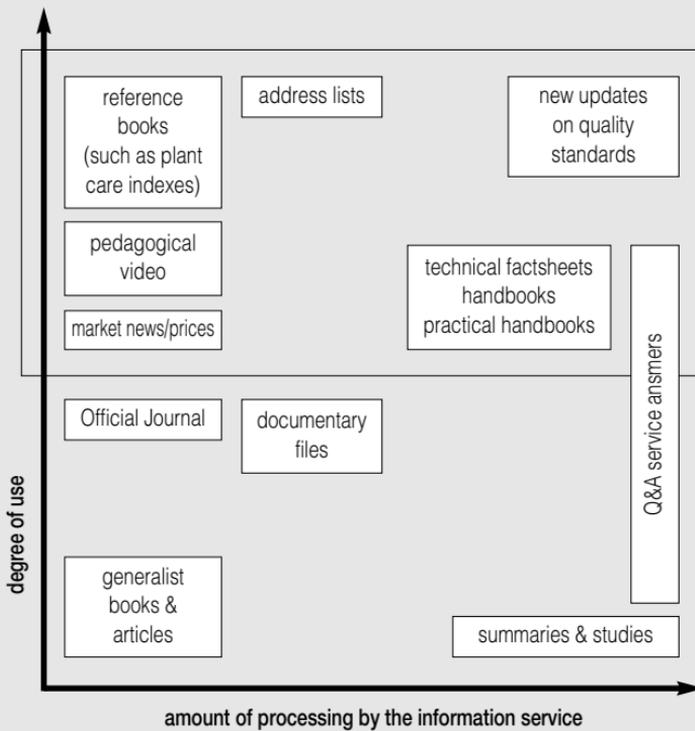
The way in which you respond to such information needs—in other words, the degree to which and how you process information—will vary widely according to the audience and the users’ greater or lesser ability to identify their needs, actively seek out the information they need, and interpret it.

In response to this diverse demand, information services must adapt their sources and make the effort to re-process the information upstream, taking into account how much it will be used by users. They must consider the fact that the target audiences do not have time to read and/or are not used to reading long books (and sometimes are barely literate).

In addition, users seek practical solutions to their problems. These solutions are rarely found in books available on the shelves; they require prior work collecting and summarising information so that askers can use it.



The chart below gives an overview of available information in function of degree of use.



In the chart above, the closer you are to the upper right corner, the more directly useable the information is and the more it was processed. Information services that specifically target rural professionals should place their offer in the top half of the chart.

► ***The Right Approach***

When processing information, documentation centres produce original information. This is a step away from the profession of librarian, towards the function of intermediation.

This increases the need to place the information service within, or in close relation to, a professional organisation that has specialists available.

Choose Your Target Audience

Whatever its stage of development (in the process of being created, undergoing changes, or being restructured), your service must define a strategy based on its target audience, make it explicit, and formulate it. If you do not, you run the risk of failure (inappropriate acquisitions, types of services and products).

Adapting to Your Audience Two Case Studies¹

The Analakely Boutique d'information, CITE's Antananarivo Branch (Madagascar)

CITE positions itself as an information centre for enterprises and craftsmen but realises that this audience does not visit it. It therefore decided to:

- open a specific site—an “information boutique” at the marketplace, 200 metres from CITE;
- hire a manager-agent with good knowledge of the sector; and
- create a small but highly specialised documentary fund focusing on crafts professions.

It was an immediate success in terms of number of visitors.

The Saild CDDR² (Cameroon)

At the start, CDDR was an internal service for Saild staff. The decision to open it to the outside and gear the service towards farmers lead to organisational changes:

- opening a specific site: a shop on a busy street;
- enriching the documentary fund with specifically adapted products: video library;
- creating specific services that target its users: events;
- shoring up specific products: question & answer service.

¹ All organisations cited in the case studies in this handbook are presented in Appendix 2, page 167.

² The Centre de documentation pour le développement rural (CDDR, documentation centre for rural development) created by Saild (Service d'appui aux initiatives locales de développement).

Why Specialise?

Trying to address all the audiences mentioned above would be extremely ambitious and would indeed require considerable financial and human means. In addition, you would risk a lack of visibility or recognition.

Specialising allows you to act in function of your means and be more relevant for specific sectors. This in no way means that your information service can totally ignore other needs and audiences. Rather, you need to use your judgement and determine one or more primary target(s) and one or more secondary target(s).

The choice of a target audience should guide every aspect of setting up your service, its location, and its products.

Choose Your Audience(s)

Information services that address professionals (or development stakeholders) would not take into account illiterate farmers, teachers and students. Targeting this audience is not relevant.

- ◆ To reach **illiterate farmers**, you need to go through intermediary organisations: the target audience would therefore be these intermediary organisations, and not the end users directly.
- ◆ As for **teachers and students**, they must not be the priority target of information services that specialise in rural development.

The audiences that define the orientation of an information service are in fact farmers and craftsmen, entrepreneurs, and finally associations and support organisations.

- ◆ **Farmers, craftsmen and enterprises:** Favouring this audience implies providing immediately operational—and therefore sorted, analysed and reformulated—information. It also requires you to have a strong promotional drive targeting this audience (unfamiliar with information services), and actively disseminate information and organise events.
- ◆ **Support Organisations:** These organisations act as intermediaries. As such, they process information so that it is more easily useable by the stakeholders they support. Thus, they will do some of the information processing themselves. This audience is also more naturally inclined to seek out information and is relatively familiar with information services. Finally, it ensures dissemination towards end users.

► ***The Right Approach***

Many of these audiences (other than support organisations) are not used to seeking out information. Dialogue with users is central to obtaining specific understanding of users' demands, which are often formulated in vague terms or in terms of problems that they need solved. Consequently, and no matter what audience you target, you should focus your information service on mediation and communication.

A Key to Success: Your Location

The choice of a location is primordial for specialised information services that target audiences that are not familiar with documentation centres and not used to seeking out information. You must take the service to your audience and find a location that is central to places it frequents (markets, craftsmen's neighbourhoods, the city centre, etc.). If it is too far from such areas of professional activity, either it will not draw visitors or it will grow with an audience other than the one intended (students, etc.) and therefore progressively drift away from its original goal.

The Development of an Enterprise Cyberspace by CIMDET in Nouakchott (Mauritania)

In May 2001, CIMDET opened an Internet consultation and search help service (5 computers) destined specifically for entrepreneurs, the information centre's prime target. Very rapidly, it became a cybercafe frequented by civil servants and students (only approximately 6% of visitors were entrepreneurs).

The number of visitors, low at first, dropped rapidly (in 2002, less than twenty or so users per month, compared to an average of approximately fifty users per day in the other cybercafes in Mauritania).

The location of the enterprise cyberspace—an outlying neighbourhood mostly occupied by offices and administrations—goes a long way towards explaining this change.

In 2004, CIMDET planned to obtain high speed Internet access and develop computer skills courses.

KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE'S ENVIRONMENT AND PRACTICES

Getting to know your audience implies exploring in three directions: your audience's surroundings and environment, the information supply available locally and directly accessible by users; and your users and their information practices.

The Users' Surroundings and Environment

Before creating or restructuring an information service, you must complete your analysis and definition of your target audience with knowledge of its context: the surroundings and environment, and the major international, sub-regional and national development stakes.

You can obtain this knowledge mainly from studies (on, for example, national or regional agricultural production). These studies exist but are often distributed on a limited scale, especially local studies, and they can be rather difficult to find. Initial identification (and later identification to update your knowledge) of such documents is easier if you rely on a network of contacts with people working in or with producers' organisations.

The Existing Local Information Supply

Knowledge of the information already available locally is a vital part of identifying the main rural stakeholders. This local investigation should give you an idea of the context in which your target audiences work, and provide clues as to their needs, what is missing, and the problems they have accessing information.

At this stage, your methods will differ considerably from standard information-collection methods. The goal is not an exhaustive inventory of information sources but rather basic knowledge of the context in order to position your service in relation to other existing services and available sources.

Identifying and Locating Sub-Regional and National General Policy Documents

These documents give an overview of the different sectors and strategic orientations of rural development. They are often written by or for the multi-donor committees present in each country in conjunction with governments. One interesting method is to identify the multi-donor secretariat and its site for each country. For example, Madagascar's is very rich: www.smbmada.net.

The following organisations notably publish general policy documents:

- ◆ The **Ministries of Agriculture and Ministries** that coordinate national policies and donors' interventions. These structures, however, do not always list and file their documents, which can make access difficult;
- ◆ The **World Bank** publishes PIDs (project information documents) and PADs (project assessment documents) that give general presentations of the countries concerned and sectors targeted (www.worldbank.org/infoshop/projinfo.htm).
- ◆ Similarly, the **European Union** publishes country strategy papers that are generally available only on Internet (http://europa.eu.int/comm/development/body/csp_rsp/csp_en.cfm for ACP countries and http://europa.eu.int/comm/external_relations/index.htm for other countries).
- ◆ The **Postes d'expansion économique** (part of the French Ministry of the Economy) and the British Department for International Development (DFID) also publish good quality strategy studies. Unfortunately, they are not available for all countries. They can often be found online on these organisations' websites. Postes d'expansion économique: www.missioneco.org/ followed by the name of the country. For example: www.missioneco.org/burkinafaso - DFID: www.dfid.gov.uk.
- ◆ Finally, another possible source can be economic cooperation zones such as WAEMU³ (www.uemoa.int/index.htm), ASEAN⁴ (www.aseansec.org) or even IZF (Investir en zone franc - www.izf.net).

³ the West African Economic and Monetary Union

⁴ the Association of Southeast Asian Nations

How to Investigate Existing Local Resources?

- ◆ Identify the primary support structures (private and public associative structures, projects and programmes) and contact them. It is a good idea to start with these structures because they often have a broad vision of the context. They are in direct contact with the various actions underway, and with the target audiences and their needs. They generally have basic knowledge of information sources. This provides a fairly accurate picture of how the rural world is structured.
- ◆ Identify organisations that publish reviews or specialised newsletters, books, handbooks, videos, etc. Support structures are often also such publishers.
- ◆ Identify and visit the existing information services, whether specialised or generalist. Knowing that a documentation centre exists is not enough—you must also verify that it is operational, what information it offers, and its pertinence in for the target audiences.
- ◆ Identify and visit the telecentres near the information service.
- ◆ Identify local radio stations.
- ◆ Identify websites created by organisations or enterprises in the country.

Preferred Methods:

- ◆ Identify stakeholders in the area to understand the rural context as a whole and its structure: this investigation must take into account the stakeholders in the urban centre(s) where institutions and donors are concentrated (usually the capital) and equally those in the major agricultural zones.
- ◆ Conduct interviews, discussions and meetings.
- ◆ Seek in particular to learn two major things: the geographic scope of action of each of the structures visited and these structures' target audiences.

This may at first glance seem very ambitious and time consuming but in fact, it does not necessarily take long. Experience has shown that one week is often enough to obtain this overview and conduct the interviews.

You will also make contacts to begin creating a network of relationships with the main stakeholders.

You may discover that other structures also plan to create information services, which could lead you to work in partnership with them, or you may discover that a high-quality, operational information service already exists, which would lead you to re-think your strategy to complement—rather than compete with—it.

Users and their Information Practices

Your goal should be to acquire minimal knowledge of users' activities so that you can identify what will be useful to improve their activities and what they would need to overcome the difficulties they encounter in their day-to-day activities.

Information is never neutral. That is to say, it is always related to the sector concerned and is not cut off from professional activities.

The services you offer will only be a good match if they are closely related to your users' day-to-day activities.

A Method to Investigate Your Information Service's Users' Practices

1. Qualitative surveys based on user interviews should be favoured. You do not need to conduct a large amount of interviews, but they need to be well targeted and in-depth.

Statistical surveys and questionnaires with a series of questions on information needs often give disappointing results and yield only a partial, or overly schematic, view of users' attitudes to information. Also, statistical surveys are relevant when they collect information from those who are already familiar with seeking out information.

(cont.)

2. It is preferable to start with initial understanding of the users' activities so as to keep information in its rightful place—an element that contributes (along with other things) to improving activities.

This method of starting not with users' information needs but by identifying the problems they encounter in their activities is relevant for several reasons:

- ◆ Addressing users directly about their information needs only gives you useful indications if the users are familiar with information services (if they are not, they will not be able to formulate their needs).
- ◆ It allows you to go beyond the demands that users have already identified. Indeed, when seeking information, users tend to express their needs in relation to what they already know. They do not tend to look for the unknown, even if it might be more useful.

At this stage, your goal is in-depth knowledge of needs. This knowledge of users and their practices can be acquired from a dozen interviews of different types of users.

This method is, overall, easy and inexpensive (quantitative surveys, on the other hand, require considerable resources).

MONITOR AND EVALUATE YOUR AUDIENCE

You will need to monitor your audience for several reasons.

Such monitoring allows you to:

- ◆ demonstrate your information service's usefulness (attendance rate and level of satisfaction);
- ◆ adapt your products and services: your audience and its centres of interest will guide the documentary fund and collections; analyse demand to fine-tune your knowledge of the link between "types of audiences" and "types of needs"; and
- ◆ optimise internal organisation (improve response times, for example).

The monitoring tools set up must meet all three needs simultaneously, and therefore require putting prior thought into their design.

How to Design Monitoring Tools

Ask Yourself the Right Questions: What Do You Want to Know?

Qualifying Users' Professional Status, an Example

People frequently seek out information when creating a second, or even third, activity (for example, a teacher who starts raising chickens). In this situation, what interests the information service: their main profession, the fact that they have more than one activity, or that activity that lead them to consult the documentation centre?

Depending on the case, you could place them in the category "teacher", "chicken farmer" or "multi-activity". However, using the category "teacher" will partially skew the analysis of your data.

There is no need for information services to manage data on both the primary profession and the secondary activity. You should use the category that corresponds to the activity for which the service was consulted.

Ask Useful Questions

Do you really need to know your users' exact level of education? What impact will knowing what percentage of users have degrees have on the development of your information service? Experience has shown that information services that include this type of data in their questionnaires do not generally exploit this data.

Ask Questions Whose Answers You Can Actually Use

Open questions are difficult to process because they take time to analyse and answers are rarely uniform. They are better suited to occasional surveys, rather than the ongoing monitoring of users and demand. The use of open questions should be very limited.

Design Tools Suited to Your Needs

Monitoring tools should be designed differently according to the specific data you want to obtain about users:

- ◆ If you want to know if you have steady flow of return clients, you will need to link user data to demand data. This will allow you to identify the number of users who use the infor-

mation service more than once. Similarly, the membership renewal rate will give indications as to client loyalty. If your members change every year, your service probably does not meet their needs.

- ◆ If your goal is not client loyalty but a large volume regardless of who the users are, counting requests is enough.
- ◆ If you want to know what types of requests are made of your service, you will have to record the subject of requests.
- ◆ If you want to know the characteristics of requests for the various types of audiences, you will need to cross-reference user data with data on requests.

Recommendations from Experience

1. Computerised management (preferably in a database) is necessary to exploit the data. Manual processing will rapidly become too time consuming, and will therefore rapidly be abandoned.
2. Multiplying data collection files is inefficient because this increases processing times, generates double entries, and disperses data.
3. Demand forms need to be simple. It is better to collect less information systematically than it is to start out overly ambitious and end up with data gaps, excessive data entry times, and overly complex data processing.
4. The paper forms must be designed after the computer tools have been designed.
5. You will need both information management and computer skills (databases and office software) to set up a monitoring process.

Monitoring Tools: Definition and Set Up

Three Categories of Data in All

1. description of users/members
2. type of requests
3. request management (response times, etc.)

Two Management Tools

Data collection for monitoring uses two questionnaires:

- ◆ **the user form:** a tool to know your audience (cf. pages 30 and 31); and
- ◆ **the request form:** a tool to assess requests. This form includes both the content of the requests and the monitoring data (cf. page 32).

Ideally, with computerised data processing, the two files will be linked within one database: each user is linked to all of his or her requests.

Recommendations on the Use of Monitoring Data: Standardisation and Rigour

To be useable, some of the data in these forms must be collected using typologies (or reference lists) that are also used to control data entry.

Typologies are by definition standardised so that each notion is covered by one and only one term spelt in only one way. The following example illustrates the need to standardise the data collected: “teacher”, “professor”, “instructor”, and “trainer”—all these terms can be grouped under the generic term “teacher”.

Typologies must be simple to offer rapid visibility (quicker data entry and easy reading) and contain a limited number of categories (estimated at a dozen terms). For example, the rural field can be covered by the following thematic list: agriculture/plant crops, stock/animal farming, fish and game, natural resource management, economics and trade, agricultural policies and services, infrastructures and rural engineering, agricultural product processing, nutrition and health, and information/training.

Questionnaires must be simple, with clear questions that users can understand instantly. In some very specific cases, ambiguity may be unavoidable. For example, the type of profession may be difficult for users to answer: What should a teacher that is seeking information not as a teacher but for the creation of a secondary activity give as his or her profession? Will they describe themselves as teachers or according to this secondary activity? This example highlights the need for dialogue with users.

User Form

Last Name: First Name:

Gender: Male Female

Organisation in conjunction with the demand
(full name and acronym):

Profession / Position in conjunction with the demand:

Address / Contact Information

Organisation:

Address: City:

Telephone: Fax:

Email:

Contact (if different)

Direct telephone: Email:

Type of Organisation (select one)

Private Sector: Public Sector:

1. Central Administration: Ministry
2. Local Administration
3. Support-Advice Organisation
4. Local Government
5. Bilateral Agency or International Aid Organisation
6. Development Project
7. International / National NGO
8. Farmer / Agricultural Producer
9. Professional Agricultural Organisation
(farmers' group, cooperative, federation)
10. Craftsman / Small or Medium Enterprise
11. Agrifood Industry
12. Vocational Training Organisation
13. Teaching Establishment
14. Media / Information Service
15. Research Institute
16. Other (specify)

Field of Activity

- ◆ Agriculture / Agricultural Producer
- ◆ Stock Farming, Fish and Wildlife
- ◆ Environment and Natural Resource Management
- ◆ Development and Rural Engineering
- ◆ Agriculture Policies and Services
- ◆ Economy and Commercial Trade
- ◆ Agricultural Product Processing
- ◆ Private Sector
- ◆ Nutrition and Health
- ◆ Other (specify)

Level of Education

- 01 - No education
- 02 - Primary education
- 03 - Secondary education
- 04 - Higher education

Internet Access

- Do you have direct access to Internet?
- at work
 - elsewhere (at home, cybercafe, etc.)

Date:

Signature:

Request Form

Last Name: First Name:

Member no.:

Your Question(s)

What is/are the subject of your question(s) (2 questions):

.....
.....
.....

The rest of this form will help you better clarify your demand and help us formulate our response.

Reason for the request, according to your question(s)

- ◆ agriculture/agricultural production
- ◆ agricultural processing (artisanal or semi-industrial)?
- ◆ market information
- ◆ elaboration of projects or policies within your organisation
- ◆ class preparation
- ◆ other

Specify the reason for your request (problem encountered):

.....
.....

Request Processing by the Information Service

Request Date:

Thematic Sector (use the service's typology):

Type of response provided (use the service's typology – consultation – production of a documentary file, etc.):

Response Date:

Responsible Person:

Finally, you need to be rigorous about entering data regularly and completely.

BUILD LOYALTY

Building the loyalty of your audience is your best guarantee of knowing it well and giving yourself the means to monitor its needs closely. Two tools are especially used for this:

- ◆ user subscriptions to the documentation centre, and
- ◆ mailing lists.

Two Specific Cases in Monitoring: the Question-and-Answer (Q&A) Service and the Occasional In-Depth Survey or Satisfaction Survey

Question-and-answer services need to monitor the content of responses given to users continuously. A detailed analysis of this can be found on page 66.

Occasional satisfaction surveys should be conducted to feed reflections on your service's prospects. The goal is to assess the service's capacity to respond to needs and measure how well your offer meets your audience's expectations. The data collected may lead you to envisage possible new orientations. Satisfaction surveys are most often conducted through questionnaires distributed widely among users.

The questionnaire survey may be completed and strengthened by a short series of more in-depth interviews with users judged to be representative of the audience.

A Methodology for Questionnaire Surveys

- ◆ Define the scope of the survey and the subjects on which it will concentrate.
- ◆ Build the survey on the notion of “indicators”, that is to say on elements that will effectively allow you to measure what you want to measure.
- ◆ Organise your questionnaire in a very structured manner, paying close attention to the order of questions and making sure you ask short, simple questions.
- ◆ Favour closed questions (in which respondents choose from a pre-determined list of answers). These questions keep the survey on track and are more easily exploitable than open questions. The people surveyed are often more comfortable with this type of question. Nevertheless, open questions can be of interest in that they allow users to express themselves more freely and evoke subjects or ideas that might otherwise have been ignored. They take more time to exploit because the responses can be very scattered or vague.
- ◆ Collect specific and objective data, rather than opinions. Thus, the question “Is the service useful?” may provide you with the users’ opinion as to its usefulness but it will not allow you to determine the service’s impact on the users’ activities or tell you how it is useful. It is therefore necessary to clarify, in the question, the various uses that users might have made of the service. To identify real uses, you will have to ask that the answer be illustrated by one or two specific examples.

For example: a service wants to know what impact its website has. One survey question will be: “Do you use the website?” Yet, even if most answer “yes”, the indications obtained will not be specific. A follow up question asking users to provide one or two specific examples of when they used the website will provide you with a clearer picture.

Communicate and Facilitate the Flow of Information

The relevance and viability of information services come from their strategies on what they offer. **The notion of offer** is important because it underlies the cohesive integration of several types of products and services that respond on various levels to users' needs. No one single product or service can respond to all types of requests and all types of users. In function of your strategy—built around the definition of priority target audiences and priority actions—you will build your data collection tools, set up suitable management modes, and mobilise the necessary means of action.

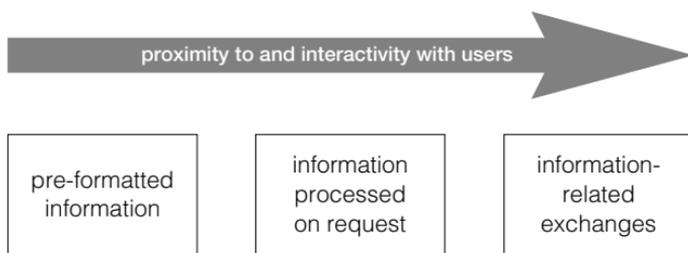
This chapter aims to:

- ◆ illustrate the various services that can make up an information offer, highlighting the conditions needed to create them and what each product can contribute; and
- ◆ draw a certain number of lessons from case studies, notably keys to success and the relevance of products (or services).

ESTABLISH A RANGE OF SERVICES

Diverse Information Services

The schema below shows an overall approach to services and products that can be offered. It identifies three forms of intervention, showing their distance to (or from) users and the (greater or lesser) amount of communication and exchange you have with users.



The range of products and services that you are able to implement can therefore be organised around these three types of information “interventions”.

Information analysed, organised and formatted in advance based on recurrent requests, available to an audience used to seeking and using information independently:

- ◆ A consultation and lending service based on an established, predominantly practical documentary fund focused on the major professions in the region or country. This fund should be updated regularly and enriched with answers to questions, Internet documents, and thematic and/or organisation information packs.
- ◆ An Internet consultation service that provides assisted access to pre-selected, relevant Internet sites and online databases.
- ◆ Publications (paper or digital copies) to disseminate frequently requested information and exploit available databases: technical factsheets (e.g. on how to sell a product), directories (e.g. suppliers’ addresses), orientation sheets, periodicals, information portals, etc. The information service can produce these publications or (partially or fully) outsource their production.
- ◆ A bookstore to sell publications likely to interest the target audiences (both the service’s own publications and the publications of others).

Tailored information in response to requests:

- ◆ Orientation and initial advice, the purpose of which is to help users formulate their requests or problems and steer them to useful resources (inside or outside the information service).
- ◆ A question-and-answer (Q&A) service, a central tool that provides suitable responses to specific and individual requests (in the form of documentary files, summaries, etc.).

Information prepared and shared collectively during activities that facilitate its mastery:

- ◆ Events and exchanges on given subjects to favour networking (open houses, conferences, meetings, thematic events, etc.).
- ◆ Radio programmes are also a good way to disseminate information widely to an audience that is often cut off from information services or not very familiar with written texts.

Three Case Studies: Saild and Agro-PME in Cameroon, UTAP in Tunisia

Saild, Agro-PME and UTAP⁵ are three private or associative structures that developed services:

- ◆ in direct contact with the professional environment;
- ◆ on their own initiative (rather than on that of outside projects) as part of their development strategies;
- ◆ with a concern for financial balance; and
- ◆ combining information and support services (training, advice, professional representation).

The three case studies summarised in the table on page 38 show that the process of elaborating an information offer generally follows the same outline, even when the organisations are at different levels, are in diverse sectors, address different audiences, and have made more or less progress setting up their services. You can see:

- ◆ a certain convergence in how the offer was elaborated as the same types of services were developed. This illustrates what could be a basic offer, adequate and effective in response to needs, even though starting points vary greatly; and
- ◆ progressive stages, built in response to the demand and set up because of a combination of close proximity to the public and its demands and the dynamic nature of the teams in charge.

⁵ Saild: Service d'appui aux initiatives locales de développement. Agro-PME: promotion of agrifood activities and small and medium enterprise. Utap: Union tunisienne de l'agriculture et de la pêche.

Progressive Implementation of an Information Supply

Saïd – support for farmers' organisations – Cameroon



Agro-PME – small enterprise support – Cameroon



UTAP – professional organisation for agriculture and fishing – Tunisia



DESCRIPTIONS OF VARIOUS PRODUCTS AND SERVICES

When presenting products and services, we aim to:

- ◆ give you the keys to determine how interesting it would be to develop this or that product/service (for example: tools that permit effective consultation, indispensable Q&A service, events that generate high added value, etc.);
- ◆ explicitly state the questions you will have to answer to guide your decisions on how to run your service and, consequently, identify the means and resources you will need so that you can be prepared; and
- ◆ highlight the keys to success.

Orientation and Initial Advice Service

It is crucial that you do not neglect your users' first contact with the information service. This initial reception makes it possible to understand or elicit their requests and steer them to the right organisation, document or service.

This requires qualified staff. All too often, reception desk staff do not know how to orient visitors. Yet, it is important that reception staff understand visitors' requests and know the information service well so they can refer visitors to the agent, Q&A staff or person best able to provide the information requested.

This form of "pre-advice" can only be given after discussion with the information-seeker. The person in charge can then suggest the visitor contact a more appropriate organisation, consult the documentary fund, contact a question-and-answer service, or read existing publications. This pre-advice should enable visitors to continue their search for information to create and/or improve their activities.

Document Consultation and Lending

Consultation and lending are crucial activities, notably in areas where there are no other sources of information. The audience targeted by specialised services is little inclined

to consult on site as they are not in the habit of doing so and do not have the time to do so. This justifies developing a lending activity.

Key Factors (necessary means and keys to success)

Direct or Indirect Access

Direct access to documents should be favoured for smaller documentary funds and audiences that do not frequent libraries. This requires, however, considerable discipline to ensure that documents remain whole and are put away. A simple categorisation scheme and the presence of someone to supervise are needed because there is a strong risk of theft and/or torn/missing pages.

For indirect access—generally the case in large documentation centres with large numbers of visitors—search tools for users (catalogue, database with local or online access) need to be developed and you need to have the staff to distribute the documents.

In both cases, reception is important.

Documentary Fund Content: Up-to-Date and Diverse

You need to have an adequate documentary fund: practical, illustrated documents on various supports (videos for example) that suit the users' professions. It is imperative that you renew the fund regularly. A minimal budget must be devoted to this every year.

Documentary funds should be very diverse: newspapers and magazines, technical videos, trade information from Internet, technical factsheets, ad hoc information packs.

The Torohay example shows that a practical fund can be of interest to the public despite insufficient updates. Customer loyalty, however, is low, notably because the fund is not updated.

Should You Charge for Consultation and Lending or Not?

Most documentation centres charge consultation fees. This serves two primary purposes:

- ◆ show the value of information; and
- ◆ prevent non-targeted audiences (notably students and teachers) from taking over the information centre.

Most often, the fees are linked to a loyalty-building policy via yearly subscriptions, which may be accompanied by fees for occasional consultations.

Torohay Centre in Antsirabé, a Regional Branch of CITE in Antananarivo (Madagascar)

Torohay is an information centre created in 1996 and geared towards a public of micro-entrepreneurs (primary or secondary activity, craftsmen, farmers, artisanal food processors) who make up 50% of the centre's users. Other visitors to Torohay are mostly students and teachers. Torohay is situated at the centre of the market, in the form of a boutique open on the street.

It has a very practical and technical documentary fund (on agrifood processing, agricultural production, embroidery, carpentry, etc.). For example, the magazine *Système D*, imported from France, is a big success.

Its central activity is consultation and lending, with 250 to 300 consultations and 250 to 300 loans every month. The documents are set out for direct access, filed by major subject. On-site consultation is free. Lending is reserved for members (approximately 200 members per year on average, with a high turnover—only 13% of members have renewed their membership more than twice).

Membership dues are 2 euros per year for individuals and 9 euros for organisations.

Lending is managed by hand: each document has a lending sheet and each member has a card. Documents are lent for 15 days.

The documentary fund contains 1,700 documents. It has not been enriched or updated since it was created. It does not subscribe to magazines or periodicals. However, members have access to CITE's general catalogue and can request documents from CITE headquarters in Antananarivo. These documents are periodically delivered to Torohay by internal mail.

Torohay employs two full-time staff.

When lending, collecting security deposits is crucial to minimise the risks of document loss and deterioration. For example, Sald in Cameroon charges 15.20 euros for loans (enrolment fee + security deposit) and 1.50 euros for a yearly subscription.

Lending Management Constraints

Lending requires specific management linking documents to borrowers. This means that a lending log for each docu-

ment must record the document references, the borrowers' names, and the dates on which it was borrowed.

When the volume of lending is high (more than 20-30 loans per day), computerised management should be examined, but be warned that appropriate software can be fairly expensive.

Lending ideally requires several copies of all your centre's documents to make sure they remain available. In addition, the more documents are consulted or borrowed, the more quickly they deteriorate; you will need to protect them.

Internet and New Information Technologies

Information services have a role to play in developing the use of Internet and new technologies. The stakes are double: establishing a pure service logic (Internet access and computer infrastructure, etc.) combined with capacity building in finding and using information. Information services are coherent when they offer both.

There are several advantages to providing users with Internet access. Doing so:

- ◆ opens the documentary fund to a larger range of information: given the quantity of information available on Internet and access difficulties or slow speeds for individual users, it is obvious that an Internet consultation service can, if well equipped, provide added value to the search for pertinent information, especially in isolated areas;
- ◆ familiarises an audience unfamiliar with information and computers with computers and new information technologies; and
- ◆ draws an audience that might not otherwise have come and makes this audience want to use information and other services.

In the rural development sector, information services are unique in two ways:

- ◆ accessible infrastructures are poor; and
- ◆ Internet's technical potential can satisfy producers' main concern—obtaining market information in real time.

The development of new technologies in rural areas thus centres around two elements: telecentres and market information services.

Telecentres

Information services find it difficult to enter the telecentre field. Until now, they have not initiated such projects. The stake is to build a service offer that combines access infrastructures with assistance finding and elaborating content. It would be interesting for information services to participate in the numerous telecentre creation experiences in rural areas, give training courses, and offer their research services and know-how. Currently, the most developed experiences tend logically to be in urban areas and target an audience willing to pay for the service: students, entrepreneurs, etc.

Market Information Services

Experiences with new technologies in rural areas focus primarily on market information systems (MISs). This handbook does not cover the creation of such complex services requiring considerable logistics. These services are better suited to governmental or inter-branch structures, rather than information centres.

Market Information Systems (MISs), Two Examples

- ◆ **Manobi in Senegal** – <http://t2m.manobi.sn>
This MIS provides horticulturists and market gardeners with the prices of their products on the major markets in Dakar in real time. They access this service through their WAP mobile phones.
- ◆ **Agritel in South Africa** – www.agritel.co.za
Agritel publishes the prices of fresh products on the South African market daily on Internet. The service is accessible with a monthly subscription (14 euros in 2003).
- ◆ **FAO, Market Information Services**
www.fao.org/waicent/faoinfo/agricult/ags/AGSM/marketin.htm
The site presents concrete MIS experiences.

The “Maison des initiatives économiques et sociales locales” (MIESL, local economic and social initiative centre) in Brazzaville, Congo: An Information and Communication Access Infrastructure

MIESL, inaugurated in March 2003, was an initiative of the Forum des jeunes entrepreneurs du Congo. The Forum is a professional business development support NGO that began its activities in 1990. It is organised in skills centres: business support, credit, rural support, and grassroots organisation support. In 1997, it set up an “information and communication engineering” service to accompany the growth of its activities, respond to its audience’s growing information needs, support the skills centres, manage the increasing amount of information they generated, and capitalise the projects conducted. This service has two primary tools: the Contact Forum newsletter and MIESL.

MIESL’s services were defined following a market study, notably conducted to verify potential profitability. To cover costs, these services include **income generating services**:

- ◆ cybercafe with a search help service: 50 users per day - 600 CFA francs per hour for members and 800 CFA francs for non-members (the average price for Brazzaville cybercafes is 1,000 CFA francs (1.50 euros));
- ◆ office and mini-media centre: an internal communication tool that offers services such as typing, photocopies, flyer production, etc. to outside customers (it serves approximately 20 people per day);

and “pull product” services:

- ◆ meeting facilities (for training courses and meetings), and
- ◆ a documentation centre is planned (the process of hiring a documentalist and establishing a documentary fund is underway).

The cybercafe is frequented by a majority of entrepreneurs and association leaders. It began by proposing Internet navigation services and beginners’ classes on navigating Internet. It evolved to provide Internet search assistance and a question-and-answer service.

From providing support-advice, the Forum progressively began to include communication and information services. Using Internet allows the Forum to ensure that the development of services has a financially viable basis, and draw professionals, which generates specific demands. To meet these demands and build the loyalty of this audience, the Forum now needs to develop a true information supply: documentation, research assistance, a question-and-answer service.

Key Factors (necessary means and keys to success)

Develop an Internet Search Service

For information centres, offering Internet services is only relevant if they are designed to provide information and search assistance. Information centres are not cybercafes.

Human Skills

It is crucial that the staff be very familiar with the audience's centres of interest (and thus, be able to judge the interest and suitability of the information found in relation to the users' needs), search logics, and the use of office equipment. More than computer skills or documentary techniques, this requires curiosity and communication skills above all.

Technical Means

The service must have a good connection (a specialised line, which is usually expensive), computers (to offer this service you need at least two computers devoted to it), and access to computer maintenance skills.

Develop an Information Watch and Activity Support

Seeking and, above all, finding relevant information requires know-how. In addition, you should select and bookmark the best sites so you can rapidly guide users to suitable information that responds specifically to their questions. The worst, in terms of service, is to provide no answers or a flood of (possibly off-topic) answers. To make your Internet service more relevant, you can:

- ◆ identify recurrent demands and pre-select sites of interest (Web watch);
- ◆ build up a documentary fund based on the most interesting sites (creation of documentary files by printing pages from sites of interest); and
- ◆ link the internet service to a question-and-answer service, if one exists.

Running an Internet consultation service can spur the development of products and services and thereby contribute to improving the pertinence of your information centre: from the creation of lists of interesting sites on specific subjects to the creation of a portal site that points to an ensemble of resources.

Charge for the Service

These services are never provided for free. When effective search assistance is provided, you should charge slightly more than cybercafes.

Publications: Technical Factsheets, Practical Handbooks, Books

Launching and selling a collection of documents, collected by the information service, generates high added value because it allows the service to:

- ◆ meet the specific needs of economic operators;
- ◆ generate its own income; and
- ◆ showcase the information capital accumulated by this activity and, possibly, the experience gained from projects conducted by the organisations with which information services often have ties.

Publications are very good pull products. They can improve information services' reputations and visibility.

Key Factors (necessary means and keys to success)

A Clear Editorial Policy

The efficiency of a publishing activity depends first on the presence of a clear editorial policy that is pragmatic and well-centred on the target readership(s). Quality staff is also primordial.

The definition of an editorial policy and issues to be published is guided by an analysis of the demand. Good knowledge of the readers and their needs makes it possible to diversify publications (bilingual documents, digital media, etc.). In terms of the editorial policy, financial viability is often built around a flagship publication, the best seller that will carry the full range of publications.

Production Conditions

For most rural information services, the readership for publications is small and has little purchasing power. Outside funding is often necessary to cover part of production costs. Indeed, publishing requires a considerable investment that may be recovered over a relatively long period (always more than one year) by the income from sales.

Agripromo Development Dossiers: A Collection on Rural Development Produced by Inades-Formation, Côte d'Ivoire

In 1998, Inades-Formation published the first Dossier de développement Agripromo (DDA, Agripromo development dossier), following changes to the Agripromo journal (published from 1973 to 1998) that came about as a result of problems financing the journal, a large drop in subscribers, and repeated difficulties in publishing it regularly. In launching this new collection, Inades had three goals:

- ◆ help development agents better understand current development issues and improve their critical analysis skills on these issues;
- ◆ help these agents make development choices that best take into account local conditions and best showcase locally available resources; and
- ◆ contribute to building farmers', development agents', and decision-makers' abilities to elaborate more effective development strategies.

DDAs are destined for development agents, Inades-Formation trainers, literate farming leaders, and via these agents, farmers within farmers' organisations.

- ◆ **The Publication.** Each DDA focuses on a single subject and covers the following aspects: genesis or history of the issue, critical analysis, and proposals for change. Analysis and reflection are entrusted to specialists. Inades-Formation's General Secretariat primarily re-writes these specialists' contributions to make them accessible to non-specialist readers.
- ◆ **Format - Circulation.** One DDA per year. Each issue is approximately 150 pages long and takes the form of factsheets. These 4- to 12-page factsheets are contained in an illustrated folder. 3,000 copies of each issue are printed in French, and 1,500 in English. Initially, two Agripromo development dossiers were planned per year; however, this revised downwards in line with Inades-Formation's real capacities.
- ◆ **Cost, Sale Price and Distribution.** More DDAs are sold on a per issue basis than on subscription. It costs approximately 9,140 CFA francs (13.70 euros) per copy to produce one issue. The sale price ranges from 3,000 CFA francs (in Africa) to 10,000 CFA francs (15.20 euros, outside Africa). Most are distributed by Inades' national offices. Currently, at least 60% of the print copies are sold in Africa.

The Technical Factsheet Collection by BIMTT⁶ (Madagascar)

Since 1989, BIMTT has been publishing technical factsheets on agricultural techniques for agricultural development agents, notably to support their farmer training activities, and for farmers themselves (groups or individuals).

These factsheets give detailed and practical descriptions of cropping or stock farming practices: pig farming, lettuce farming, beet farming, composting and earthworms, reforestation, agroforestry, etc.

◆ **Editorial Programme – Publication**

The subjects of the factsheets are chosen from suggestions by member institutions across the Malagasy territory (76 member organisations, primarily training and extension organisations).

- Publication is coordinated by an editorial committee that represents the member institutions and includes technical, pedagogical, and writing skills. A first draft is written locally under the responsibility of a member institution, a regional structure (a regional branch exists in each province), or a thematic pool. The final draft is written by the editorial committee.
- Products are assessed on a continuous basis by the trainers and farmers. Observations are consolidated in the regional structures and by the “Information, Communication, Documentation” pool that acts as a catalyst and driving force. Illustrations, layout and printing are outsourced.

◆ **Format – Circulation**

Paper copies (format A5 - 14 pages). Published in Malagasy. Printed in four colours. Average press run: 2,500 copies; some factsheets are reprinted.

◆ **Dissemination – Distribution**

From 2,000 to 6,000 copies are sold, depending on the factsheet. Distribution is organised above all in conjunction with the member organisations that act as relays and are in direct contact with farmers.

A small number are sold through a few bookstores.

Some factsheets are also showcased in BIMTT’s bimonthly liaison newsletter. .../...

⁶ Birao Iraisan’ny Mpampiofana Tanora Tantsaha (Malagasy for rural training centre liaison office).

◆ **Cost and Financing**

The average total production cost for one factsheet (with a print run of 2,500 copies) is 1,670 euros (or 0.70 euros per copy), including writing and editing (40%), layout (5%) and printing (55%). The sale price (0.35 euros) covers 50% of production costs and covers the outsourcing costs for layout and printing.

This activity is maintained—and its sale cost kept low enough for the readership's purchasing power—thanks to funding from donors who have supported this activity from the start.

The geographic spread of BIMTT's member institutions is a strong point for both the identification of priority needs and distribution.

The Technical Factsheets of the Institut agronomique et vétérinaire (IAV) Hassan II (Morocco)

Since 1994, IAV has published the Bulletin de Transfert de Technologie en Agriculture (BTTA, agriculture technology transfer bulletin) for extension agents, agricultural development agents, leading farmers, researchers and teachers. In the form of a technical factsheet, each bulletin presents a summary and updates on agricultural commodity chains, crops or livestock, and agricultural techniques. They often contain practical advice for farmers and various agricultural and rural sector stakeholders.

◆ **Editorial Programme — Publication**

The editorial committee, the "Comité national de transfert de technologie" (national technology transfer committee), is made up of research, teaching and agricultural development institutes. Every year it decides which subjects will be covered based on readers' expectations (surveys) and research by specialists.

Each issue is coordinated internally by an IAV professor and consists of contributions by various specialists from the institutions on the "National Technology Transfer Committee"—primarily IAV, INRA, the École nationale d'agriculture de Mekhnès (Ena-M, Mekhnès national school of agriculture), and the divisions of the Ministry of Agriculture. The range of contributions clearly reflects the availability of agricultural information within national institutions.

Approximately six months goes by between the moment a text is received and its publication. (cont.)

Each issue, written in French, is outsourced for translation into Arabic. Layout is done internally. Printing is outsourced.

◆ **Format – Circulation**

Paper copies (4 A4 pages) and digital copies (PDF on the Web). Printed in four colours - Photos.

Double publication: in French (3,000 copy press run) and in Arabic (5,000 copy press run). Monthly publication: 95 issues as of May 2003.

◆ **Distribution**

Distribution is by subscription to individuals (45 subscribers) and distributed by the Ministry of Agriculture to all its local and regional services. Distribution by post or door-to-door delivery.

Website publication at <http://www.iav.ac.ma/pntta/index.html>. Approximately one hundred visits per day.

◆ **Cost and Financing**

Overall production cost for one factsheet (with a press run of 3,000): 1,200 euros (or 0.40 euros per copy), including printing (50%) and management fees received by IAV (25%); the remaining 25% covers travel costs, translation and layout. This cost, as identified by IAV, does not include writing.

Sale Price: free - marginal subscription system (45 subscribers): 60 euros per year.

◆ **Financing**

- Subsidy from the Moroccan Ministry of Agriculture.
- The work is not remunerated as such: the factsheets showcase the work of IAV staff and are an integral part of their extension mission.

Information services can produce these publications themselves or in partnership with their organisations' other teams or outside organisations, notably for writing. Often, however, it is more efficient to outsource all or part of production (layout, printing, translation, etc.).

The Comparative Interest of various Products

- ◆ **Product factsheets, technical handbooks, and thematic factsheets** are by far the most successful. They are flagship products. They are original and practical products that are well-suited to the local context and can be showcased within a question-and-answer service.

Business and Supplier Directories: An Information Service Product that Typically Finds a Professional Readership with Ease

Directories are one of the most sought after tools, notably in numerous countries where telephone directories are incomplete and where no specific directories are published for professionals. A useful tool, directories are also products that sell very well. Thus, they are both an important source of potential income and an excellent pull product.

The publication of this product can be efficient and not very time consuming if procedures are defined and respected.

An Example: *Qui fait quoi en Mauritanie ?*, The Indispensable Directory of Mauritanian Businesses

In 1996, CIMDET published the first directory of businesses in Nouakchott. In 2002, the directory for the capital, Nouakchott, was on its fourth edition (with 1,700 entries) and there were five regional editions. This directory is the only list of businesses present in Mauritania.

The publication is fully self-financed and turns a profit by selling advertising space. In 2001, advertising income was 13,980 euros.

Several things explain this success:

- ◆ narrow targeting of the scope of the directory at launch: identification was first done on a limited scale before being expanded progressively;
- ◆ the information to be collected was well thought out and defined at the start and a suitable management tool (a database) was created;
- ◆ following the considerable initial data entry work, regular monitoring for very reliable data updates was set up;
- ◆ very rigorous data entry: complete, homogenous information for each business, notably using a pre-defined core vocabulary;
- ◆ a quality reference product for professionals;
- ◆ a printed product generated almost automatically from the database; and
- ◆ a database which forms the hub around which an ensemble of activities are organised: publication of the directory, source of information for the question-and-answer service, source of information on business opportunities.

- ◆ **Catalogues and directories** (of suppliers, sources of funding, support services, equipment, etc.) are in demand. This type of product is relevant if you use computerised management modes (databases) that allow for regular data collection and new, updated editions. Designed in this way, they can be used for multiple products and by several services, from the publication of a list of entities on a specific subject to the publication of complete directories, guidance services, question-and-answer services, etc.
- ◆ **Thematic dossiers** cover subjects frequently addressed by the question-and-answer service (they are therefore demand-generated).

While the following is not a mandatory list of collections to develop, experience has shown that:

- ◆ there is a crucial need for pedagogical material adapted to local contexts;
- ◆ there is a need for concise, practical documents written in simple language and heavily illustrated;
- ◆ there is a need for documents in local languages; and
- ◆ there is a flagrant lack of audio-visual material.

Finally, there is a need for capacity building.

These few difficulties aside, it does seem that the publishing sector is promising, if you adopt a suitable price policy and cover pertinent and well-presented subjects (to calculate the production cost of a publication and set a sale price, see the chapter on financing, page 135 and following).

Periodicals: Newspapers & Newsletters

Why tackle such a priori demanding and costly products? Why ask this of information service that can say “it’s not my role”?

In addition to extension services, agricultural press and rural radio are two favoured ways to reach farmers directly. Professional newspapers are such vectors notably when they are run on certain principles: an approach that seeks out users, the notion of “proximity information”, and consideration of the local context and various aspects of professional life. In addition, they should seek reader loyalty (subscriptions).

La Voix du paysan, Cameroon's Leading Agricultural Monthly, Published by Saïd

The Saïd structures providing information services were initially grouped with an aim to efficiency and reciprocal use of information and communication tools as their audiences and objectives were the same. In 1994, the La Voix du paysan newspaper and the CDDR information centre split apart, with one person coordinating both.

◆ **Content and Languages Adapted to the Agro-Ecological and Linguistic Zones**

The La Voix du paysan newspaper, as is Saïd, is currently strongly implanted in two countries, Cameroon and Chad. The newspaper is published in the official languages of these two countries: French and English in Cameroon; French and Arabic in Chad. Its content follows ecological reality: a Sahalien zone version for Chad and a humid zone version for Cameroon. The English and Arabic editions are translations of 80% of the original French version (in English for the humid zone and in Arabic for the Sahalien zone).

◆ **Editorial Organisation**

The editorial committee (which meets once a month) is chaired by a publication director who determines the newspaper's editorial policy and editorial line. The committee includes an editorial coordinator for the two versions and three editors-in-chief (French, English, Arabic). Two regional offices run by journalists, based in large cities, each cover a specific geographic area. These journalists are in charge of collecting information in their zones of action.

◆ **Distribution**

La Voix du paysan is sold through two channels: newsstands and subscriptions. The newspaper reaches the various zones via the regional offices there, the role of which is to ensure the distribution and recovery of sales receipts in their spheres of intervention. The people in charge of these offices are on Saïd's staff. Distribution quotas are set for each regional office according to the zone's potential (language, literate population, etc.).

◆ **Breakdown of Funding**

Sales receipts cover 47% of the total budget; the rest is covered by subsidies. Sales-related income breaks down as follows: subscriptions 33%, newsstand sales 6%, advertising 7%, want ads and other 5%.

Agri-Culture, the Leading Agricultural Newspaper in Benin, Media and Technology's Flagship Product

The newspaper Agri-Culture is published by a private company, Media & Technology, created in 1998 and specialised in agricultural publishing: newspapers, handbooks, radio programmes, and video documentaries (planned). The newspaper was launched 1999 following discussions with farmers and after a market study that led Media & Technology to target research results and farmers' experiences.

The target readership is farmers, farmers' organisation leaders, and support structures.

◆ **Editorial Organisation**

Articles are written by two Media & Technology journalists (one of whom is the company's founding director). Layout is done internally and printing is outsourced.

Information is in part collected through field surveys by journalists who conduct interviews around the country. An active network of contacts with farmers' organisation leaders keeps a regular watch over the rural world. Classic document collection (subscriptions to journals, Internet, etc.) completes the scheme.

◆ **Press Run and Distribution**

Press runs are 1,000 copies, distributed primarily by subscription (500 subscribers) with a few direct sale points (approximately 100 copies sold each month). There are three subscription rates: one for subscribers abroad, one for subscribers in Benin, and a "support" subscription.

Distribution is done by post or door-to-door delivery (in Cotonou within a 20 kilometre radius).

◆ **Financial Structure**

Cost of one issue: 3,050 euros (or 3 euros per copy), all inclusive. Sale Price: 0.76 euros per copy.

25% of production costs are covered by subscriptions (5%) and advertising (20%). The rest is covered by the services provided by Media & Technology who produces three periodicals (Agro-élèveur for the PDE project, Échos du PADSE for the project, and La Voix des producteurs for the Beninese Fédération des unions de producteurs).

These services are being diversified to include the publication of a collection of practical handbooks that aims to cover all farming and stock farming products in Benin. In addition, Media & Technology animates the radio programme "La Graine". (cont.)

◆ **The Newspaper's Impact for the Company**

Agri-Culture contributes to Media & Technology's reputation; thanks to the quality of its newspaper, it was able to develop its activity as specialised agricultural publishing service provider.

The newspaper is a pull product for the company whose profitability is fully ensured by the ensemble of services sold.

Entirely private in operation, and starting from one newspaper, Media & Technology progressively developed a diversified supply of information products.

Inades-Formation (Burkina Faso)

Venegda, A Newspaper by and for Farmers in the Moré Language

In 1992, Inades-Formation in Burkina Faso launched Venegda ("the scout"), a liaison newsletter for the rural world published in Moré. The idea of creating Venegda came from students during agricultural training courses in Moré. Approximately one issue is published every two months.

The entire publication is based on local editorial committees (approximately fifteen) made up of farmers who are literate in Moré and are usually literacy teachers. These committees, coordinated on provincial level, produce 75% of the articles published.

A technical committee within Inades-Formation Burkina Faso provides editing and layout, and monitors printing and distribution.

At first technical in character, the content has expanded to more diverse subjects at the instigation of farmers: policy news, organisation of the rural world, local development, etc.

Venegda has a press run of 1,500 copies. 90% are distributed by the editorial committees; the price is 100 CFA francs (0.15 euros) per issue.

Elaborated by and for farmers, the newspaper has several impacts:

- ◆ farmers are better informed when it comes to policies, their environment, techniques, etc.;
- ◆ they are better able to understand the stakes and discuss them in relation to the newspaper;

(cont.)

- ◆ this medium gives them a voice with which to express their position (for example on the crisis between cotton producers and the Société des fibres et textiles in 1998);
- ◆ the "farmer-authors" have developed their capacity to express themselves freely and confidently;
- ◆ communication between farmers, their organisations and development agents has improved;
- ◆ information circulates directly among farmers, which better showcases their knowledge and traditional methods;
- ◆ used as a literacy support, the newspaper strengthens farmers knowledge of Moré; and
- ◆ via the editorial committees and running the newspaper, farmers take on increased responsibility for producing and disseminating the information they need for their development: they have, among other things, acquired information collection and processing skills.

Because of its success, this experience was reproduced in 1994, in the Dioula language with Hakilifalen ("exchange and increase knowledge").

Inades is currently working on the progressive turn-over of newspaper production and management to the editorial committees. This necessitates building the capacities of these committees.

The Union tunisienne de l'agriculture et de la pêche (UTAP)

2 Complementary Newspapers, 2 Languages

- ◆ **Tounes El Khadra** – monthly institutional journal, mouthpiece of UTAP, created in March 1976. A relatively luxurious edition destined above all for agriculture executives, with a highly technological content, focused on research results. The articles in the journal are written in French or Arabic.
- ◆ **El Fateh** – a weekly professional newspaper for farmers and fishermen, created in May 1993 (which followed the newspaper El Omma published from 1978 to 1988). An economical edition, with practical content. Published in Arabic only.

Sale Price: Tounes El Khadra: 1.26 euros (2 dinars) per issue and 9.50 euros (15 dinars) for a yearly subscription. El Fateh: 0.19 euros (0.30 dinars) per issue and 9.50 euros (15 dinars) for a yearly subscription.

When published regularly, professional newspapers are can sustainably anchor a publishing organisation's visibility and draw a loyal readership that could be interested in a larger offer. In this way, this communication support can lead to other information activities.

More easily than any other support, professional, specialised newspapers pull in commercial financial resources (advertising, want ads) that contribute to their financial balance even if these resources are usually not enough to cover all costs, notably in a sector—rural development—where the sale price must remain low to match the readership's purchasing power.

Key Factors (necessary means and keys to success)

Professional newspapers and, generally speaking any periodical, are demanding products when it comes to maintaining the quality of their content, the regularity of their publication, and their distribution.

Product Definition

Before starting to publish a periodical (a commercialised medium that is projected to last from the start), you need to specifically target your readership.

The product adjustment stages are as follows:

market study ► layout tests ► publication of issue number zero ► assessment ► adjustment of the final product.

Three objectives generally lead to the production of a periodical:

promotion of the organisation and its activities	►	newsletter, liaison bulletin
contacts among members	►	liaison bulletin, news magazine
professional information, with technical, legal, commercial, political, etc. content	►	professional newspaper

Particular attention must be paid to:

- ◆ Correctly defining the goal of the publication. The balance between informing readers and promoting your organisa-

tion can be very difficult to find. Trying to combine these two goals in the same publication results in a hybrid that may fail to find a readership.

- ◆ Adapting the publication's format to the readership and available means, and avoiding luxurious products (four-colour printing for all of the newspaper, thick glossy paper, etc.). We can cite the example of the newspaper *Professionnel agricole*, published by the Association nationale des organisations professionnelles agricoles de Côte d'Ivoire (Anopaci, national association of professional agricultural organisations in Côte d'Ivoire), that redefined its format following a survey of readers (from a luxurious four-colour, A4 size, bound, magazine-style issue to a daily-style publication).

Choice of Publication Language

You should ask yourself whether or not it is pertinent to have versions in several languages (possibly with different content), particularly for periodicals that directly target farmers. The following elements underlie this question:

- ◆ Depending on who you target, with a look at readership segmentation: to reach an audience of farmers, for example, you would have to use their daily language. For periodicals, publishing in two (or more) languages is not pertinent because it combines target readerships (for example, attempting to reach development agents and farmers simultaneously).
- ◆ The availability of writers in a certain number of primarily oral languages.
- ◆ The financial means needed to produce several editions simultaneously.

Information Collection and Writing Quality

The regularity and quality of the publication depends on good organisation and solid skills:

- ◆ a highly motivated and dynamic editorial staff, close to the target readership;
- ◆ an in-house team of editors who have good writing skills (not necessarily journalists): extension and communication skills, simple writing style; and
- ◆ a network of members or partners, resource persons, to collect information in the field and ensure the widest possible geographic coverage. This network often plays two roles: collection and distribution.

Profitability

The rural development readership is relatively small because of both high levels of illiteracy and low purchasing power.

Given this limited market, it is practically impossible, at least during the first years of publication, to cover production costs. You will need an outside source of funding (either from a project or because of an investment decision by the publishing organisation) for a minimum of two to three years to launch this type of product.

Sales will be a more or less marginal source of income depending on the publication's target readership. Direct profitability (subscriptions and advertising) is difficult to attain. However, this type of product has a strong impact, which often justifies the publishing organisation making such an investment.

The viability of a periodical depends heavily on a good distribution network. This is vital, especially in rural areas where the readership is isolated and scattered.⁷

E-periodicals have become commonplace and present the double advantages of very wide distribution and low production costs (cf. Paysan en action, page 62).

Digital Showcasing and e-Publication: CD-ROMs and Internet

Today, information services can not easily escape the question of how they will use digital media, notably Internet, to distribute and showcase their information.

Digital media present various advantages:

- ◆ CD-ROMs are ideal mediums to transmit large volumes of information in remote areas without the need for Internet connections.
- ◆ Internet makes distance a non-issue, and reduces printing and distribution costs while still allowing you to reach a large audience.
- ◆ Internet can give you greater visibility and allow you to offer extensive content.

⁷ For an original example of how distribution can be organised, see the "Vital Signs" brief in Spore no. 104, April 2003, which gives a presentation of the Voix du paysan's distribution network (<http://spore.cta.int/spore104/spore104.pdf>).

In different ways depending on how each organisation is set up, its information service should play a central role in:

- ◆ defining a strategy for the use of digital mediums and notably Internet: for example, the information service should define the website's structure, develop it, and update it;
- ◆ structuring product content (website, CD-ROM, etc.) and providing input on navigation and information searches; and
- ◆ initiating and steering e-publication projects, whether in-house or outsourced.

The use of digital mediums calls for specific information strategies for which you will need to have good knowledge of information technologies and specific equipment (computers and software). There are multiple uses that are more or less simple to implement. They demand different levels of skill and investment. In-house and outsourced production need to be balanced in function of your available resources.

Each product is specific and must be treated as an independent project. No matter how involved the information service is in producing a product (from simply initiating the project to steering it), it must be aware that each production must be assessed and scaled before hand so as to provide an indication of its feasibility and adapt the means and skills necessary to implement the project.

Thus, it is necessary to:

- ◆ consult, in all cases, specialists on the subject;
- ◆ attempt to highlight the potential interest of the project for an information service; and
- ◆ know of interesting experiences in the field.

When these products are successfully created, they have a very positive impact and can give your service a dynamic, reactive and professional image.

Digital Media: What Types of Products and Content?

Information services have a vocation to develop informative content. Whatever is planned, this must be the goal. Depending on the scope of the project, and its technical level, four major types of uses and products can be distinguished:

- ◆ **Present an organisation and its information service's actions:** this is the minimum initial stage. To get beyond purely promotional content, you must reflect on an information strategy and an astute structure for information, and develop strong writing and communication skills.

- ◆ **Make documents or publications available in digital form via a Website or on CD-ROMs**, paying attention to how they are stored: users download entire documents from a catalogue. Documents are minimally processed (saved in PDF format, for example), which requires little technical skill. However, it is important that you know how to organise access to the documents (filing, classification).
- ◆ **Put internal databases on-line**, whether they be the information service's bibliography or any other database (directory, experiences, etc.). Good mastery of database management and database-Internet interfaces and specific equipment (server and connection line) are necessary. A priori, professional hosting is preferable.
- ◆ **Elaborate original digital content** (on CD-ROM, for example): these are large projects that take a great deal of time and demand specific thought on how information will be structured (the structure is different from that used for paper products).

Examples of Showcasing Already Available and Processed Information Online

- ◆ CITE's online bibliographical database: www.cite.mg.
- ◆ Agropolis's online document database: www.agropolis.fr/formation/biblio.
- ◆ Agridoc, online publication of resources, technical factsheets, articles, etc.: www.agridoc.com.
- ◆ CIRAD-FIhor online or CD-ROM symposium showcase: <http://citrus2002.cirad.fr/index.html>.

Examples of Original Digital Products

- ◆ The content of the Mémento de l'agronome CD-ROM is different from that of the paper version.
- ◆ Websites, digital resource centres, generally on specific topics. Microfinance: <http://microfinancement.cirad.fr/present.html.en>
Water: www.inpim.org
- ◆ Full-text digital libraries, CD-ROM on environment law in Tunisia, published by CITET: <http://www.citet.nat.tn/>

The Special Case of E-Newsletters

More and more organisations publish e-newsletters or display all or part of printed newsletters on their websites. There are several advantages to doing so: ease of implementation, no printing and distribution costs, increased speed of information dissemination, larger audience. If regular publication is a sure thing, this medium can generate a very positive image for the publishing organisation: dynamism, reactivity, and professionalism.

The *Paysan en action* E-Newsletter Fekritama's Experience in Madagascar

Alongside the newspaper *Gazety Mita* published in Malagasy and distributed to Fekritama's members (farmers and producers), an entirely digital publication in French, *Paysan en action*, is destined for a different readership: donors and support organisations.

Created in 2001, the e-newsletter is distributed by email to more than 2,500 people and organisations (30% in Madagascar and 70% abroad). Four pages long, it gives monthly summaries of news in Madagascar and around the world.

It is written, formatted and distributed by Fekritama's headquarters.

This e-newsletter, inexpensive to produce and distribute, has an impact because it maintains permanent contact with a network of organisations.

Key Factors (necessary means and keys to success)

Each Product Must Be Designed in Terms of Use and Not in Terms of Tools

Computerised information management is first and foremost the domain of information specialists, before that of computer programmers and technicians.

Too often, because computer tools must be used, product design is brushed aside and left to technicians. This stage of design skips the elaboration of specific and complete specifications, the only way to dimension the product in terms of uses, information processing, and human and financial means.

All too often, the result is the development of an initial product that, because of a lack of means, ends up having:

- ◆ very poor content or content that very rapidly becomes outdated and obsolete;
- ◆ tools unsuited to needs; and
- ◆ elaborate sometimes overblown tools that, above all, do not fit the means that the organisation has to feed, monitor and enrich them.

Do Not Start Producing this Type of Digital Document on Your Own

More particularly in this field, it is important that you do not remain alone and, on the contrary, that you contact structures that have already conducted similar projects and contact the numerous exchange communities (technicians, webmasters, etc.) that are found on Internet (such as the French-speaking Linux and Libre Software Users' Association, www.aful.org/index.html, etc.).

The watchdog function is more vital here than elsewhere because technologies are constantly changing.

Regularity Is Key to the Success of Many of these Products: Regularity in Website Updates, Regularity in E-Newsletter Publication, etc.

When it comes to your professional image, the following can have a very negative impact:

- ◆ a website that does not provide information, is not updated, or is poorly organised; and/or
- ◆ a newsletter that is not published on schedule.

General Recommendations

To succeed, you must:

- ◆ take the time at the start to structure your information and its collection;
- ◆ delay launching a product rather than launch it too quickly and then abandon it because you lack the means to update it; and
- ◆ take a progressive approach, start on a modest scale (product and content) to ensure quality, rather than dreaming up an overly ambitious product that will never be complete.

Said's Bookstore (Cameroon)

Said's bookstore grew out of the sale of its own publications. The sale of Said's publications makes up 71% of the bookstore's total turnover. The best seller is the *Recueil de fiches techniques pour l'entrepreneur rural*, a collection of technical factsheets for rural entrepreneurs.

The bookstore has more than 150 books for sale. It either buys books from publishers or takes them on consignment (unsold books are not paid for and are returned to the publisher). The bookstore service also sells video tapes.

◆ **Sales Statistics and Turnover**

In 2002, 1,479 outside publications were sold and 3,681 copies of the *Recueil de fiches techniques* (volume 2 had just been published).

Said's publications and those of other Cameroonian publishers make up 85% of turnover on average. 15% comes from the sale of international publications by institutional publishers specialised in development (CTA, GTZ, GRET, Inades, etc.).

In 2002:

- the sale of the *Recueil de fiches techniques* (volume 1 and the then recently published volume 2) generated a turnover of 16,348,800 CFA francs (25,000 euros);
- other sales generated turnover in the amount of 5,184,500 CFA francs (7,900 euros).

Said is increasing the number of publications from the international commercial circuit that it sells. Two necessary conditions must be met: sufficient cash to purchase books and pay shipping costs and customs duties; and rigorous management to determine a profitable sale price.

◆ **Setting a Sale Price: The *Mémento de l'agronome***

The French distributor sells it for 14 euros (developing country price). For a 200-copy order, shipping and customs account for 30% of the wholesale price. The minimum sale price for the book must therefore be at least 22 euros to cover management costs (set at the standard 30%) in addition.

Bookstores

Bookstores do not a priori aim to be information centres. The question of whether or to set up a bookstore can, however, be pertinent because bookstores:

- ◆ can be profitable; and
- ◆ can be a plus for users when the country's commercial bookstore network is insufficient, either because there are few bookstores or because they do not sell specialised books.

Key Factors (necessary means and keys to success)

Lessons Learnt from Three Bookstores in Africa: Saild and Agro-PME (Cameroon), CITE (Madagascar)

Half-way between a simple consignment store and a commercial shop, bookstores grow out of opportunities but are limited by commercial circuits

1. Organisations that develop—on a smaller or larger scale—bookstores do so from the sale of their own publications, progressively expanding to outside publications.
2. This expansion is subject to certain limitations:
 - Logistical limitations and limitations due to the cost of acquiring publications for sale (shipping costs, customs duties, storage costs, etc.). These limitations cause them to initially favour local or regional publications and, on the international scale, the publications of partners that have subsidised sales policies (Inades, for example).
 - Limitations caused by international commercial circuits. Distributing European publications is difficult for several reasons: high sales prices, the need to cover shipping costs and customs duties, and the need to pay when ordering or on short and strict deadlines. Often, it is only possible within the framework of book distribution support policies (different prices for developed and developing countries, for example).
3. This activity is part of the commercial sector and requires rigorous accounting and financial management. Among other things, when purchasing books to sell, the organisation needs to have cash available to pay for the books, including shipping fees and customs duties.
4. Finally, the organisation needs to develop promotional activities and a distribution network to sell its own publications.

Question & Answer Service: The Heart of the Profession

All information services are faced with many more questions than document requests. Thus, it is important to develop the capacity to respond specifically to the questions asked.

What we call question-and-answer (Q&A) services are services that:

- ◆ explicitly state their desire to provide personalised answers to questions; and
- ◆ are organised specifically to develop their ability to handle a large volume of questions in short amounts of time and while controlling the associated costs.

Q&A services have two major advantages:

- ◆ They are undoubtedly the service that best meets the needs of the audiences targeted by professional information services. Interactive with high added value, Q&A services provide personalised answers tailored to fit the needs of the askers.
- ◆ They participate effectively in making information services sustainable because they are efficient and can charge for their services.

Set Up Conditions

Setting up Q&A services is extremely demanding. Several constraints must be taken into account:

- ◆ **The need to handle diverse subjects in a precise manner** (the information is neither generalist nor scientific): the questions can be very diverse, they call for vast knowledge in technical, economic, legal and commercial fields that can be difficult to bring together in one team. To be efficient, Q&A services must rely on a network of resource people and organisations—paid or not, depending on their status—to guarantee high quality, rapid answers.
- ◆ **The need to answer the questions with precision and appropriately for the type of asker:** to do so, staff need to be very curious and polyvalent, master of numerous sources of information, have knowledge of the fields in which questions are asked, and be able to dialogue with colleagues, clients and partners.

- ◆ **The need to answer the questions quickly:** This requires good organisation supported by excellent staff, rapid access to sources of information, an appropriate and well-managed documentary fund, and documentary dossiers elaborated in advance on the subjects in which questions are most frequently asked or that have the greatest possibility of being asked. To accomplish this, you need to build a system that will manage questions and record answers.
- ◆ **The need for client satisfaction with the service is stronger than it is with any other service** because clients pay for this service and the information supplier and user are in direct contact with each other. Dissatisfaction has immediate consequences and there is relatively little room for error.
- ◆ **Finally, this service requires considerable (and costly) human resources (research capacities):** production costs are difficult to cover with the income from the sale of the answers alone. This type of service cannot exist without outside funding, which implies an obligation to account for the usefulness of the service and its effectiveness.

Concrete Conditions for Success

- ◆ **Clearly list what you offer, that is to say the types of answers and how much they cost.** The types of possible answers must be specifically defined and clearly listed along with the corresponding estimated processing times and a suitable (adjustable according to the buyer) fee schedule that takes into account the information service's strategy. The fees must be determined based on a study of the cost of producing the answers provided (time spent, specific costs, etc.) and in the form of either a flat rate or a per-question estimate.
- ◆ **Specifically identify the question and its context.** It is important to help askers formulate their needs with precision: subject, circumstances, sources already used, types of data sought, etc. Using a question form facilitates the analysis of each question.
- ◆ **Have and use computerised tools.** It is vital to set up databases to manage questions and answers. They must enable you to record the answers provided (method, results, most frequently asked questions, etc.) and monitor the service's activity and the demand (number of questions asked, type of audience calling on the service, response times, etc.).

- ◆ **Find a balance between quality, speed, and lowest cost.** Tools and methods must enable you to organise, upstream, a capital of useable resources: a network of competent people, an appropriate documentary fund, thematic dossiers, a selection of websites, prior knowledge of themes and types of information requested, a system for filing answers for (possible) future use, and close ties to the structure's other services and experts.

Progressive recording of answers makes it possible, in time, to answer questions faster at lower cost. Yet, your service must answer enough questions to accumulate a critical mass of answers and have a minimum of basic documentation.

- ◆ **Evaluate satisfaction.** User satisfaction must be evaluated and monitored constantly using feedback forms included with the answers provided or through user interviews.
- ◆ **Assess the service's operations.** The service's profitability (its cost in relation to receipts), quality and development must be assessed annually.
- ◆ **Make the service known and promote it.** The service must be promoted (in newspapers, on the radio, on Internet, etc.) to increase demand.

Formalising the Q&A Service's Answers

The Q&A service experience obtained by the Agridoc networks, the CTA's Q&A focal points, and the TPA Network shows that it is important to formalise the service for sale by:

- specifying the type of answer; and
- setting a flat-rate price based on the amount of work (time).

Five types of answers can generally be distinguished:

- ◆ **Documentary dossiers** contain extracts from articles, books and websites taken from the documentary fund or found on Internet. This type of file is the most common because they are relatively easy to produce when one has good sources of information. It is, however, not necessarily the most suited to the demand.

To be immediately useable, it must:

- not take too long to read (approximately thirty pages maximum);
 - present a selection of information that is predominately practical and on the same reading level;
 - be organised and structured (notably by grouping information into sub-sections) so as to be easy to read; and
 - contain validated information. The pertinence and quality of each item in the dossier must be determined, notably based on the source of the information (it is particularly important to be selective when it comes to Internet where thousands of pages are available from sources of all kinds).
- ◆ **Orientation factsheets or dossiers** generally contain addresses and descriptions of resource organisations and suppliers. It can sometimes take a relatively long time to collect relevant addresses (because exhaustive and regularly updated telephone or professional directories do not exist) for this type of dossier. This type of information is very frequently requested.
 - ◆ **Commercial factsheets or dossiers** contain market data: distribution circuits, prices, suppliers, regulations, standards, etc. Collecting this information takes time and specialists who know where to find it and know the commodity chain in question. This type of dossier, while not quite a market study, is therefore more costly to produce.
 - ◆ **Summary factsheets or dossiers** are the result of work done to summarise and take stock of a technique, commodity chain, market or product. Written by specialists, these documents must also be easy and quick to read while being comprehensive. They can cover technical, economic or legal subjects.
 - ◆ **Bibliographies** contain the references of documents that are useful on a given subject and may contain summaries of the cited documents. This type of dossier is cited for information here because it does not generally address the needs of the professional target audience, but rather those of researchers and students. In addition, in numerous developing countries, the documents listed can be difficult to obtain, which considerably limits the usefulness of such dossiers.

Summary factsheets and orientation factsheets are probably the most relevant types of answers (more manageable, more directly useable) for professional publics.

From CITE's experience, we can present the following typology of answers (listed in order of frequency of requests) with their various prices (in 2003):

Type of Answer	Content	Amount of Time Billed	Price in Euros	
			Standard Rate*	Discount Rate*
documentary dossier	photocopies of articles, book extracts, possibly a CITE publication	0.5 days max.	13.10	6.10
orientation factsheet/dossier	list of organisations and photocopies of documents if needed	0.5 days max.	8.50	4.60
bibliography	bibliographical references (approx. 25)	0.25 days		
summary factsheet/dossier	original paper on a product or economic subject	1.5 days	43.10	21.50
commercial factsheet/dossier	information on selling a product, a commodity chain, prices, standards	1.5 days	43.10	21.50
document reproduction	reproduction of a pre-existing dossier		0.10 per page	0.10 per page

* The standard rate applies to businesses, support organisations, projects, and donors; the discount rate applies to micro-entrepreneurs, craftsmen, farmers, etc.

Management Tools

Q&A service management systems use three separate databases:

- ◆ **A database of askers** that identifies types of askers and stores their contact information.
- ◆ **A database to monitor the demand** in which the following information is stored for each question:
 - date the question reached the service,
 - date it was entered in the database (in other words, the date on which the question began to be processed),
 - the response date,
 - the general theme of the question (out of a dozen categories),
 - the type of answer, and
 - an identification code for the asker (member number for example).

The data in the “asker” and “demand monitoring” databases are linked. The goal is to be able to cross-reference the following information: volume of questions, thematic distribution, types of users, types of answers, response times, and user monitoring.

- ◆ **A database capitalising answer dossiers.** The goal is to re-use all or part of the answers already formulated by the Q&A service (or as part of other information products). Concretely, this database could be the information service’s bibliographic database. This database would contain the following information: dossier title, keywords, subjects, summary (or full answer when short), and the file number of the physical dossier (or location of the answer).

The major interest to be found in monitoring a Q&A service, beyond rationalising management, is that doing so gives you a very good understanding of your audience’s needs, which in turn allows you to orient—and develop—the information service’s offer and products.

For the most frequently requested subjects, and based on recorded information, you may find it interesting to predefine standardised, simple products to produce and sell (such as technical factsheets or directories of information sources and supplier addresses).

Financing

Services such as this can not self-finance themselves independently (except in very specific and strategic fields such as legal information, market information, or competition watch services). The cost of providing a personalised and individualised answer to each question is too high for them to be sold at cost. Q&A service financing therefore relies on reaching a complex balance between:

- ◆ **An affordable and acceptable sale price.** How well a Q&A service suits its users depends, of course, on how much it costs. Users generally find the price acceptable if the service is one of quality (as far as both content relevance and response times are concerned). One solution is to set two price scales in function of the purchasing power of asker audiences. Many users are willing to pay for information: the welcome users receive, the help they receive formulating their questions, and the provision of a personalised dossier are all elements that contribute to an acknowledgement of the value of the service provided.
- ◆ **Controlled time management** (being careful not to exceed average response times set for each type of answer) and benefiting from economies of scale as the service grows (by reusing answers).
- ◆ **Partial cost coverage** by the organisation to which the service belongs or by an outside donor: this is imperative when the service is launched and for at least its first two years.

Events and Activities

Events and activities are very good tools to disseminate operational information and meet specific needs frequently expressed by professionals: know what works and obtain practical advice, be in direct contact with people who have already conducted a given type of project or used a technique, collect ideas, use solutions that have been tested elsewhere, pool experiences, etc. Events are an information dissemination tool that is very suited to certain types of audiences (producers, small craftsmen, etc.) who do not have a close relationship with the written word and do not frequent documentation centres.

These activities can be developed rapidly and inexpensively as long as they are reasonable in scope and address



a small circle of users. Exhibits, thematic days, discussion workshops, a booth at a conference, etc.—the possibilities are very diverse, as are the scales on which they can be organised.

They often have a strong impact on several levels: visibility for the information service, growth of its audience, better knowledge of the sector's needs. They contribute to the positive recognition of information's role in developing professional activities.

Key Factors (necessary means and keys to success)

- ◆ Coordinate events and activities with the service's usual audience(s) and decide on them together, notably when choosing themes.
- ◆ Be in direct contact with your professional surroundings to identify the organisations and resource persons who will take charge of running the events or activities. This contact with the professional milieu—needed to organise an event or activity—also serves to strengthen the information service and its presence in this milieu.
- ◆ Begin on the small scale, gain experience organising small events or activities, make contacts and find partnerships. Events and activities do not have to be huge affairs to have strong and lasting impact.
- ◆ Have a clear idea of the means you will need to mobilise according to the type of event or activity and its scope (for example, a meeting attended by 10 people can be held on

the centre's premises, but one attended by 100 people will require specific premises).

- ◆ Be aware that any events or activities will increase demand, and therefore you must be able to enrich your information supply to meet the new demand.

Cocoa Exhibit — Sald (Cameroon)

This exhibit, and the accompanying event, focused on two crucial subjects: growing cocoa and processing cocoa beans and shells. The initial idea for the exhibit grew from the observation that most cocoa producers do not know its various uses. The exhibit therefore presented the products made from cocoa beans and pods: chocolate (all kinds), oil, cocoa butter, wine, vinegar, sweet drinks, cocoa shells, potash (ashes).

In addition to the panoply of products, books, posters and technical factsheets were displayed. Rows of baskets full of beans in all categories (standard and non standard), and fresh pods along side pods attacked by black rot were an original facet of the exhibit. A selection of video tapes could be viewed in a video library area set up for the exhibit.

The exhibit was attended by 200 or so visitors.

The Thematic Events Organised by Torohay, the Small Enterprise Information Centre in Antsirabé (Madagascar)

Torohay has organised events since the centre opened in 1998 and has held them on a regular monthly basis since 2001. The purpose is to share the know-how and experience of an entrepreneur or organisation during workshops attended by 15 to 20 people and focused on a specific subjects such as "beekeeping", "foie gras production", and "embroidery, sewing and crochet".

The target audience is made up of small and micro entrepreneurs, most of whom are members of the centre. These workshops are free.

The workshops are organised by one of the centre's staff who chooses the subjects directly from her knowledge of the (cont.)

milieu and interest expressed by the public. The workshops are run by a professional in the chosen subject (a person or business). Before each workshop, the centre collects documents on the subject, displays them, sometimes creates a specific documentary dossier, and sometimes uses a video to launch the discussions.

After each workshop, the results and reports from the businesses that participated are broadcast by a local radio station. This radio broadcast makes it possible to reach a larger number of entrepreneurs and craftsmen in the sector.

◆ **Strengths and Keys to Success**

- The audience has been identified. Thus, there is no need for workshop-specific promotion. Also, the subjects of the workshops fit the members' information needs very well.
- The organiser is dynamic and has perfect knowledge of its members and the economic milieu in Antsirabé. She is easily able to identify interesting speakers and priority subjects.

◆ **Cost**

The workshops cost very little to organise: 70 to 150 euros per workshop (the organiser's time, logistics, workshop advertising, and summary documents). Organisation is very streamlined: everything takes place in a direct relationship with members.

◆ **Impact**

On the public: two immediate impacts are an increase in the number of members from the sector that was the subject of a workshop, and an increase in information requests.

On the sector: the events contribute to the dynamism of the commodity chains: creation of an arena to meet, consult and reflect on issues for the commodity chain, mobilisation of regional partners. They allow those who have projects to verify the relevance and feasibility of their ideas and compare their know-how. Some workshops inspired small enterprises to form associations and become Torohay's partners, notably to organise exhibits to sell their products.

On the centre's information activities: the needs of the sector are better known, which consequently provides better guidance for centre's products and services (collection of specific documents, updating the fund, publication of information products, identification of resource persons).

After a workshop on beekeeping that had been a particular success, a larger event was organised in Antananarivo: a three-day exhibit with booths selling goods and discussions, attended by more than 1,500 people.

Radio Programmes and Videos

There are many advantages to including multimedia products and services in your information supply:

- ◆ They facilitate the dissemination of information to a population that may not be very literate.
- ◆ They make very good teaching materials, notably when used in organised events.
- ◆ Rural radio stations can reach a wide audience that is often far from any sources of information. They can also broadcast in national languages.

These products require very specific know-how and equipment. In principle, it is not information services' job to create these products. Information services must, however, endeavour to:

- ◆ identify videos and make them available to their audiences;
- ◆ identify the relevant radio stations for their users and provide these stations' journalists with support in the form of written information and help them with their documentation needs; and
- ◆ participate in radio programmes to promote information and its use when the means to do so are available.

A Few Reference Sites on Rural Radio Station Experiences

- ◆ **FAO, Regional Workshop on Rural Radio**, held in February 2001, and presents numerous case studies, primarily in Africa: www.fao.org/sd/ruralradio/en/23589/index.html
- ◆ **Developing Countries Farm Radio Network**: www.farmradio.org. It distributes documents in French and in English for radio broadcasters (network of 500 radio broadcasters).
- ◆ **CTA, Rural Radio Programme**: www.cta.int/about/ruralradio.htm. Produces thematic resource packs for rural radio stations that contain a tape of the programme and supporting documents.
- ◆ **Original experiences** in using rural radio to disseminate market news, presented by the FAO, the International Workshop on Farm Radio: www.fao.org/sd/2001/radio/index_en.htm.

ELABORATE YOUR OFFER: LESSONS LEARNT FROM EXPERIENCE

Decide What You Will Offer

Defining the products and services you will offer is crucial. This definition must be clear for the information service staff's and its audience. Two guidelines must be followed:

- ◆ elaborate your offer—which must always be very close to your audience—progressively and pragmatically; and
- ◆ conduct financial analysis to determine the means necessary and ensure the service is sustainable (cf. the chapter “Finance the Information Service and Ensure its Sustainability”, page 135 and following).

Link Your Information Service to the Professional Milieu

It is crucial that information services be closely linked to the professional milieu and its concerns. This strengthens your information service's relationship with users and avoids the ever-present risk of promoting an information centre that is closed in on itself with information specialists confined within their specialities.

Having an open attitude to your surroundings must be one of the service's constant concerns and can be achieved by multiplying contacts, dialoguing with users, organising events, and establishing partnerships.

Combine Information Services and Support-Advice Services: A Key to Sustainability

None of the examples cited in this handbook are stand-alone documentation centres. They are all either information services that grew out of an initial technical support offer (business advice service, for example) or information services that were then enriched by specific technical support activities.

If your assessment of the context justifies doing so and if the scope of the intervention allows, you can combine offering

information and offering study, consultancy and training services. Cross-fertilisation by two types of activities improves effectiveness and thereby to sustainability: information services can rely on the organisation's skills and the support service's direct contact with professionals. Inversely, the structure's experts can showcase their actions through information products and use the information service's research skills. This combination can provide professionals with a complete service offer.

Regularly Assess the Overall Offer and Each of its Products

Every year, an assessment of the entire service and each of its products must attempt to measure:

- ◆ your audience's level of satisfaction;
- ◆ how well your offer meets needs (subjects, products); and
- ◆ how efficient the service and its products are in terms of organisation and cost control.

Do Not Forget to Showcase Local Experiences and Know-How

It is important that you explore your immediate environment and showcase experiences underway in it: for example, call on producers for an event, foster direct exchange via a readers' newsletter, and promote local publications.

ASSESS YOUR SERVICE AND ITS OFFER

This is not a formal assessment. Formal assessments generally call on outside assessors and precise and complex terms of reference. They are conducted occasionally, outside of the service's day-to-day operations.

Here, this handbook aims to illustrate a monitoring-assessment method that should be part of the information service's normal operations and describe the primary tools for such assessment.

Why Assess Your Service and its Offer?

Assessing your service and its offer allows you to:

- ◆ describe the service: have a clear “photograph” at a given moment in time of what the service offers;
- ◆ know the service: understand what is at play in its environment (internal and external factors) and any gaps between its strategy and reality;
- ◆ evolve and adapt the service: measure what it knows how to do and its environment, and formulate what it could do to grow;
- ◆ control the service’s organisation and costs: analyse its operations to pinpoint areas that could be improved; and
- ◆ communicate and prove its usefulness.

What Should Be Assessed?

The assessment should focus on three aspects:

- ◆ the audience’s level of satisfaction;
- ◆ how well the offer fits needs and target audiences (subjects, products); and
- ◆ how efficient the service and its products are (operations and cost control).

In addition, all assessments include two key factors:

- ◆ long-term prospects; and
- ◆ coherency with the service’s and the organisation’s objectives and strategy.

How to Assess: Data Collection and Processing Tools?

The assessment should be an extension of and use the same indicators as your monitoring tools.

Assessing Satisfaction and Use

Users’ satisfaction with products and services should be assessed and the number of visitors should be determined.

Direct measurement of users' satisfaction is done through questionnaires distributed or interviews conducted at different rhythms:

- ◆ systematic: when a product is delivered (Q&A response, for example);
- ◆ occasional: yearly for a newspaper, for example;
- ◆ ad hoc: for an in-depth "photograph".

In addition, you can flesh out this analysis indirectly by analysing the attendance rate to measure the level of satisfaction. This must be done over time and based on the evolution, in absolute value, of the number of users and membership (or subscription) trends, with a focus on the renewal rate.

Assessing Satisfaction

An information service's number of members has been growing regularly for five years, by approximately 15%. At first glance, one might assume that the service fits the demand well.

More in-depth analysis, however, reveals that only 13% of members have renewed their memberships more than twice in the past five years and 70% of users have taken out memberships only once.

While there may be many different reasons that users did not renew their memberships, this trend casts doubts on the level of satisfaction among users.

Satisfaction Questionnaire: Saild CDDR's Q&A Service

A questionnaire is included with each answer sent to the askers. It addresses five things:

- ◆ how and where the question was received;
- ◆ the rapidity of the response;
- ◆ how the answer was presented;
- ◆ the content of the answer; and
- ◆ how the information was used.

Assessing Your Offer and Products

Offer and product assessment endeavours to analyse how well your information service's activities match the demand and your target audience. For this, two elements are studied:

- ◆ A breakdown of types of audience and changes in this breakdown. This breakdown is then compared with the initially targeted audience(s).
- ◆ A thematic breakdown of demands, combined with the thematic breakdown of services offered (documentary fund, catalogue of publications, events, etc.). This is done by regularly recording the themes requested and exploiting the resulting quantitative data over time.

Assessing how well the offer matches the audience and the information service's official strategy cannot rely exclusively on a "photograph" taken at a given moment in time. It must be analysed over time. Information services all too frequently do a good job recording demand data but then only use the data to produce yearly statistical tables. They rarely compare several years' worth of data, and fail to connect all three components of the analysis: demand, audience and supply.

ANALYSING THE THEMATIC DISTRIBUTION OF REQUESTS

You will need to have and use a pre-established thematic typology for a full set of services:

- ◆ documentary fund consultation and loans;
- ◆ Q&A service questions;
- ◆ Internet consultation; and
- ◆ breakdown of publication sales.

Sample Assessment of How Well the "Audiences and Demands" Match the "Strategy and Offer"

We shall examine an information service geared towards small entrepreneurs and craftsmen. The assessment conducted over a ten-year period focused on two of its departments: the documentation centre and the Q&A service.

◆ Documentation Centre

1. The breakdown of types of audience shows that 75% of visitors are students (all subjects). (cont.)

Trends in frequentation patterns show that the breakdown of types of audiences is stable. However, the overall number of users has fallen by 30% over the last four years.

2. The analysis of the documentary fund shows that works on technico-economic subjects that interest small businesses and craftsmen are in the minority, and have been over the years, increasing only slightly in number.

The documentary fund has a highly “sciences and general economy” bent. This is a good fit for the student audience, in the majority, but it does not at all match the organisation’s official strategy. The evolution over ten years shows that the documentation centre has not refocused on its target audience and caters to its “natural” audience, students. The centre therefore needs to ask itself two major questions:

- Should it retain the student audience or actively and progressively reorient the centre towards craftsman and entrepreneurs, while seeking to understand the contextual constraints that led to the growing loss of interest by this initially targeted audience (content of the documentary fund, for example)?
- Why is the number of users falling?

◆ Q&A Service

1. Analysis of the breakdown of types of audiences and 5-year trends in this breakdown show a predominance of small entrepreneurs and craftsmen, but also a noticeable drop over the last two years: from 40% to 20%.
2. An analysis of the number of demands reveals an overall drop in use of the service over the past three years: 30% fewer demands.
3. The sectors most frequently addressed by the Q&A service are agrifood, business support, agriculture, and stock farming. Agriculture and agrifood questions have been increasing in number for five years.
4. The Q&A service primarily uses the documentation centre’s documentary fund to answer questions. Yet, as we saw above, this fund addresses the Q&A service’s priority subjects poorly.

The Q&A service therefore matches the originally targeted audience better than the documentation centre does and it is the Q&A service that continues to draw this audience. However, its information resources are not very suited to the questions asked. One can assume that the quality and speed of answers is affected by this, which would explain users’ dissatisfaction and, thus, the falling number of demands.

(cont.)

Faced with this observation, the service should undertake an in-depth satisfaction survey on a limited number of current and potential users to identify more precisely its weaknesses and things that could be improved.

When a service is a good match for its target professional milieu and knows how to adapt to the demand, three elements—type of audience, subject of demands, and theme of the services offered—should, when analysed, show parallel trends.

Assessing the Efficiency of the Service and its Offer

Efficiency pertains to the running of the service and its activities: Are the service's activities well organised? Do they function correctly? An efficiency assessment attempts to measure and analyse the means mobilised (human resources, logistics, etc.) and what it costs to run the service and produce its products. To do so, one studies:

- ◆ the scope of tasks;
- ◆ the human resources mobilised for the various tasks or products;
- ◆ the organisation of and production circuit for each product/service;
- ◆ changes in the budgets and production costs of the products assessed; and
- ◆ changes in financing (share of services sold, subsidies, etc.).

Such assessments therefore rely on management and accounting, and on an analysis of the service's procedures and operations.

Assessing the Efficiency of a Consultation and Lending Service and of a Q&A Service

Using our previous example, we shall examine an information service geared towards small entrepreneurs and craftsmen.

- ◆ **Consultation and Lending Service**
 - All tasks related to record keeping, client reception and lending are done in a timely manner. (cont.)

- The tools used (documentary databases, lending procedures, etc.) are operational.
- In the past five years, the service's overall budget has risen slightly but the acquisitions budget has fallen and the documentary fund is no longer growing. The sources used to enrich it have not changed (Internet resources are not used, for example).
- The number of visitors per day has fallen by 20% over five years while human resources have remained the same, with no job changes.

To analyse each of these elements, you would need to compare the observations made at a given time with a reference point, which can be an industry standard, an objective you had set for your service, or a ratio that is monitored for changes (for example, a steady number of people for a falling volume of service).

Although some of the elements analysed show that the consultation and lending service is operational, others could lead you to conclude that improvements should be made.

An initial analysis of this type sheds light on the questions on which to focus in greater depth and problems to solve. For example, the means mobilised for the documentary fund are inadequate to meet the goals of a consultation service that must, by definition, offer up-to-date information. In the medium term, a problem such as this can cause a large drop in attendance.

◆ Q&A Servicen

- A considerable backlog in processing requests can be seen: when the assessment data was gathered, 35% of demands received in the past four months had not yet been processed.
- With a hypothetical average processing time of two days per question, the permanent staff should answer approximately 440 questions per year. Yet, the service currently answers only 220.
- The Q&A service is not free. It operates, however, without specific and clear billing rules in function of the type of product. In day-to-day operations, this causes billing losses (some questions are never billed) and makes it impossible to measure the profitability of the various products. In addition, the suitability of the tariffs for the audiences and service provided can not be verified.

These three observations are sufficient to demonstrate the non-efficiency of the service and the urgent need to reorganise it. Without a doubt, the service's malfunctions partially explain the large drop in the number of requests that was observed.

Seek Information, Keep an Informative Watch

This function is built around three lines of work:

1. identifying useful and accessible sources;
2. elaborating an acquisition and subscription policy; and
3. setting up watchdog systems, notably on Internet.

The goal is not so much to produce an exhaustive inventory of all information sources; rather, it is to identify the vital points of entry from which the search for information can be fine tuned. These points of entry can equally be international or local development organisations, publishers, Internet sites, and people.

This chapter presents the primary points of entry in the rural development sector. It also presents search methods, notably Internet search methods, pointing out inexpensive ways to enrich your documentary fund.

HOW TO ASSESS AND CATALOGUE SOURCES

Your information source identification methods should be built simultaneously on local (regional) and international levels. On these two levels, five types of sources should be combined:

- ◆ **Resource persons:** they can be colleagues and contacts, notably rural sector specialists, with whom a close professional relationship has been formed and who can easily

be solicited when looking for information. These resource persons are notably those on whom you can rely to compare different sources and assess their relevance, reliability and quality.

- ◆ **Local, national and international development organisations:** they can be international organisations, administrations, projects, professional agriculture organisations, research organisations, documentation centres, etc.
- ◆ **Publishers, periodicals and professional journals.**
- ◆ **Events:** professional trade shows, fairs, workshops, etc. Such events are a rich source of commercial information (suppliers are present) and are useful when it comes to identifying organisations and resource persons for specific subjects.
- ◆ **Internet:** both websites and information sent by email (e-newsletters, mailing lists, etc.).

In addition to the active identification process during the service's activities, a great deal of information arrives spontaneously (readers'/members' mail, publications, references to projects/experiences, etc.). While such spontaneously received information needs to be carefully assessed and selected for use, it can be a valuable watchdog tool.

Identifying useful sources is a first stage. Then, you need to increase your knowledge of each source (or type of source) to determine:

- ◆ how it works and how often it is updated (for example, learn that a publisher announces new publications in an e-newsletter to which you can subscribe); and
- ◆ the type and level of information offered (including in what languages).

A policy to enrich the service's stock of information can be elaborated from this precise knowledge.

Information "close to home" is too frequently neglected because it is more difficult to identify and exploit. Yet, it generally provides a more efficient and direct response to the needs of agriculture professionals, notably by providing them with information and points of entry into supply circuits and with suppliers, contacts with other actors in the commodity chain, and the possibility of pooling practices and techniques.

INTERNATIONAL SOURCES OF INFORMATION

The list of information sources presented in this section is not exhaustive. In addition to the major sources for the sector, this list favours:

- ◆ organisations and publications with regular production;
- ◆ organisations that disseminate large volumes of information; and
- ◆ organisations and publications that place their documents and information on Internet.

Resource Catalogues⁸

FAO (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations)

www.fao.org

This site is very large and full of information even if it is not always easy to find. It is important to note that the FAO, like the World Bank and many United Nations agencies, favours e-publications and prints only small amounts of paper copies.

Navigate and Find Your Way Around the Site

The site's home page provides rapid access to the various subjects addressed: agriculture, economics and nutrition, fisheries, forestry, sustainable development, etc.

The World Agricultural Information Centre (WAICENT) was created to manage and disseminate agricultural information via Internet. Also available are the full text of publications and technical documents, multimedia information, statistical databases, etc. WAICENT's thematic directory is the simplest point of entry and acts as a portal to the various programmes and Internet sites on the different themes: www.fao.org/waicent/index_fr.asp

Another entry point into the site is the "FAO Corporate Document Repository", which provides direct Internet access to all publications and information produced by the FAO via an advanced search engine that you can search by type of document, publication date, journal title, language, etc.

www.fao.org/documents/default.asp

(cont.)

⁸ Additional sources can be found on pages 23 and 24.

CTA (Technical Centre for Agricultural and Rural Cooperation, ACP-EU)

www.agricta.org

The CTA's vocation is to promote agricultural and rural development in Africa, the Caribbean, and the Pacific.

Wishing to develop e-publication, CTA makes numerous publications available for downloading from its bilingual French-English site. Various journals and e-newsletters can be found online: Spore, Agritrade and ICT Update.

ELDIS (the Electronic Development and Environment Information System)

www.eldis.org

This gateway to development and environment information provides access to the full text of thousands of documents proposed by more than 4,500 organisations, bibliographical references, and services offered by organisations. They can be accessed either by subject (approximately twenty themes are offered: agriculture, biodiversity, pastoralism, globalisation, poverty, health, ICT for development, education, etc.) from the home page or via a search engine.

You can subscribe to Eldis Reporters e-newsletters and automatically be informed of new additions to the site by email.

CIRAD (French Agricultural Research Centre for International Development)

www.cirad.fr/en/index.php

Two sections are particularly useful: "Services and products" that provides access to documentation, publications, training, etc. and "the Web of Knowledge" that is presented as a virtual encyclopaedia of Southern agriculture (online documents by theme, symposium announcements, links, e-training).

By Subject

The choice of websites listed here is very selective. It does not cover all subjects, merely those for which there are currently one or two sites of reference that act as information portals and thus form real points of entry into their subjects.

Agrifood

InPho

www.fao.org/inpho

The information network on post-harvest operations was created by the FAO, in partnership with GTZ and CIRAD, to accelerate the development of post-harvest activities for tropical agriculture by facilitating access to technical information and inter-stakeholder information exchange: virtual library, product factsheets, equipment.

TPA – Food Processing Technologies and Partnerships

www.gret.org/tpa/en/index.htm

The Food Processing Technologies and Partnerships Network's goals were to promote exchange and further information circulation among food production enterprises in developing countries (Africa in particular). Although it ceased its activities in 2002, the site is a rich source of useful and practical information, notably through its directory of Web resources.

The site also contains the network's thematic newsletters.

Trade and Markets

International Trade Center

www.intracen.org/index.htm

A specialised agency of UNCTAD and WTO, the International Trade Centre's site notably offers a "products and services" section that presents national and international market studies for several agricultural and processed products.

Info Comm

<http://r0.unctad.org/infocomm/anglais/indexen.htm>

This portal, set up by UNCTAD, contains detailed commercial information on the primary commodities and offers summaries on products with high added value, provides information on emerging markets, and contains an extensive collection of online documents organised by subject.

(cont.)

Trade and Markets

Agritrade

<http://agritrade.cta.int>

Agritrade is the CTA's portal for international trade in agricultural products, in the framework of European partnership agreements. It provides information on the progress of negotiations, notably through the Agritrade e-newsletter.

IZF - Investir en zone franc

www.izf.net

Created in 1998 by the West African Economic and Monetary Union (WAEMU) Commission and by the executive secretariat of the Monetary and Economic Community of Central Africa (CEMAC), IZF is a working tool for economic operators. For the 14 countries concerned, the site offers information on investment regulations, the overall economic situation, business directories, practical information, etc.

FAO Agricultural Marketing Group

www.fao.org/waicent/faoinfo/agricult/ags/AGSM/marketin.htm

The FAO's agricultural marketing and supply group provides developing countries and emerging economies with support to help them improve the marketing systems for their agricultural products and input supply (fertiliser, seeds, etc.). The site contains numerous practical guides and case studies on marketing issues, including market information services.

Local Development and Decentralisation

Online Sourcebook on Decentralization and Local Development

www.ciesin.org/decentralization/SB_entry.html

This site is the result of a collaboration between the FAO, UNDP, World Bank, Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), and German Aid (GTZ). It offers a selection of handbooks and working documents on all issues pertaining to decentralisation and development. It presents country case studies and methodology tools to set up decentralisation projects.

Environment

SDDimensions

www.fao.org/sd/KNdef_en.htm

The FAO's Sustainable Development Department offers several points of entry linked to various key elements of sustainability:

(cont.)

Environment: environmental conventions and agreements, energy and environmental technology; geoinformation, monitoring and assessment; and environmental policy and integrated management.

Institutions: land tenure, public institutions, and rural organisations.

People: gender and development, participation, population, and sustainable livelihoods.

Forestry

FAO Forestry Department

www.fao.org/forestry/index.jsp

The site covers all issues related to forestry and tree management: forest products, environment, policies, agroforestry, etc. It offers numerous online documents and the flagship journal, *Unasylva*.

Irrigation, Water and Soils

Land and Water Development Division

www.fao.org/landandwater/default.stm

This English-language information portal is devoted to soil conservation, plant nutrition, soil biodiversity, and water resources. More than 160 online publications are available in several languages.

Arid and Arid-L

www.eier.org/arid/about_arid.htm

The Regional Association on Irrigation and Drainage in West and Central Africa offers a mailing list on its site and a wide range of full text documents on traditional irrigation, periurban irrigation, pumping systems, etc.

pS-Eau

www.pseau.org/index_en.php

The objectives of the Programme Solidarité Eau, the partner network for access to water in developing countries, are to provide information and foster exchange on the subjects of water supply, drinking water access, water management, and public policies.

The site offers numerous online resources: newsletter, online documents, experience factsheets, technology factsheets, and a water and sanitation training directory.

(cont.)

Microfinance

Pôle Microfinancement

<http://microfinancement.cirad.fr/present.html.en>

Jointly managed by GRET and CIRAD, this site contains numerous online documents, a directory of organisations, analytical factsheets on microfinance institutions and projects, and a bibliography. It runs an exchange forum, "Espace finance", that offers a weekly newsletter.

The Microfinance Gateway

www.microfinancegateway.org

The Microfinance Gateway is a portal managed by the Consultative Group to Assist the Poor (CGAP) which is made up of most donors active in the sector. It offers a wealth of resources.

Publishers Specialised in Development and the Rural Sector

Listed below are the primary publishers specialising in development and how you can access their catalogues or lists of new publications.

Agromisa

www.agromisa.org

Agromisa publishes the Agrodok series that contains very practical technical booklets at low prices in several languages (French, English, Spanish, and Portuguese).

CIRAD

www.cirad.fr/en/index.php

CIRAD publishes Tropicale, its publications newsletter. Online access to the catalogue with a multi-criteria or thematic search engine.

Earthscan

www.earthscan.co.uk

Environment and sustainable development are the subjects addressed by this English publisher. An e-newsletter announces the latest publications (by theme).

(cont.)

Educagri Editionswww.editions.educagri.fr/default.cfm

Books, videos, and DVDs for various agricultural teaching and vocational training audiences in France: apprentices, interns, students, teachers, trainers, executives, administrative staff, and establishment partners.

FAO

The FAO's catalogue of publications can be consulted on its Internet site and a CD-ROM of the catalogue can be sent on request. All you need to do to be informed of the publication of new books, periodicals and CD-ROMs is subscribe to FAO-BookInfo by sending an email to mailserv@mailserv.fao.org. The subject of your email should be left blank and the first line of the message should be: subscribe FAO-Bookinfo-L.

GRETwww.gret.org

GRET publishes specialised development works (its catalogue contains approximately 110 books). Online catalogue and the possibility to subscribe online to the new publications email mailing list.

ITDG Publishingwww.developmentbookshop.com

This English publisher publishes works on all international development-related subjects: agriculture, education, energy, stock farming, forestry, transportation, construction, environment, etc.

Karthalawww.karthala.com

Online catalogue that can notably be searched by subject (agriculture and farmers, cooperation and development, land tenure issues, environment, etc.).

Lavoisierwww.lavoisier.fr/fr/livres/index.html

Online subscription to email notification for new publications by subject (e-Doc service).

Oxfam Internationalwww.oxfam.org/eng/about.htm

A federation of twelve independent organisations, each Oxfam produces and distributes its own books and other material for use by policy makers, schools, universities, development professionals, and the general public.

Major Periodicals

We have deliberately chosen to emphasise free periodicals (bulletins, newsletters) and those available online.

Afrique Agriculture and AgriEconomics

www.afrique-agriculture.com

Both are monthly news periodicals on agriculture, stock farming, fishing, and forestry. Afrique Agriculture focuses on sub-Saharan Africa, and AgriEconomics on North Africa (subscription: 73 euros each).

Spore

<http://spore.cta.int>

Published in three languages (English, Portuguese and French) by CTA, this rural development news magazine, available free on request, offers in-depth articles, short news briefs and updates on CTA's activities, information sources, and reviews of publications.

Grain de sel

www.inter-reseaux.org

This quarterly by Inter-réseaux seeks to be a forum for exchange and dialogue around rural development. Stakeholders from the South are invited to contribute to it by sending (both personal and collective) accounts of their rural development experiences.

Tropicultura

www.bib.fsagx.ac.be/tropicultura/eng/home

Available for free, this periodical publishes original articles, research and synthesis papers, and book and thesis summaries relative to all aspects of rural development in overseas France.

Voices

www.farmradio.org

This quarterly liaison newsletter by the Developing Countries Farm Radio Network proposes information, resources and scripts for radio broadcasters in order to support their efforts to improve the quality of life in rural areas.

Échos du Cota

www.cota.be

Échos du Cota, a quarterly published by the Collectif d'échanges pour la technologie appropriée (COTA, an exchange group for appropriate technology), specialises in development technologies and methodologies. It contains articles, book reviews, and announcements for training courses and events (subscription: 10 euros for 4 issues).

Haramata – Bulletin of the Drylands:***People, Policies, Programmes***www.iied.org

Published by IIED, this journal fosters exchange among NGOs and researchers active in drylands. Published in two versions (English and French), each issue is accompanied by four “Drylands Issue Papers”.

Acaciawww.agrecol.de

Published three times a year by Agrecol-Afrique, this newsletter provides information on ecological agriculture. (Publication contact: agrecol@enda.sn)

Leisa Magazine and Agridapewww.ileia.org

LEISA Magazine is co-published in English, Spanish, Portuguese, Indian and Indonesian by ILEIA and IIED; Agridape (“Agriculture durable à faibles apports externes”) is the regional edition for French-speaking Africa. These publications are available for free on request by organisations and individuals in the South. (Online LEISA subscriptions—including free subscriptions—at: www.leisa.info/index.tpl)

Unasylva (online)www.fao.org/forestry/index.jsp

The FAO’s international forests and forestry review is published four times a year in French, English and Spanish.

Productions animales – INRAwww.inra.fr/productions-animales

This scientific journal contains synthesis articles and research results on species of zootechnical interest (herbivores, monogastric animals and fish). It also devotes sections to tropical stock farming.

e-Newsletters***FRAMEgram***framemail@irglttd.co

This e-newsletter contains selected articles, information on recent or upcoming events, and summaries of recent studies and analyses of environmental issues in Africa.

Options méditerranéenneswww.iamm.fr/html/public/options/default.html

The different series brought together in CIHEAM’s Options méditerranéennes collection are devoted to Mediterranean

agricultural development. They are regularly placed online and the issues can be searched by keyword, summary, author and full text.

ICT Update

<http://ictupdate.cta.int>

News watch service on information and communication technologies (ICTs) for agriculture in ACP countries. Bimonthly with a paper and a digital version.

Source Water and Sanitation News

www2.irc.nl/source/index.php

Focusing on water and sanitation, this e-newsletter, a joint endeavour of Crepa, H2o, WSSCC and IRC, includes news items for this sector by geographic area, information on new publications, lessons learnt, etc. Also available on paper.

Zoom microfinance

www.sosfaim.be

Newsletter presenting SOS Faim's microfinance initiatives. Paper and digital versions in three languages.

HOW TO FIND INFORMATION

This section presents information-finding methods and commonly used tools. Emphasis is placed on computerised searches, notably on Internet which contains large volumes of changing content that make it crucial that you sort and select reliable and pertinent information.

Any information search faces two risks, frequently referred to as “documentary noise” and “documentary silence”. Documentary noise refers to search results in which the pertinent documents are drowned out by an excessive mass of irrelevant information. Documentary silence, on the contrary, refers to no—or not enough—search results or results that do not contain the information sought.

Look at the Context

To search for information you need to ask yourself a few prior questions to identify the context of the search: who? why? what? where?

These questions allow you to better target the request, refine the search, and provide a suitable answer. This method attempts to understand and clarify the following:

- ◆ the asker's profile: an individual or an organisation, their position, their level of knowledge on the subject, and their level of training;
- ◆ their objectives: for what will the asker use the information? what is his or her primary objective?
- ◆ the nature of the information: what type of information is it? an address, a definition, statistics, a practical tool? is the document's language important?
- ◆ the geographic limits: what is the geographic context? national or local?

Chose Your (Key)Words Wisely

Today's computer systems allow you to search within entire documents (full text searches). This is how, for example, your computer searches for files or folders and how Internet search engines work.

Database management systems use two search modes: searches in keyword-controlled fields (the most frequent mode) and full text searches.

The use of keywords guarantees more targeted and more precise search results than are possible with full text searches. In addition, this type of search is faster because it is structured on access indexes. Users often find this more restrictive because they must use limited and controlled language. It is, however, often more efficient and more direct. Full text searches give users more freedom to formulate their questions; the results are, however, less precise.

No matter what type of search you use, you will need to adapt your query language to each information system: do not be afraid to use different words for the same concept and search in successive stages. It is important to correctly clarify the concept on which information is sought and find the relevant terms to refer to the concept (remember to include synonyms). A documentary language (thesaurus or other) can be useful for this. It is also important to take the time to gain clear understanding of how each search tool works, notably by reading their online help sections.

► ***The Right Approach: Search in Successive Stages***

You will only rarely find the desired results on your first try. Very often, you will need to test several terms because several terms can be used to describe one concept, and because searching from differing angles of attack improves results.

A Sample Internet Search

Using Google to respond to a request for information on “the commodity chain for traditional silk in Asia”. The notion of “commodity chain” refers to several stages (production, processing, sale, etc.) and would most likely need to be the subject of several successive searches:

- Searching for the expression “silk commodity chain” yields little in the way of relevant results.
- Searching for the word “silk” yields a huge quantity of results. Analysis shows that certain aspects of the commodity chain are not covered in the results, for example mulberry tree production, sericulture, or even traditional weaving methods. The search using “silk” must therefore be completed by searches on the terms “mulberry tree”, “sericulture”, etc.
- Using different languages: for some sectors, there may be more, and more relevant, information available in languages other than English, in which case you may need to work in other languages.

Switching languages raises specific questions: in addition to knowledge of the specific technical terms required, some notions are not used in the same way across languages. Thus, the notion of “commodity chain” is little used in Anglo-Saxon circles and will need to be covered by a series of terms for each stage of the commodity chain.

Combine Keywords

You can fine-tune a search by combining several terms using Boolean logical operators. Boolean logic consists of three logical operations: union (operator: OR), intersection (operator: AND), and exclusion (operator: NOT). Using the operator AND limits the field of the search, whereas the operator OR expands it.

Combining operators make very sophisticated searches possible; these are generally explained in the search engines’ online help sections.

Searches using controlled vocabularies (thesauruses, lexicon of keywords, etc.) refer to terms (made up of one or more words) whereas free text searches are limited to searching on words with each word taken independently of the others. For example, “rural development” is only one term in a controlled vocabulary. In a full text search, however, each word may be considered independently of the other.

A Few Examples

OR	searches for results containing either or both of the two terms	cashew OR « cashew tree »
<hr/>		
AND	searches for results containing both of the two terms documents containing only one of the terms will not be taken into account	peanut AND processing
<hr/>		
AND NOT	this operator allows you to exclude a term	butter AND NOT peanut butter
<hr/>		
NEAR	finds documents in which the two words are close to each other	butter NEAR peanut will find documents about peanut butter
<hr/>		
truncation	enables you to search on partial terms the truncation character (usually an asterisk *) can be used to replace any letter(s)	silk* to search for silk, silkworm, etc. cereal* to search for documents on cereals, wether the word is written in singular or plural

Identifying Relevant Information

All search results must be analysed to determine whether or not the documents are a good fit for the initial request and its context. Depending on the number of results (too few or too many), your query will need to be adjusted to narrow or expand the scope of the search.

Internet Searches

Internet is a vast pool of information in which everyone can become an information producer. This makes for wide diversity in the value of the information (reliability and interest), its content (databank, full text, etc.), the media used (text, image, video, etc.), and sources (scientific, commercial or personal sites). It is also a shifting space that is updated frequently and is constantly and rapidly growing. The information available on Internet is neither filtered nor validated by an authority such as a newspaper's editorial committee. The information found on Internet is not all reliable, high-quality, precise, etc.

► *The Right Approach*

A small African stock farmer asks a service run by a computer technician for information on building appropriate buildings for his pig farm. The person in charge runs an Internet search and delivers the results to the user. Among the sites/documents listed, the only document that specifically addresses construction techniques presents the blueprints of modern buildings in Canada: this answer is totally inappropriate for the request.

The right approach is to always keep in mind the context of the request: rather than starting with a vast search using search engines, it would be better to pre-target sites that have previously been identified as belonging to organisations working on the subject. In addition, you must always sort the results before giving them to the asker.

For stock farming, there are no websites of reference. In response to this request, the appropriate method would be to contact the national organisation in charge of disseminating stock farming methods.

It is important to keep all this in mind before searching for information on Internet. The right reflex is to proceed in a methodological manner: clearly frame the question, use the right search tools, assess any and all information you find. Internet is often deceptively easy to use because answers can always be found, even if they are not necessarily relevant. Internet is merely one source of information among many and does not contain everything. When a search does not yield the hoped-for results, do not hesitate to move on to other sources.

Types of Search Tools

Internet offers numerous information search tools that use different logics. It is crucial that you understand the specificities of each tool well in order to choose the one best suited to your search.

- ◆ **Directories or Indexes.** Called catalogues or thematic indexes, directories are collections of sites organised in hierarchical categories and sub-categories. Sites are selected by teams based on site indexing proposals submitted by the sites' authors. Yahoo! is one of the best known directories: it offers a hierarchical classification system with fourteen primary categories and numerous sub-categories.

These tools are indicated for vast searches, to explore a subject, and to find resource sites in a given field. They offer two search modes: by major categories and by keywords. Also, general directories exist along with thematic or geographic directories

- ◆ **Search engines** (Google, AltaVista, Lycos, Voila, etc.). These engines crawl the Web and automatically reference sites, indexing them, checking for broken links, eliminating repetitions, etc.

Queries are formulated using keywords, generally via a simple search form. More and more often, these search engines have advanced features that take into account Boolean operators, truncation, and accented characters. Advanced searches are also offered. Compared to directories, they have the advantage of performing more exhaustive searches and are therefore indicated for very specifically targeted queries. They are also updated more frequently than directories. However, the results are not usually returned in any logical order.

Internet “How To” Guides

GIRI	www.bibl.ulaval.ca/vitrine/giri/index.htm	beginners' guide to Internet searches produced by a group of Quebecois information professionals
Inter-Réseaux, PassDev	http://ancien.inter-reseaux.org/passdev/pratique/internetafriquefranco.htm	practical advice on using Internet in Africa
Jean-Philippe Accart	www.accart.nom.fr/Cours/RechInfo_plan.html	an Internet professional's site containing online classes and resources

The Invisible Web

The “invisible Web” is made up of Web pages that are not indexed. These resources include databases, e-newspapers, newsgroups, product reviews, articles, umbrella sites, thesauruses, etc. They are notably websites built around databases that can be searched only with their own internal search engines, and password protected sites.

The most common search engines (such as Google) include a larger and larger share of Web resources. However, a large share of this invisible Web continues to elude search engines, notably the wealth of information managed in databases. Using a search engine, no matter how powerful it is, is not enough to find all useful resources.

- ◆ **Meta-search engines** query, in one go, various search tools—both directories and search engines—and provide the most relevant responses from each tool. They can therefore save you considerable time, but their results may be less precise because they do not make full use of the specificities of each tool. It is often difficult to formulate complex queries using parentheses and Boolean operators. Copernic is one of the most frequently used meta-search engines. A basic version can be downloaded for free from Copernic's website (www.copernic.com).
- ◆ **Intelligent agents** are programmes that let you set up automatic information searches on Internet, set up watchdog processes, and download and sort search results. They usually contain linguistic and/or semantic tools and can be queried in natural language. These complex tools are rarely free and are frequently very expensive (Arisem, Verity, etc.).

Internet Watches

Without costly and complex software devoted specifically to information watches, setting up an Internet watch can be done simply and easily by subscribing to email alerts and monitoring key websites.

More and more websites allow readers to subscribe to their mailing lists and send out regular emails announcing updates to the sites. For example, La toile d'elles is a free monthly e-newsletter informing subscribers of new additions to the famafrique site (www.famafrique.org — to subscribe, send a blank email to Toiledelles-subscribe@yahoogroups.fr). You will then automatically be informed of organisation news, new publications, and downloadable documents.

Other sites also offer selective dissemination of information (SDI) alerts. One example is Eldis (www.eldis.org), a development and environment information portal in English that allows users to create a centre of interest profile. Users then receive alerts that target the subjects they have selected in their profiles. Another example is the development and poverty reduction portal, the Development Gateway (www.developmentgateway.org).

In addition to automatic Internet watches, it is useful to monitor key sites that provide reliable, up-to-date information. Managing your own site directory (bookmarks) is part of capitalising on the information you find. Whenever you discover an interesting page, your first reflex should be to save

it in your bookmarks (organised, for example, by theme in folders and sub-folders). Occasionally, once or twice a month, your bookmarked websites should be visited. In addition, most sites indicate new items directly from their home page under different headings: “new documents”, “site news”, “new”, etc. Visiting the new publications pages where online documents may become available is also efficient.

Site Evaluation and Selection Strategy

It is not necessarily easy to find relevant information on Internet: you can find just about anything—the good, the bad and the ugly. Thus, you need to determine the validity of the documents you find. This is done in two stages:

- ◆ first, analyse the list of results: decode addressees (the URL can indicate whether the sites are personal, commercial, etc. sites), summary, site date;
- ◆ then, analyse the site’s reliability by looking several things: What type of site is it? Who is the author? Is he or she known for his or her reliability and expertise in the subject? Is the site regularly updated? Does it contain links to reliable sites? Do other sites link to it?

ENRICH YOUR DOCUMENTARY FUND AT LITTLE COST

An information centre can take various steps to compensate for a small acquisitions budget: take part in organisations’ free donation programmes, set up partnerships or exchanges, obtain virtual libraries, and/or identify publications that are distributed for free by institutions.

Free Donation Programmes

A certain number of organisations donate books. The pitfall to avoid is receiving documents that are inappropriate for your information service’s needs because they are off topic, unsuited to the context, or obsolete. Thus, it is preferable that

the recipient information service reach an agreement with the donating organisation on what it would like to receive.

Several libraries and information services have written and signed a “Book Donation Charter”, which can be found in *Book Donations for Development* published by UNESCO and available online (<http://www.codecan.org/english/documents/Book-Donations.pdf>). This document also lists various book donation programmes and their website addresses.

Book Aid International

www.bookaid.org

Created in 1954, Book Aid International is an English non-governmental organisation that works in partnership with other organisations in developing countries to encourage and support local literacy, education, training and publishing initiatives. It responds to requests for books on all levels and for all budgets by providing new and used books and obtaining funding for book purchases.

INASP (International Network for the Availability of Scientific Publications)

www.inasp.info

This network offers several programmes to improve the scientific community’s access to information. It notably publishes a directory of organisations that support information dissemination, including through the donation of scientific articles and journals, and book grants or exchanges.

Book Donation Charter

www.culture-developpement.asso.fr

The first article of the book donation charter sets forth the following general principles:

“[...] knowing and involving the partner body in all the stages of the programme; preferring quality to quantity; expanding the knowledge of the readerships to be served; fostering the development of a culture of writing; and, in the case of donations of new books, cooperating to the greatest extent possible with publishers and booksellers in the two countries concerned; and contributing to the local production of books by supporting limited editions of works.”

Books for Africa

www.booksforafrica.org/overvw.html

Books for Africa collects, sorts, ships and distributes books to children in Africa. Books donated by publishers, schools, libraries, individuals and organisations are sorted and packed by volunteers who carefully choose books that are age and subject appropriate. A list of donation programmes can be found on its site.

International Book Bank

www.internationalbookbank.org/whoweare.htm

United States and Canadian publishing companies donate new books to IBB where they are inventoried and warehoused for distribution to developing countries around the world. Non-profit education programs in these countries choose the books they wish to receive from a catalogue and IBB packages and ships the selection overseas. The only cost to the recipient program is the reimbursement of expenses incurred in processing the books.

The Rhône-Alpes Book Bank

www.culture-developpement.asso.fr

The Banque Rhône-Alpes du livre (Rhône-Alpes book bank) is a pilot book donation and library development support project in French-speaking Africa managed by the association Cultures et Développement. The book bank's mission is to rationalise and organise French book donations to African countries, collect them, process them, and redistribute them to partners identified through the public reading networks in the countries concerned.

The libraries with which contracts of agreed objectives have been signed are proposed aid in the form of book donations, supplies and exhibits highlighting the cultures and productions of African countries. Training courses are also offered⁹.

⁹ This association has also published two handbooks:

- ◆ the Guide du partenariat Nord-Sud pour le livre et la lecture which provides those involved in exchanges with guidelines for the elaboration and implementation of twinning agreements or partnership agreements with African libraries. Available online at www.culture-developpement.asso.fr/E_COOP/IE_coop.htm
- ◆ and Coopérer avec une bibliothèque d'Afrique. Designed and produced as a working tool, this handbook enriches and amplifies partnership practices and issues in a search for greater effectiveness.

ADIFLOR – Association pour la diffusion internationale francophone de livres, ouvrages et revues

www.adiflor.org

ADIFLOR, the association for the international French-language distribution of books, works and journals, is financed by the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the French Ministry of Culture. It ensures the free distribution of books in French to approximately 100 countries. Only associations, schools, Alliances françaises, cultural centres, libraries, French and foreign members of parliament, French embassies abroad, and foreign embassies in France can establish lists of desired books. ADIFLOR finances the collection of publications. Shipping is also covered, often by container or through other associations. Delivery times vary by volume and geographic zone.

ADEL Réserve centrale Book Distribution and Exchange Office

ADEL is an integral part of the Réserve centrale (central reserve), a division of the city of Paris' technical library service. The role of the central reserve is to allow municipal libraries to keep their collections up-to-date by relieving them of the least borrowed books and/or multiple copies of the same book to make room for new purchases. Useable volumes are either kept or made available to various organisations (libraries, schools, retirement homes, hospitals, prisons, charities, cultural organisations, national and international organisations, etc.) via ADEL.

Contact: Bureau des bibliothèques du livre, 31 rue des Francs-Bourgeois 75188 Paris. Tel.: 33 (0)1 49 29 36 65. Fax: 33 (0)1 49 05 20 99.

Virtual Libraries

Donation organisations and programmes are not the only ways to increase your documentary fund. More and more institutions are creating digital libraries—whether virtual or on CD-ROM—that make it possible to make documents available to the public more rapidly and less expensively.

The CTA, like other development agencies, places most of its printed publications online and offers others on CD-ROM.

The FAO also has an active policy of making agricultural information available online. The FAO's Corporate Document

Repository is an electronic library that holds FAO's huge collection of publications and meeting documents in full-text, digital format. Since it was created in 1998, more than 6,000 documents have been converted into HTML so that users from around the world can download agricultural information for free.

UNESCO has published two digital libraries on CD-ROM: SAHEL point DOC, an anthology on the development of the Sahel zone, and the East African Development Library on East Africa. With its Publica collection, UNESCO aims to promote free access to information in the public domain and information made available for free by copyright holders.

Free Publications

Many development organisations distribute their publications to partners in developing countries for free. Available works are generally announced on websites or in periodicals. You should therefore be on the lookout for this type of information and you should not hesitate to request it from these organisations. For example, the Belgian development aid service published a memento on agricultural techniques for tropical zones which is distributed for free on request to organisations in the South. Yet, the number of such requests is often very small.

Examples of Virtual Libraries

- ◆ Humanitarian Information for All's goal is to create CD-ROM libraries. Several collections have been published, available for free or at very little cost : www.humaninfo.org.
- ◆ The "Booktique" section of IDRC's website offers numerous books for downloading: www.idrc.ca.
- ◆ "Plein_Textes" is the IRD's (Institut de Recherche pour le Développement) digital library; it aims to make full text versions of the IRD's entire documentary fund available online: www.bondy.ird.fr/pleins_textes.
- ◆ The Agence universitaire de la francophonie (AUF) offers the complete contents of selected works classified according to subject matter: www.bibliotheque.refer.org.

Manage, Sort and Handle Documents

Finding and collecting the right information is not enough, you must know how to communicate it by responding in a relevant manner to the questions asked by your audience. The purpose of an information service is not to store and conserve documents, as libraries do, but rather to process the information collected and format it so that it can be used by information seekers.

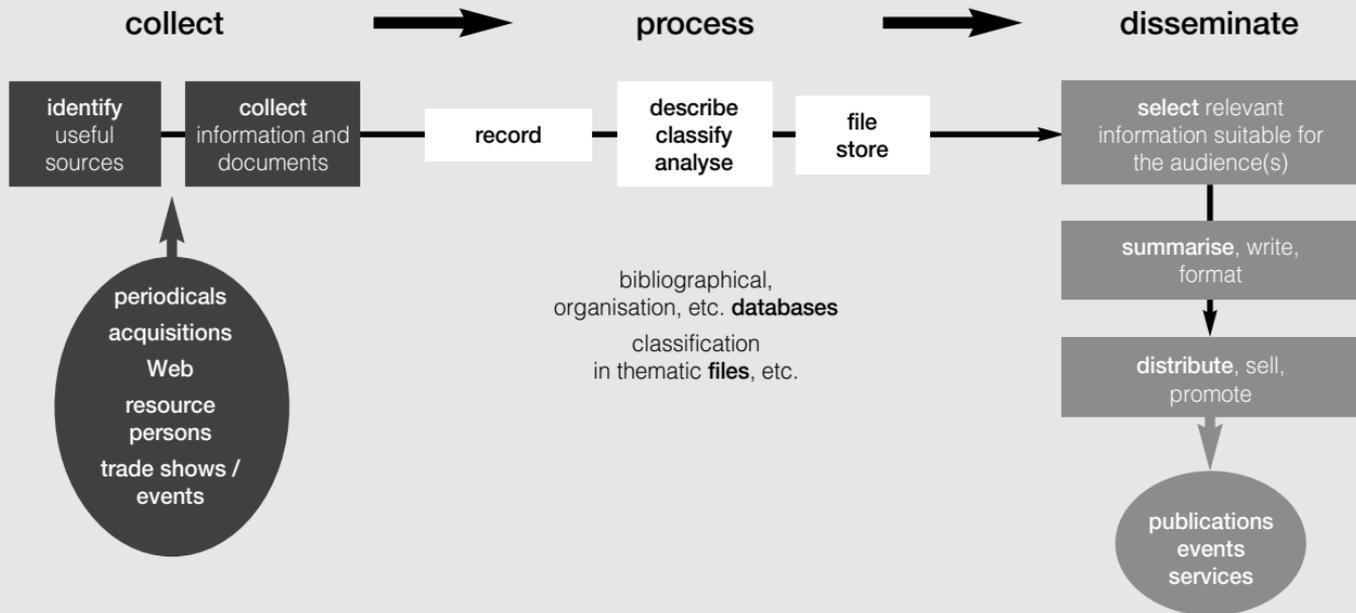
Once the information has been collected and validated, it is crucial that the service's available documents be managed rigorously so that the relevant information can be found easily. To do so, you need simple and efficient tools that allow you to organise all the documents in your information supply: books, articles, websites, newsletters, brochures, catalogues, audio-visual materials, etc.

These tools are methods (typologies, categorisation schemes, hierarchical lists of keywords, thesauruses) and computer applications (bibliographic databases, periodical management databases, Q&A service answer management databases, etc.).

The end goal of the tools presented here is to use the information to answer specific questions (going beyond merely compiling documents) and transmitting the information in a form suitable for the audience. For this, you must:

- ◆ be able to **imagine distribution formats** other than classic documentary formats (bibliography, press reviews, etc.);
- ◆ be skilled in **producing** them, which requires good understanding of the subject, writing in strict response to the pu-

The Document and Information Circuit



blic's expectations, and formatting the information (while using simple tools such as word processors); and

- ◆ communicate to promote the products

METHODOLOGY TOOLS

Classify and Sort Documents: Thesauruses and Categorisation Schemes

All information services very quickly need to manage a large stock of documents. You will only be able to find the relevant information rapidly and with certainty if you have described the content of each document. Two tools will help you do this: structured vocabularies to analyse the content, and a categorisation scheme to physically store the documents.

Information Content Analysis

Describe informational content using more or less elaborate controlled vocabularies: control list, keyword list, thesaurus. The information service will thus have a common basis on which to describe and search for content. Without such vocabularies, a wide variety of words will be used to describe the same content.

Without such vocabularies, a wide variety of words will be used to describe the same content, making it difficult to find the—or all of the—content sought. For example, England, Britain, United Kingdom and UK are four different terms often used to refer to the same country. To find information on this country, one would therefore have to enter these four different names to be sure to find all documents, no matter how they were described; this takes time and not everyone will think to do so. It is therefore crucial that you establish a reference list of country names so that the descriptions are uniform and searches are simplified.

Control Lists

These lists make it possible to standardise some elements used to describe an “information item” (whether it be a per-

son, organisation, document, etc.). For example, to describe a document, the language, document type (article, special issue, book, video, CD-ROM, report, etc.), and even the publisher would be selected from a control list. Standard, pre-existing control lists do not exist; each organisation builds its own lists in function of its needs.

For languages and countries, however, it is recommended that you use ISO standards (country codes and names, for example, can be found at the following address: www.iso.org/iso/en/prods-services/iso3166ma/02iso-3166-code-lists/list-en1.html).

Lexicon or Thematic List of Keywords

To describe the subjects covered by an “information item” or document, you build a vocabulary of keywords that summarise the basic concepts used in a given sector.

These keywords come from natural language usage but they must be identified according to certain rules: each keyword must designate one and only one notion, they must be singular, etc.

Keywords are classified by major subjects and sorted alphabetically so that they are easier to use. With this vocabulary, each “information item” will be described by as many keywords as there are concepts in the document, providing detailed and rich indexing.

This list of keywords should be established in function of your information service’s primary working subjects; it must be updated regularly to keep abreast of evolutions.

Establishing such lists requires considerable rigour and very solid mastery of the subjects covered, which implies calling on a team that contains not only information specialists but also specialists in the subjects covered.

Thesaurus

A thesaurus, like a lexicon, is a controlled vocabulary made up of keywords called “descriptors”.

A thesaurus has the same purpose as a list of thematic keywords: it will allow you to describe the content of a document with several descriptors. However, compared to a simple list, thesauruses are both controlled (only existing descriptors can be used) and structured in major themes. They also link descriptors using several types of relations (hyponymy, synonymy, related term, polysemy, etc.).

For example, the descriptor “parasitic disease” could be defined in a thesaurus by the following relations:

- ◆ Is “used for” (UF): parasitosis.
- ◆ Has for “broader term” (BT): illness. The broader term is the descriptor with the next more general meaning.
- ◆ Has for “narrower terms” (NT): malaria, filariasis, trypanosomosis. The narrower term is a descriptor with a more specific meaning.
- ◆ And, has for “related terms” (RT): animal parasitic disease, vegetable parasitic disease, water quality. Descriptors can be related by their meanings to other descriptors.

These various relations among descriptors provide a precise definition of the meaning given to a term and offer multiple ways to describe or seek information.

How to Use a Thesaurus to Index Documents

First, you identify the general subjects and concepts evoked in the document. Consult the alphabetic section of the thesaurus to verify that the concepts exist as descriptors. If so, identify the general subject(s) under which the concepts fall. This can give you ideas for additional descriptors to use. Also verify that the meanings you give to the words are the same as those given for them in the thesaurus by reading the descriptions.

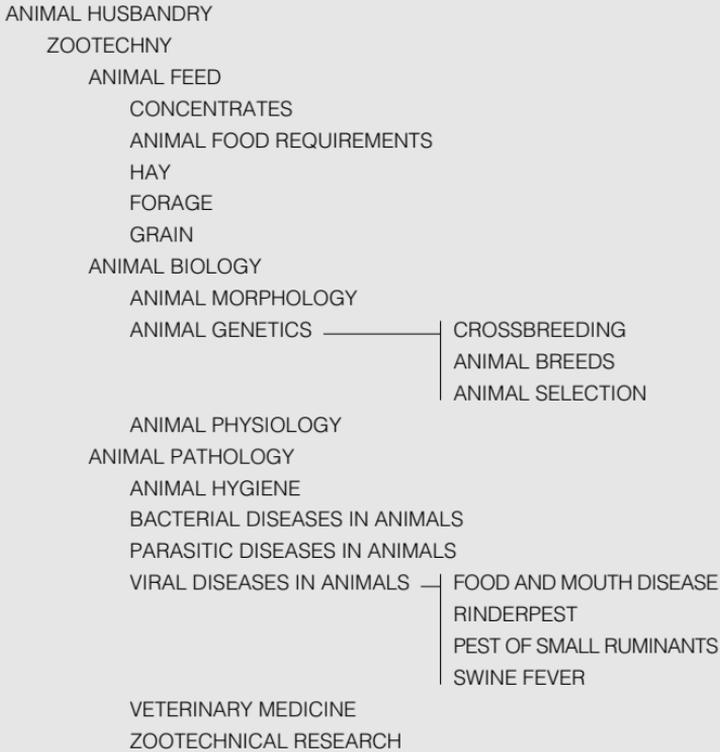
If the concept in question is not a descriptor, it may be listed as a forbidden synonym; in which case, you should use the equivalent term labelled “USE” in the thesaurus.

You should also pay attention to related terms that can also give indications on how to make document indexing more precise and complete.

If the thesaurus does not contain the concept, it should be introduced as a “descriptor candidate”.

The thesaurus should be updated regularly using the list of descriptor candidates after you have verified that descriptors do not already exist for the concepts.

The Thesaurus: An Example of the Hierarchical Thematic Presentation of Keywords



The Thesaurus: An Example of the Alphabetical Presentation of Keywords

MALNUTRITION		MANGO	
sub	Health	sub	Agriculture
UF	UNDERNUTRITION	BT	FRUIT
BT	NUTRITION		
NT	DIETARY DEFICIENCY	MARKET	
		sub	Economy
MANAGEMENT		UF	MARKETS
USE	BUSINESS MANAGEMENT	NT	DEMAND
			SUPPLY
MANDARIN TREE		RT	MARKET STUDY
sub	Agriculture	SN	Balance between the supply of and demand for goods, services or capital.
BT	CITRUS		

Synonyms are managed via the use of “USED FOR” (UF) and its opposite “USE”. Across from the term “parasitosis”, you will find “USE: parasitic disease”.

To avoid synonyms, a thesaurus uses only one word (the most representative) as the descriptor. Other synonymous terms are forbidden. Thus, there will be several points of entry for the same concept, all of which point to a single term. This makes it possible for users to find the term they are used to using, while managing synonyms and avoiding the use of multiple keywords for the same concept.

Some terms may be used with different meanings. Supplementary “scope notes” (SN) may be added to clarify the meaning of descriptors in the thesaurus.

Creating a thesaurus is a complex and lengthy operation. We recommend that you adapt a pre-existing thesaurus. Several appropriate thesauruses exist in the field of rural development:

- ◆ The 19-chapter **OECD Macrothesaurus** focuses on economic and social development in general; it also covers rural development. It contains country and region descriptors in the international cooperation/international relations chapter. It is available online at: <http://info.uibk.ac.at/info/oecd-macroth/en/index.html>.
- ◆ The **Thesaurus** published by **Ibiscus** is similar to the OECD Macrothesaurus but goes into more detail on the subjects of tropical agriculture and rural development. This tool has not been updated or distributed since the association ceased its activities. It remains, however, an appropriate thesaurus.
- ◆ **Agrovoc**, the FAO’s multilingual thesaurus (in French, English, Spanish, Chinese, Arabic and more) is, for its part, oriented more towards science and agricultural research. It can be consulted online at—or downloaded (as an Access database) from—the following address: www.fao.org/agrovoc/.
- ◆ In English, the **CAB Thesaurus** on life sciences can be consulted on Internet (www.cabthesaurus.info). A 2-volume paper version (1999) can be obtained for free under certain conditions (otherwise, it can be purchased for approximately 200 euros).

Using a thesaurus is not mandatory. It is, however, imperative that you at least build a controlled list of keywords.

Without such a list, you will have multiple entries for a single concept (for example: fruits and vegetables, vegetable, fruit, produce, fruit crops, market garden crops, market garden crop, etc.) or concepts that vary in function of who describes the document—both of which will make searches inefficient.

Physical Placement

The purpose of a **categorisation scheme** is to physically place documents in the documentary fund according to a pre-determined, thematic order. Categorisation schemes are hierarchical lists of themes and sub-themes, with four or five levels. A numerical, alphanumerical or alphabetical index number identifies every section in the classification scheme. To file a document, you will choose the main subject covered, attribute the corresponding index number, and file it with the documents that have the same index number.

The categorisation scheme is an addition to lexicons and thesauruses that allow you to provide a detailed description of the content. For open access documentary funds, they are crucial to help users rapidly find and identify documents on any given subject.

Building your categorisation tool from scratch is a time-consuming operation that requires precision and logic. It is more prudent to rely on what already exists, adapting or expanding certain subjects in function of your needs.

Your information service may take its inspiration from the following categorisation schemes that cover all or some of the subjects involved in rural development:

- ◆ **Agridoc's categorisation scheme**, available online from the network's website (www.agridoc.com), tends to focus heavily on tropical agriculture and rural development. It was last updated in 1998.

An Example: the plant care index (which covers all products to combat the various crop enemies) would be classified under the heading AGEN 4.4 (Preventive measures), AGEN being the level 1 heading (Agronomics – general agriculture), and AGEN 4 being the level 2 heading (crop defence).

- ◆ The **OECD categorisation scheme** proposes a system based on three initial levels followed by the first letters of the author's name. An adaptation of this tool is available online on CIFDI's site at http://cifdi.francophonie.org/Bases/Kora_Thes.cfm.
- ◆ The **AGRIS categorisation scheme** (international information system in the areas of agricultural sciences and technologies) coordinated by the FAO covers agriculture and related subjects (fisheries, forestry, food, veterinary sciences, and rural development). It is available online in the "Documentation Tools" section of the Agris website (a mine of information) at: www.fao.org/agris/IP/code.asp?InfoT=Subject&Language=EN.
- ◆ There is also the **Satis categorisation scheme** on appropriate technologies. It is still in use by many NGOs (for example, CDDR-Saïd, Enda, Atol, Cota, etc.), but is not longer distributed.

Computerised Management Tools

The interest, and even the necessity, of computerising information services has largely been proven. Computerisation improves documentary fund management, saves time, optimises information searches, and facilitates access to documents. Finally, it facilitates the monitoring of operations and generation of statistics.

Various databases can help you manage your information stock.

Bibliographic databases summarise the content of the documents and information available to the service. They facilitate finding and making available this information. Depending on the service's needs, this database can also include an additional function: loan management.

Given the importance of a good network of contacts, a "contacts" database is often useful. These databases contain all organisations and resource persons that may be useful and/or with whom the information service is in contact.

The tools to manage a question-and-answer service were evoked earlier with the creation of three separate databases: one for users, one for questions, and one for answers. Independently of the software used, these various databa-

Sample Categorisation Scheme Adapted from the Agridoc Categorisation Scheme

AGRO	AGRONOMICS; GENERAL AGRICULTURE
AGRO 1	BOTANY; PLANT BIOLOGY; PLANT PHYSIOLOGY
AGRO 1.1	Flora
AGRO 2	CROPPING TECHNIQUES
AGRO 2.1	Cropping system
AGRO 2.1.1	Crop rotation
AGRO 2.1.2	Perennial crops; Arboriculture; Plantations
AGRO 2.1.3	Greenhouse crops; Plasticulture
AGRO 2.1.4	Soilless cultivation; Hydroponic cultivation
AGRO 2.2	Cultivation practices
AGRO 2.2.1	Associated crops; Catch crops
AGRO 2.2.2	Soil preparation; Sowing; Transplanting
AGRO 2.2.3	Crop tending; Shrub pruning
AGRO 2.2.4	Harvest; Post-harvest work
AGRO 2.2.5	Cultivation dates
AGRO 2.2.6	Labour times
AGRO 3	SOIL IMPROVEMENT
AGRO 3.1	Soil amendment
AGRO 3.1.1	Liming
AGRO 3.1.2	Composting
AGRO 3.2	Fertilisation
AGRO 3.2.1	Manure
AGRO 3.2.2	Mineral fertiliser
AGRO 3.2.3	Nitrogen fixation
AGRO 4	CROP PROTECTION
AGRO 4.1	Pests; Parasites; Agricultural entomology
AGRO 4.2	Plant diseases
AGRO 4.2.1	Bacterial plant diseases
AGRO 4.2.2	Parasitic plant diseases
AGRO 4.2.3	Viral plant diseases
AGRO 4.3	Weeds
AGRO 4.4	Control methods
AGRO 4.4.1	Prevention
AGRO 4.4.2	Bird control; Locust control
AGRO 4.4.3	Pest control
AGRO 4.4.4	Biological control
AGRO 4.4.5	Chemical control
AGRO 4.4.5.1	Plant care products
AGRO 4.4.5.2	Pesticides
AGRO 4.4.6	Integrated pest management
AGRO 4.4.7	Weed eradication

ses can be implemented rapidly, following a certain number of basic principles.

- ◆ **Correctly analyse your needs and identify their uses.** Writing a small set of specifications makes this formal and allows you to identify the purpose(s) and content of the database, the functions you desire, the data to be found, and the management data. Specifications can also serve to improve an existing database (missing data, tasks not done, etc.). Software should be chosen in function of all these questions.
- ◆ **Keep it simple.** Tool design must be simple on two levels: do not multiply the number of different databases and do not make data entry in the various databases more difficult by having a multitude of fields. For example, many documentation centres have set up separate databases for each type of document they manage: one for periodical articles, another for books, and a third for reports. This distinction doubles—or triples—management work, and information searches.

It is much simpler to elaborate one bibliographic database for all references and include the field “document type” and the possibility of searching by document type.

Similarly, some documentation centres adopt very complex bibliographic description formats that use approximately fifty fields to describe a document. These formats are elaborated and standardised to facilitate international data exchange between libraries. Most of the time, they are distributed by international organisations. They are not very useful for the information services we are discussing here. A bibliographic database must be dimensioned to meet the service’s needs and adapt to them. Using overly complex formats has a negative and counter-productive effect on information services with few qualified staff: staff spends more time entering data in the bibliographic database than it does replying to users’ requests or developing useful products and services.

- ◆ **Break information down into separate fields.** Every different type of information must be managed in a specific field. For example, do not use one field to manage where the work was published, who published it, and the date it was published—create three separate fields. This makes it possible to search each field, apply multiple formats, and use different sort methods. This principle—separating different types of information into different fields—is of the utmost importance: doing so facilitates later formatting of the information in ways suitable for multiple uses.

Imagine, for example, that your service wants to publish a bibliography of documents, sorted by publication date with the following format: author's name followed by publication date.

If your database manages the publication date independently of the publisher this will be very easy to do. If, however, the two pieces of information are contained in the same field, it will be impossible to sort the entries by publication date and isolate the date to display it alongside the author's name without processing all the entries by hand.

- ◆ **Control the content of certain fields** using lists or typologies (document type, language, geographic area, etc.). By using a controlled vocabulary, these controlled lists reduce data entry errors and fully optimise searches (for searchable fields). These controlled lists serve to standardise the various ways to write names.

For example, how the country Vietnam will be entered should be decided: Viet Nam or Vietnam. If you do not choose one spelling, information searches will very likely yield incomplete or empty results if, for example, a user searches for "Viet Nam" but information has been indexed under the spelling "Vietnam".

- ◆ **Fix data entry rules** to make data entry uniform and allow efficient use of and searches for information. A simple example, telephone numbers: determine what format should be used (e.g. with or without country codes) and apply this format to all records.

Many information services fail to take the time to standardise formats for various fields, which can make searches nearly impossible later. One of the most common examples of this is the entry of individual authors' names. They should be entered in the simple format of "last name, first name". In databases where this is not standardised, the same author's name will end up entered in various ways: "Smith, John", "John Smith", "J. Smith", "Smith", etc. In the search index, it then becomes difficult to find all entries and the results will be incomplete if you select only "Smith, John" for example; also, when bibliographical references are to be published, it will be difficult to sort by name and group all documents by the same author together.

The case of a bibliography database illustrates this approach to structuring and defining your database.

Destined to search for and consult information, this database can be used to reference both books, articles and Q&A service files, internal reports, and vital websites. Searches can be performed on some fields (keywords, language, authors, etc.) to facilitate and speed up information searches. A verification process (mandatory fields, controlled-content fields, etc.) allows you to both ensure that the fields are properly filled in and that each record is consistent.



BDPA

Example: Structuring a Bibliography Database

PURPOSE	FIELDS	DATA ENTRY CONTROL	SEARCHABLE FIELD	DOCUMENT TYPE
management	record number	automatic number		all
	last update	system datestamp		all
	producer (the person who enters the record)	control list		all
bibliographic description	document type*	pre-determined list	yes	all
	title*		yes (words in the title)	all
	author (person)		yes	all
	author (organisation)	control list	yes	all
	publisher*	open-ended control list	yes	books, multimedia documents
	publication location*	control list		books, multimedia documents
	publication date*	date format	yes	books, multimedia documents

bibliographic description (cont.)	collection			books, multimedia documents
	volume			books, multimedia documents
	pages*			all
	ISBN			books, multimedia documents
	periodical title*	control list	yes	articles
	periodical issue number*			articles
	document language*	pre-determined list	yes	all
content description	theme/subject	lexicon or thesaurus	yes	all
	geographic location*	pre-determined list	yes	all
	keywords*	lexicon or thesaurus	yes	all
	descriptor candidates (open keywords)		yes	all
	summary			all
document accessibility	ranking*		yes	all
	* mandatory fields			

The purpose of this database is to manage the coordinates of people and organisations useful for the information service (partners, experts, suppliers, donor, etc.). Contacts are searched by name, organisation, country, type or even thematic category if possible and provided for. At the least, it should contain the following fields:

Example: Contacts Database (organisations or resource persons)

Contact Record

Contact Ref. no.	<input type="text"/>	Last Update	<input type="text"/>
Title	<input type="text"/>	Address	<input type="text"/>
First Name	<input type="text"/>	Postal Code	<input type="text"/>
Last Name	<input type="text"/>	City	<input type="text"/>
Position	<input type="text"/>	Country	<input type="text" value=""/>
Organisation	<input type="text"/>	Contact Type	<input type="text" value=""/>
Department	<input type="text"/>	Keywords	<input type="text"/>
Phone	<input type="text"/>		
Direct Line	<input type="text"/>		
Cell Phone	<input type="text"/>		
Home Phone	<input type="text"/>		
Fax	<input type="text"/>		
Email	<input type="text"/>		
Email	<input type="text"/>		
Website	<input type="text"/>		
Notes	<input type="text"/>		

THE DOCUMENT MANAGEMENT CHAIN

This section does not aim to explain in detail the information processing chain because very abundant literature already exists on the subject¹⁰. Instead, it gives practical and methodology tips in function of the type of information or document collected for your documentary fund. Particular emphasis is placed on poorly identified and usually under-utilised “volatile” information made up of brochures, catalogues, informative flyers, websites, etc. Although these documents have a shorter shelf life, they are nonetheless a source of information with high added value, notably for question-and-answer services.

Processing a document consists of indexing it, physically filing it, and analysing its content. This processing will vary according to the type of document or information (books, periodical articles, reports, brochures, catalogues, websites, CD-ROMs, videos, etc.).

Books, Multimedia Documents, Internal Reports

The proper management of these documents has several purposes:

- ◆ identify the relevant documents for a given user or use: document analysis;
- ◆ rapidly find documents in your stacks: categorisation scheme; and
- ◆ establish an inventory of the fund, analyse its evolution, and guide its acquisitions policy.

Document Analysis

Content analysis tools (keyword lexicon and thesaurus) and registration in a bibliographic database contribute to the first purpose (cf. previous section describing management tools, page 117).

¹⁰ See appendix 1, page 163, for a selected bibliography.

A summary of each document is a useful addition to this first level of analysis via keywords.

Physical Placement

Filing documents makes them easier to find when they are wanted. To determine which filing system is most appropriate for their needs and capacities, information services must ask the following questions: Should access to information be open? How much space do you have? Is the audience used to finding its own information? Is the staff large enough to provide a document consultation service and supervision?

Two major types of physical placement of documents exist:

- ◆ **By inventory number:** Documents are physically filed one after another in order of their arrival or entry in the database, with the entry number acting as shelf number. This system makes documents very easy to put away and saves shelf space. It makes direct consultation by users impossible because this system does not take into account document content. The information service must act as intermediary between users and the available documents. In addition, the documentary fund must be computerised as this is the only way to find the relevant documents rapidly.
- ◆ **Using a thematic categorisation scheme:** The content of the document determines where it is placed on the shelves: documents are filed by theme, and within each subject, by sub-theme. This filing method makes open consultation of documents possible. It needs more space, however, as you have to save space on the shelves at the end of each section of the categorisation scheme for future acquisitions. Furthermore, great discipline is required to keep the documentary fund neat and complete, which also requires considerable supervision to avoid misplaced or “lost” documents.

Do Not Forget Online Documents

In order to make the best use of Internet searches and enrich your documentary fund at little cost, we strongly recommend downloading the documents of interest (books, reports, etc.) that you find on Internet, printing them, binding them and storing them in your stacks after you have recorded and analysed them, as you would any other document.

► *The Right Approach*

Direct access should be favoured for small funds and audiences that are not used to visiting documentation centres (this is the case, for example, for CITE's branches in Madagascar).

At first, Sald's CDDR favoured open access but, faced with the loss of numerous documents (to theft, or misplacement) and too much daily work putting documents away correctly, open access was rapidly ended.

Periodicals

Periodical management has two purposes:

- ◆ monitoring subscriptions to ensure that all issues arrive regularly (accessioning of periodicals); and
- ◆ analysing content and selecting interesting articles and information (cataloguing content).

Experience shows that periodicals are one of the most poorly exploited sources of information. Very often, information services believe they are subscribed to numerous periodicals when, in reality, they receive the corresponding issues irregularly and collections are often incomplete or old. In addition, only a few rare information services truly exploit the content of periodicals and select interesting information and articles.

Accessioning of Periodicals

Good periodical management requires rigour. Each periodical must be verified regularly to ensure that issues are arriving properly. Each issue received must be recorded on the corresponding periodical's accession slip. You may also receive isolated issues as the result of information searches or from contacts. There is no need to create accession slips for these issues if they are not received regularly. Nevertheless, they must be conserved and classified in the subject and/or organisation files.

Each periodical is given a shelf number, attached to each copy. The method of acquisition indicates how each periodical was received: donation, publication exchange, direct

Accession Slip

Title:

Sub-title:

Publisher:

Frequency:

(daily - weekly - fortnightly - monthly - bimonthly -
quarterly - half-yearly - yearly - irregular)

Method of acquisition:

(paid - free - donation - trade)

ISSN:

Shelf number:

Status:

(active, inactive, suspended)

Price:

Year	Vol.	January	February	March	April	May	June	July	August	September	October	November	December	Special Issue
2001														
2002														
2003														

subscription, or per-issue purchase. The collection record specifies the first issue received. If the subscription is suspended or if the publication ceases to be issued, the last issue received is indicated. If the information service continues to receive it, a right-pointing arrow indicates that the subscription is active.

These slips are filed in alphabetical order and stored in a binder: they provide an inventory record. Thus, the status of the collection of each periodical is readily available, showing at a glance if any issues are missing and letting you know if you need to contact the publisher. Single issues and incomplete collections should absolutely be avoided.

This record-keeping must be done regularly and can be computerised if you receive a large number of periodicals.

Cataloguing Content

Most of the time, the issues received by information centres are displayed on racks or tables for consultation, without being analysed. Yet, they contain important information: in-depth articles, news, announcements of new publications or events, etc. Some deserve to be indexed in the documentary fund because they can be re-used for various products and by information services. If this analysis is not done, the information becomes impossible to find.

The content of each periodical must systematically be catalogued: this takes very little time, especially if several staff members share the work.

Each staff member receives a certain number of periodicals to analyse and from which to select the most relevant information. Some articles will be chosen to feed the bibliographic database: for example, in-depth articles, summary files (Afrique Agriculture regularly publishes files on animal production, commodities, crop protection), technical factsheets (for example, those published in *La Voix du paysan*, *Agriculture*, etc.). Others will be photocopied and included in thematic files.

How to Catalogue the Content of the Agridoc Newsletter

Its news briefs contain sources of information on rural development: publications (books, CD-ROMs, newsletters) that you can obtain for free from their publishers; websites, usually with downloadable documents; information on resource organisations, etc. All references to the information centre's thematic subjects will be underlined:

- ◆ Interesting publications will be selected and placed in the "acquisitions" box and a copy will be requested.
- ◆ Internet sites will be consulted and interesting documents downloaded to expand the documentary fund. Interesting sites may also be added to the list of bookmarks.
- ◆ The coordinates of resource organisations will be selected and placed in content files or recorded in the contacts database.

The **info factsheets** list, for a given subject, basic documents, resource organisations and websites. They can be photocopied and included in thematic files. Do not forget to download the documents listed as well.

The **Network News** section gives information of the correspondents' activities (publications and presentations, but also shared experiences). Contacting organisations located in the developing world and facing the same realities in the field can be interesting. Their publications are reasonably priced and adapted to the geographic context.

And E-Periodicals?

Some periodicals are published only on Internet. If you find them interesting, the articles in these periodicals can be printed out and analysed; you will enter them in your database and file them in the periodical's archives.

You do not need to download the entire issue if only one article interests you. Also, it is sometimes complicated to print out an entire issue.

You can create accession slips for online periodicals; this is one way to ensure that the periodicals are consulted regularly online.

Volatile Information

Information centres frequently receive or collect numerous documents (catalogues, brochures, flyers, etc.) but do not know how to handle them, where and how to file them, whether or not they should be included in the documentary fund, and in what form they should be recorded.

While these documents are useful, they are not very often useable because they are not managed properly. For example, organisation brochures are interesting additions to orientation files or to identify resource organisations; equally interesting are the news briefs collected from the specialised or daily press announcing development programmes, announcing research underway on this or that agricultural product, or providing commercial information. You should also save for future use bibliographic references and responses from experts or resource organisations obtained as the result of document searches. The In Brief section of the CTA's Spore bulletin (<http://spore.cta.int>) is a good example of this type of information that can be used to respond to specific questions.

One Solution: Thematic or Organisation Files

One adequate solution to manage this volatile information is to progressively build thematic and/or resource organisation files. These files take the form of folders and sub-folders stored in hanging files or archive boxes. They should be filed by theme and sub-theme according to your categorisation scheme (see the section on categorisation schemes, page 116), with the most recent information placed first in each file. With these files you to have up-to-date documentation on hand. They must be updated continuously, and any obsolete information must be removed.

It is imperative that these documents be clearly identified, including sources (periodical title, website, etc.) and publication dates. However, you must take care not to file redundant information by selecting and identifying the most relevant information.

Organisation files can be built in the same way, and should be filed in alphabetical order. They will contain, for example, presentational brochures (obtained during a trade show or study days), activity reports, and publication or supplier catalogues.

LOAN MANAGEMENT

On-Site Consultation

When your audience does not have direct access to documents, you will need consultation cards to manage on-site consultations. They are kept by the person in charge of welcoming visitors.

When visitors have open access to the documents, it is best that you do not ask users to put documents away themselves; poorly put away, they may seem lost. It is better to ask them to turn documents in to the person in charge of welcoming visitors.

Example of Torohay's Consultation Card (Antsirabé, Madagascar)

Consultation Card	
Last Name, First Name:	
Date:	
List the books you would like to consult in order of priority.	
Shelf number:	Returned
Title:	
Shelf number:	Returned
Title:	
Shelf number:	Returned
Title:	

Document Lending

Lending concerns mostly books, multimedia documents (videos, CD-ROMs), and occasionally periodicals (special issues). The goal of loan management is to know who borrowed the document and when it should be returned. Rules must be set on a certain number of issues: loan length, cost, number of items authorised, late returns, possible guarantee, etc.

When loans are managed by hand, each document will contain a lending card with its shelf number and title (the cards should be created when the document is entered into the fund). The borrower's name and the due date will be recorded on the card, which will then be filed by date (for example, by document due date). Each borrower will also be recorded in a member list.

If your information service is partially computerised, loan management can be included in the bibliographic database. Two additional fields would be planned for each document, one to identify the user (borrower) and the other to contain either the borrowing or due date. You can then easily print out lists of returns due on any given date, or lists

Lending Card

TITLE:	
Shelf number:	
Borrower's Name:	Due Date:

of borrowed documents. Such a system can, furthermore, easily provide you with statistics to assess the lending service and, thereby, information dissemination.

Library software that usually includes loan management modules and code bar identification can fully computerise loan management. However, given the cost, computerising all functions (document management, lending, code bar identification, catalogue publishers, Internet access) is only justifiable when you have a large number of loans and transactions (more than 20-25 documents borrowed per day minimum).

Finance your Information Service and Ensure its Sustainability

Information services must conduct their activities and grow following a financing and longevity strategy. This strategy must underlie the service's scale of activities, taking into account two clearly identified constraints:

- ◆ **Information costs.** Information services are not profitable in the way that purely commercial businesses can be. They grow along two logics: public service and paying service. It would be impossible to pay for the real cost of information (even in Europe, with the exception of certain very specific services such as legal information or economic information to watch the competition).

The profitability of a service must not be calculated in purely commercial terms, but in function of the reputation of the organisation that runs it, its proven usefulness for users in the eyes of the donors that finance it, and its contribution to professional capacity building.

- ◆ **To survive, information services must be lasting, and must constantly create and innovate.** To succeed, you must invest in the long term.

Aiming for the long term means having an overall development plan, a line of conduct that applies to the information service as a whole, so as to consolidate a range of activities that will also develop in response to opportunities. Without a clear strategy, there is a real risk of juxtaposing incoher-

ent, scattered activities that will in the end be difficult to manage. Similarly, because these services are costly, it is crucial that you be able to make choices in line with a pre-determined strategy and establish priorities when developing products and services.

AN EXEMPLARY TALE: THE SAILD CDDR IN CAMEROON

The success of the Saild CDDR is based on a balanced (and necessary) combination of several key elements:

- ◆ both Saild and CDDR are well integrated in their professional milieu: development was fully consistent with the target audiences and well suited to the target audiences in rural areas;
- ◆ constant innovation and creation from the start;
- ◆ the ability to seize opportunities;
- ◆ the staff's personal involvement, their profiles, their professional skills, and their dynamism;
- ◆ good management of the organisation, and good cost containment; and
- ◆ the CDDR's excellent integration within Saild.

History and Developmental Stages

The CDDR was founded in 1988, when Saild was created.

Stage 1

Following the farmers' meetings organised by the Centre pour le développement auto-centré (CEDAC) in the four major socio-economic divisions of Cameroon, an analysis of the major problems facing farmers in their development attempts revealed the difficulties involved: a lack of training, a lack of financial means, a lack of technical support, isolation, and social problems (witchcraft).

Saild was created to conduct action research on these problems, focusing on four priority lines of work:

- ◆ training;
- ◆ information & documentation;
- ◆ organisation & management support; and
- ◆ the creation of savings and credit systems

Saild's information and documentation service first consisted of the documentation centre and the monthly agricultural newspaper, *La Voix du paysan*. Its primary readership was farmers and farmers' associations.

At the time, the documentation service was a technical tool for NGO executives, primarily within Saild.

Stage 2

In 1994, the documentation centre and *La Voix du paysan* split apart to become two distinct structures within Saild, in response to the new challenges raised by the development of activities and the success encountered.

As most of the priority audience was located outside the city of Yaoundé, the question-and-answer (Q&A) service and bookshop were set up in addition to on-site consultation and the photocopy service to facilitate the access to information.

The audience was informed of new acquisitions through the *La Voix du paysan* newspaper. People unable to come to the documentation centre were able to request information by mail and documents judged to be important for the farmers' concerns were analysed and presented in the newspaper.

Stage 3

Information days—occasions for the various parties in the commodity chains to meet and share information—were launched. The CDDR organised one such day every two months. These meetings lasted one to five days, in function of the subject, and drew 100 to 300 participants. Many people thus discovered the documentation centre, whose audience grew considerably, to between 600 and 750 users per year.

The CDDR Today

A Well-Targeted Audience

The major socio-professional categories attending the centre became more specific: farmers, agronomists, development agents, students, the unemployed, and civil servants developing secondary activities.

Most of the audience are professionals, primarily farmers. This influenced its offer, which required above all field investigations, and not just documentary research.

The low income levels among this majority audience made a very modest rate scale for services necessary.

Finally, awareness-raising was needed to teach farmers that, in agriculture, information is an input that is as valuable as all the other inputs.

A Faithful Audience

The documentation centre's attendance rate has basically been stable since 1996. In 1997, when the attendance rate was very high, the CDDR instituted an enrolment fee. Since that time, the number of people enrolled to consult the centre has ranged from 700 to 900 people per year.

Regular Innovation in the Products Offered

To diversify the documentary fund and make more accessible information available to farmers, a video library was made operational (195 films in mid-2003).

In recent years, the readers' centres of interest have evolved. Alongside the need for information on production techniques, new subjects were requested by users—processing, selling and exporting their goods. This led the CDDR to introduce new products to better respond to these requests:

- ◆ meetings between buyers and producers;
- ◆ thematic exhibits;
- ◆ a commercial information point; and
- ◆ a press room.

About this time, the CDDR signed collaboration agreements with the CTA and the Agridoc network. A more structured question-and-answer service providing information packs on request, sponsored by the CTA, was set up.

When these new products were added to its existing products, CDDR's audience grew considerably. CDDR's premises—

until then in the same building as Saild—became too small and CDDR moved to larger premises on a busy street easily accessible to its users.

Operating Resources

Staff

The CDDR currently employs five people full time:

- ◆ Saild's head of communications who coordinates both CDDR's activities and the publication of *La Voix du paysan*;
- ◆ a documentation centre manager;
- ◆ two assistants; and
- ◆ one secretary.

The staff has skills in communication, sociology, and documentation. The two people in charge have double qualifications and double experience (both thematic and in the field of information), which is a plus for the information service.

CDDR's Premises

- ◆ A street-front shop, in a commercial district: a very large room (approximately fifty square metres), with a mezzanine (a dozen square metres) that serves as both a reading room and place to watch video tapes.

CDDR has a display window that it uses to showcase new publications and a notice board.

Staff offices are not closed off; they are located in the centre of the consultation room. This gives the staff permanent, direct contact with users.

This room is also used to host events (exhibits, meetings, etc.).

- ◆ Open access to the documents was dropped a few months after CDDR moved to its current premises (because of excessive theft).

Equipment

The CDDR has a photocopier and three computers, two which have CD-ROM readers and access to Internet and email. A television and VCR allows users to watch video tapes.

The Products and Services Offered

- ◆ **Documentary fund consultation.** 80% of the fund is agricultural documentation. It grows by approximately 300 documents per year. It contains:
 - 3,500 books;
 - approximately one hundred periodicals;
 - approximately one hundred video tapes;
 - fifteen audio tapes;
 - approximately fifty CDs; and
 - a thousand microfiche documents (primarily documents in English, consulted by the documentalists for the Q&A service).
- ◆ **User Enrolment.** Users pay 1,000 CFA francs (1.52 euros) per year to consult the CDDR's documentary fund. CDDR's annual membership has ranged from 700 to 900 members since 1997.
- ◆ **Document Lending.** People who want to take out documents to read them at home pay 10,000 CFA francs (15.20 euros) per year—2,000 CFA francs (3.04 euros) in subscription fees and 8,000 CFA francs (12.19 euros) as a security deposit. CDDR has between 15 and 20 such subscribers every year.
- ◆ **Bookshop.** CDDR sells a number of publications (both its own and by others). To be successful, it maintains partnerships with approximately fifteen structures. The percentage retained from the sale of a publication (from 15% to 50%) varies in function of the depositing partner. CDDR sells approximately 3,500 documents per year.
- ◆ **Photocopies.** Readers can photocopy a maximum of 10 pages from documents, and are charged 25 CFA francs (0.03 euros) per copy. CDDR photocopies approximately 7,000 pages per year.
- ◆ **Information Days and Various Meetings.** Users contribute to CDDR's information days and meetings by paying participation fees ranging from 500 to 2,500 CFA francs (0.76 to 3.81 euros). CDDR organises at least four every year, with approximately 700 people attending yearly.
- ◆ **Event Information Packs.** For each event, documentation on the subject of the event is distributed to participants; the contribution to costs ranges from 200 to 3,000 CFA francs (0.30 to 4.57 euros). Approximately one hundred copies are sold at each event.
- ◆ **The question & answer service.** Users contribute to the elaboration of their information packs by paying 2,000 to 3,500

CFA francs (3.05 to 5.33 euros) per pack, depending on the nature of the question asked. CDDR produces between 150 and 200 such packs per year.

- ◆ **Distribution of Agricultural Seeds.** CDDR occasionally distributes seeds and pre-germinated oilpalm seeds; 100 CFA francs (0.15 euros) are kept by CDDR for each kilogram of seeds and 50 CFA francs (0.07 euros) for each pre-germinated seed. The documentation centre distributes on average 5,000 kilograms of seeds and approximately 6,000 pre-germinated seeds every year.

Three Primary Products Are Beneficial for CDDR, Both Professionally and Financially

- ◆ The question-and-answer service (for which users pay) that provides personalised answers tailored to the concerns of each user and also allows information to be provided at a distance.
- ◆ The information days and meetings (that generate attendance fees) that allow true exchange and concrete discovery.
- ◆ The bookstore (sale of publications) which is a channel to disseminate agricultural information.

Assessing Users' Satisfaction and the Service

To assess its service and users' satisfaction, and to guide its information offer, the CDDR relies on several elements:

- ◆ the Q&A satisfaction questionnaire that is sent systematically to each user along with the answer provided;
- ◆ sales figures for its publications;
- ◆ the number of members and membership renewals;
- ◆ the centre's attendance rates;
- ◆ event attendance rates and direct contact with users during these events; and
- ◆ occasional satisfaction surveys: approximately one per year.

This assessment, closely followed by users' needs and how well the services match these needs, has a real influence on the products CDDR offers. The users' responses to the Q&A satisfaction questionnaire, for example, pushed the service to focus in priority on short packs of technical factsheets, rather than classical documentary files.

Tools to Promote the Service and the Services it Offers

CDDR progressively put a number of means in place to promote itself and develop its communication on various supports.

- ◆ At first, because of the link between CDDR and Sald, the documentation centre benefited from Sald's reputation. This close relationship allowed the CDDR to be in constant contact with Sald's arena of activity. Writing a specific section in *La Voix du paysan* is a very good vector of communication. This section is published very regularly and provides information on the centre's acquisitions and events.
- ◆ When it comes to its promotional policy, the CDDR used classic tools (brochure, website, posters, participation in events, fairs, etc.) and less typical tools, such as its choice of location: in 2003, it changed premises and moved to a very busy, well-known neighbourhood, and chose a street-front shop with a display window.
- ◆ Generally speaking, however, the quality of its products and services is CDDR's best promotional item.

The Relationship Between CDDR and Sald

In the Organisation Chart

CDDR, *La Voix du paysan*, and the publication service are part of the same department.

Using Sald's Expertise for the CDDR

- ◆ Some of the Q&A service's answers are written by Sald technicians.
- ◆ Sald technicians act as speakers or hosts for CDDR events.
- ◆ The CDDR provides Sald technicians with information.
- ◆ The CDDR contributes to *La Voix du paysan*. From 1990 to 1997, the CDDR published a bimonthly titled *La Lettre du CDDR* which presented its activities, reviewed its publications, and provided information on all aspects of specific themes. Over time, as *La Voix du paysan*'s readership was also for the most part CDDR users, the CDDR stopped publishing *La Lettre du CDDR* and took over responsibility for a section in *La Voix du paysan* titled "À l'écoute du monde rural" (listening to the rural world).

Financing and Management

Every three years, Saïd establishes a three-year action plan and the corresponding budget. The implementation of this action plan is largely financed by a consortium of donors, including notably the European Union.

Within this action plan, CDDR (a department of Saïd) is allocated funds to cover from 55% to 60% of its activities: a grant for rent, staff costs, new acquisitions, equipment, etc. The remaining 40% to 45% comes from CDDR's projects.

Ad Hoc Financing

For some projects (specifically events), CDDR requests ad hoc funding from donors (embassies, Agence de la Francophonie, etc.). The activities thus financed are conducted entirely with the funds obtained, without a need for further funding from Saïd, and without running a deficit.

Documentary Project Financing

The CDDR maintains partnerships with the Agridoc project and the CTA. In the framework of these programmes (over two or three years), it sells services based on the provision of products, some of which are then sold to users. The profits thus generated provide approximately 40% of CDDR's funding.

Example of a Specific Documentary Project

In order to raise women's awareness of information and documentation, Saïd submitted a project to the Agence de la Francophonie titled "Savoir, c'est pouvoir : centre de ressources pour l'entrepreneuriat des femmes en milieu rural" (knowledge is power: resource centre for women entrepreneurs in rural areas).

This project aims to create an "idea corner" at the documentation centre where women who want to set up business can find income-generating ideas thanks to appropriate documentation and video tapes.

The project was launched in 2003.

Monitoring and Management Tools

CDDR operates on the following principles:

- ◆ A financial goal is set for each activity. Management, monitoring and control tools are set up to monitor the attainment of these goals (cost accounting).
- ◆ Monthly accounts are kept and compared to the annual self-funding level desired.
- ◆ Each activity's financial pertinence is analysed in relation to its self-funding capacity; each activity is expected to generate a minimum of 10% in self-funding.

Keys to Documentation Centre Success, According to Said

- ◆ Determine each activity's financial profitability, set up management tools, and monitor activities scrupulously.
- ◆ Verify accounts monthly, quarterly, half-yearly and yearly, checking to see whether (or not) objectives are being attained and activate strategies to correct (any possible) shortfalls.
- ◆ Involve users in the creation of services and products, include them in assessments, and adopt new orientations with them.
- ◆ Use imagination and creativity to avoid fossilisation and help activities evolve.
- ◆ Adapt information formats and documentary products to users' needs.
- ◆ Be available and competent, and believe in what you do.
- ◆ Receive the support of an institution; this support should be seen in proper positioning and acknowledgement within the institution.

FINANCES AND MANAGEMENT: TOOLS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Information centres cannot be for-profit entities—turning a profit from this type of activity is by and large an illusion. Even when information products are sold, their price will not cover all costs. This is particularly true in developing countries where information centres' clients' financial capacities are very lim-

ited¹¹. Information services must therefore receive outside funding—subsidies, service contracts with donors or NGOs, or funding from the organisation that hosts the information service. Nevertheless, on pain of closure, information services still need to attain financial balance. While money may not be the goal, it is nonetheless necessary for survival.

An information service's goal is the **mission** behind its creation, for example “foster professionalism among farmers” or “promote women's economic role”. Funding is the means to accomplish this mission. Thus, when your service receives outside funding, it must decide how these resources will be allocated and to what types of services and activities. Between two activities that could be financed by outside funds, you should choose the activity with the closest-to-optimal cost/benefit ratio, **“benefit” here defined as the activity's contribution to accomplishing the service's mission**. Economic reasoning should never be cut off from the ultimate goal of the action.

The table below summarises the level of cost recovery for common products and services.

Cost Recovery from the Sale of Various Products

Type of Service	Cost Recovery
consultation/lending	symbolic (via subscriptions)
publishing (writing)	symbolic: in rural areas, with small print runs and low sales prices. Generally speaking, it is difficult to recuperate costs in technical publication
publishing (fabrication)	100% or higher
bookstore	100% or higher
Internet searches	20% to 30%
orientation and initial advice	0%
Q&A service	20% to 30%
events	20% to 50%, depending on the size of the event

¹¹ In Madagascar, for example, the psychological threshold price for an information product is said to be 2.20 euros for craftsmen and 6 euros for SMEs, which is very low.

Financing and Sustainability Strategy

There are four main components in financing and sustainability strategies: a sales strategy for the products and services offered, a financial and accounting strategy, a strategy to build client loyalty and increase your audience, and a promotional strategy.

Sales Strategy

Information services are never specialised in only one type of service. They provide different products, very frequently combined with support-advice and training. Strong synergy between these various categories of activity exist and make it possible to lower production costs and promote the various products to the same audience. An information service must seek to combine information, training and/or support-advice with an eye to consistency in order to better respond to the demands of its target audience and optimise its human resources.

Having a balanced portfolio of activities is an important part of an information service's financing strategy.

Financial and Accounting Strategy

- ◆ This strategy requires knowledge of operating costs and good control over costs, the budget and management. It needs rigorous accounting tools and procedures.
- ◆ It rests on developing the sale of products and services, with a suitable pricing policy. Information services must therefore reflect on the products they sell, at what price, and to whom. This reflection has three phases:
 1. determine, with precision, the production cost of each product and service offered;
 2. determine the sale price of each product and service, in function of your audience's purchasing power: it is important to develop a rate policy based on prices that vary according to type of audience, and it is important to think in terms of the overall offer, in which some services are free and others are not;
 3. seek supplementary financing (in addition to sales receipts) to cover at least the production cost of each product.

- ◆ This reflection should be built within the organism of which the service is a part and that allocates part of its resources to the information service.
- ◆ It should lead you to elaborate financing solutions for specific projects and activities. This presupposes developing, within the service and/or with the organism of which it is part, the capacity to raise funds from donors. Fundraising is facilitated when an information service already has a base. On this basis, and by providing some level of guarantee as to its sustainability, it can sell a certain number of products—Q&A service, publications, events—to donors. This also means that the service must be able to prove its usefulness (attendance, satisfaction, assessment of demands, etc.).

For example, CTA finances the development of question-and-answer services. To obtain funding, information services must present activity plans and budgets along with a strategy for the progressive increase (over 5 years) in coverage of Q&A service costs in order to move towards autonomy.

Strategy to Generate Client Loyalty and Increase Demand

Having a loyal audience allows you to develop your service sustainably and better adapt your offer because you will know your audience better. This loyalty-building can be accomplished by setting up subscription systems (consultation subscriptions, membership cards, subscriptions to newsletters, etc.) and taking care to renew your products and communicate regularly on actions undertaken. This long(er)-term membership is necessary because it guarantees you a minimum number of user clients.

Your strategy to build audience loyalty should be combined with attempts to diversify your audiences and turn to organisations that are most able to pay for information (micro-enterprises, professional groups, associations, local governments, NGOs, etc.).

Ideally, the development of each product or service should be combined with a strategy to increase the demand: monitoring sales, advertising targeting new audiences to launch a product or re-launch it when demand is slowing.

Promotional Strategy

All information services must promote their actions: make them know to their audience(s), communicate their offer, have a public relations strategy for donors and local partners. Outside promotion is not enough to make information services sustainable if they are not combined with support from the organisations of which they are a part. When this support is lacking, the life of the information service is threatened. Internal and external promotion are therefore equally important.

Calculate the Production Cost of a Product or Activity

Financing strategies should be established on a “product-by-product” basis. It is necessary that you calculate with precision the production cost for each activity and the margin that each can generate.

Each activity generates **direct costs**. They are the costs directly related to running the activity:

- ◆ either by their very nature: for example, printing costs for a newspaper, one hour of Internet connection, the paper needed, etc.;
- ◆ or because one can identify the share of overhead specifically allocated to producing the activity: this is the case, for example, of staff members’ working hours. If each staff member fills out time cards, you can have an exact idea of the amount of time devoted to each activity. When you calculate the projected production cost, you will estimate the number of days needed from each staff member.

Direct costs are made up of:

- ◆ proportional costs that depend on the volume and scope of the product or service: the working time of the person in charge of receiving Internet consultation service users is proportional to the number of users per day;
- ◆ and fixed costs that stay the same no matter what volume: once the service is equipped, computer maintenance and depreciation or a subscription to a specialised phone line are the same no matter how many users you have per day.

It is important that you breakdown—exactly—the direct costs for each activity. It is also important to calculate these costs

Newspaper Publication – Direct Costs

	UNIT	QUANTITY	UNIT PRICE	AMOUNT
writing	workday			
editing & proofreading	workday			
illustrations, photos	illustration			
layout	page			
printing (according to print run)	cost per page			
travel costs	flat-rate			
expedition costs	cost per copy sent			
TOTAL				

One-Day Training Course (15 attendees) – Direct Costs

	UNIT	QUANTITY	UNIT PRICE	AMOUNT
instructor				
preparation	workday	2	50,000	100,000
course		1	50,000	50,000
instructor's travel costs and expenses	flat-rate		15,000	15,000
attendees' remuneration	per diem	15	5,000	75,000
teaching materials	copy	15	3,000	45,000
room rental	day	1	10,000	10,000
TOTAL				295,000

in cost units that can be compared across your various products: for example, determine the printing cost for books based on the unit “page” so you can compare rates no matter how many pages each book has (this book would have cost 1 euro per page, whereas that book would have cost 1.20 euros).

Your service must also take into account **indirect costs**. These are the expenses that are only indirectly related to the production of products and services. They are often referred to as **overhead** and consist of: office rent, water, electricity, the salaries of administrative staff (or the amount of time worked by staff on administrative tasks: accounting, secretarial tasks, management), telecommunications and other general expenses (taxes, levies, depreciation, etc.). These expenses can only be attributed to activities with a distribution key determined by the organisation. One common distribution key is time worked by which you allocate a percentage of structural costs to the full wage cost.

Allocating Indirect Costs, An Example

The goal is to calculate the production cost of one day's work by a documentalist so you can assign a cost per day to the production of products and services.

- ◆ **Direct Costs:** a team of three documentalists who work full time on producing your products, whose salaries (payroll tax included) cost 4,000,000 CFA francs per person per year. They work 220 days per year on average.
- ◆ **Overhead:** consists of one secretary/accountant whose salary (payroll tax included) comes to 2,000,000 CFA francs per year, and building costs (rent, electricity, etc.) and other general expenditure in the amount of 2,400,000 CFA francs, for a grand total of 4,400,000 CFA francs per year.
- ◆ **Breakdown of Overhead:** overhead must be distributed over the total number of days the documentalists work, or 660 days (3 x 220 days). The share of overhead allocated to one day's work therefore comes to 6,666 CFA francs (4,400,000 divided by 660).
- ◆ **Production cost for one day's work by a documentalist:** the wage cost for one day is 18,181 CFA francs (annual salary divided by the number of days worked). Therefore, the production cost for one day comes to 24,847 CFA francs (18,181 + 6,666).

The **production cost** of a service or product is the sum of direct costs plus the allocated share of indirect costs

Calculating the Production Cost of a Book

The per-unit production cost of a book equals the total expenditure to publish the book divided by the number of copies printed.

The elements entering into the production cost are:

- ◆ writing the text and production of illustrations (royalties);
- ◆ translation;
- ◆ work of staff to prepare the text: typing the text (for an interview, for example), editing, re-writing, proofreading;
- ◆ finding and purchasing illustrations (reproduction rights);
- ◆ formatting: layout (graphic design), typesetting the cover and text;
- ◆ processing illustrations (graphics and photographs);
- ◆ shipping and exchange costs for intermediary documents;
- ◆ printing costs, purchase of paper and fabrication (assembly); and
- ◆ packaging and transport (from the printer to the publisher, storage site, and distributors).

Some of these costs are the same (editorial and pre-press costs) regardless of the number of copies printed, others are variable and depend on the print run (printing, paper, assembly, packaging and transport).

The notion of production cost is very important for two reasons at least: it allows you to decide on the sale price of products and calculate estimates; and it allows you to control the cost of your products.

All too often, information services make the mistake of only taking into account their direct costs when calculating production costs. In addition, they forget to include staff costs in these calculations.

Setting a Sale Price

It is important to calculate the production cost of a service to set its sale price. Ideally, the sale price will be slightly higher than the production cost.

The sale price, however, depends primarily on an assessment of the market: price of similar existing products and clients' financial capacities. Information services, which are not commercial businesses and which target, especially in the rural development sector, audiences with little purchasing power, find it very difficult to cover their production costs with sales receipts. Most of the time, the sales price is set below the production cost: in this case, it is clear that the service's activity can only attain financial balance with outside funding. The income generated by a product (called "activity income") includes:

- ◆ **Sales receipts:** the quantity sold multiplied by the sale price. The quantity (number of newspaper subscribers, number of students receiving training, etc.) will strongly influence the activity's financial balance. When launching a new activity, a realistic and attainable estimate of this quantity must be made.
- ◆ **Secondary revenue:** for example, income from the sale of advertising space in a newspaper.
- ◆ **Activity subsidies:** the subsidies granted by the state or a donor for a given activity (publishing a newspaper, for example), but not the operating subsidies allocated to the structure.

How to Balance Production Costs



Setting the Sale Price Based on Production Costs: The Example of Publishing in France

The cost percentages indicated below are the standard percentages applied by French publishers to ensure profitability. The table below gives an indication as to the distribution and weight of the various elements. The publication costs for a book must fall within the ranges indicated. Any percentage far outside the given range for one or more items must alert the organisation.

	Source: SNE* Average Percentage for Each Item	Production Cost per Copy (in euros)
Fabrication (editing/ proofreading, layout, typesetting, photo-engraving, printing, assembly)	12% to 20%	1.60
Royalties (text, illustrations)	10% to 12%	1.10
Distribution/Promotion (prospecting, advertising)	5% to 8%	0.65
Distribution (logistics, order tracking)	10% to 12%	1.10
Seller/Bookstore Discount	35% to 40%	3.75
Total Costs		8.20
VAT tax on books in France	5.5%	0.55
Total pre-profit margin	77.5% to 97.5% average 87.5%	8.75
Publisher's Margin	Approx. 12% to 13 %	1.25
Resulting Sale Price		10 euros

* SNE: Syndicat national de l'édition français.

These activity subsidies will, once they have been obtained, be included in the activity income. However, when you prepare an application to request such a subsidy, it is clear that these subsidies should not be included. On the contrary, you should clearly show the projected deficit that justifies the subsidy request.

In all cases, however, the sale price must be set in regards to the production cost, which will allow you to calibrate the projected income from sales and the outside funding needed for your budget.

Attaining Financial Balance

The Notion of Direct Margin

Your direct margin is your revenue (activity income) minus your direct costs. The direct margin of each activity should be positive so you can cover your overhead.

Financial balance is reached when sum of the direct margins from each different activity covers your overhead.

Since information services are not strictly commercial undertakings but also provide a public service, you should allow yourself to develop activities that generate deficits if they both fulfil your information service's defined mission and you attain overall financial balance. For example, making a documentary fund available is fundamentally a deficit generator. It is, however, the foundation on which an information service's overall activity is built.

These various activity profitability calculations performed periodically are completed by budgetary and financial monitoring by the organisation.

This detailed record of income and expenditure (cost accounting) broken down by activity allows the organisation to analyse its financial solidity and adapt its internal resources and service policy.

One of the primary financial analysis tools is the profit and loss account, which indicates for a given period the total revenue (income) and total expenditures and makes it possible to analyse what contributed to the final profit or loss.

Financial Balance Estimate

	Revenue	Direct Costs	Direct Margin
Activity 1	1,000,000	500,000	500,000
Activity 2	300,000	700,000	- 400,000
Activity 3	600,000	600,000	0
	Total Direct Margin		100,000
	Overhead		150,000
	Net Income		- 50,000

Overall financial balance will only be achieved with an operating subsidy in the amount of 50,000 CFA francs. Without such a subsidy, you will need to reduce the loss on activity no. 2 (the other two activities are profitable).

Financial balance is built on a combination of activities in which the profits from some cover the structural deficits of others that are maintained so that the service fully fulfils its mission.

HUMAN RESOURCES AND MEANS

Managing information requires a host of skills and certain profiles are more suited to this than others. This profession also requires curiosity, along with communication and people skills.

We must insist on the crucial role of human resources: it is important that you have the right people in the right jobs. Indeed, a good manager will be able to motivate staff, keep skilled people, and network. Equally, a poor manager can rapidly bring about an organisation's demise and demoralise staff.

When it comes to human resources, several things should be favoured:

- ◆ specialised initial training (legal studies, business management, etc.), completed by training in information management;
- ◆ continuing education for staff (especially in NICTs);
- ◆ proficiency in (local) languages and writing;
- ◆ awareness of the “marketing” aspect of information and facilitation;
- ◆ status confirmed by a legal work contract; and
- ◆ an attractive and progressive pay scale.

The key positions must be carefully defined, and an attractive salary policy must be in place to keep the right staff.

You need to have a polyvalent team containing staff that has experience in both the professional world and information management. It is vital that you choose staff that enjoy and are able to develop strong, close service relations with users.

By Way of a Conclusion

Moving Closer to Users: Innovative Experiences in Decentralising Services

In recent years, original experiments in decentralising information services have been initiated by organisations that have attained both institutional and financial maturity. They are built on the establishment of autonomous regional information branches whose progressive structuring is coupled with solid backstopping.

The experiences of CITE, in Madagascar, who has been doing so on a relatively large scale for eight years, and of Sield, who is developing relays in Cameroon, tend to show that this strategy is both relevant and effective because:

- ◆ It centres the development of information services on the idea of being close to users and actively reaching out to them, thereby giving priority to the information offer and the goal of improving access to information.
- ◆ It is implemented above all with the idea that access to information is a key to economic and social development. It gives concrete form to the goals of reducing of poverty and inequalities by placing information at the service of populations to diversify their income-generating activities.
- ◆ It is built on the existence of local initiatives and contributes to inspiring such initiatives. It is implemented in partnership and contributes to strengthening ties between information services and economic and institutional players.
- ◆ It relies on dynamics of support and skill transfers, between solid services and emerging structures.
- ◆ Finally, it includes the goal of institutional support to contribute to structuring autonomous, active and sustainable services.

Launching a Decentralised Network of Branches in Madagascar: ADITE

(Association pour le développement
de l'information technique et économique)

ADITE branches—born out of cooperation between the PAGU Project (Projet d'appui à la gestion urbaine, urban management support project) and CITE—were officially opened in three cities in Madagascar (Ambatolampy, Ambositra and Ambalavao) in April 2001. They are the result of studies (diagnostic of the local economy, commodity chain studies, etc.) and institutional contacts that made it possible to define partnerships, sectors, and priority needs in information access.

These information services are located in market squares thanks to the cooperation of the cities who made premises available. From the time they were opened, they have taken the form of independent and autonomous associations in which the cities (urban and rural), CITE, and the local private sector are represented. They are also original in that the cities committed from the start to financing part of the centres' operating expenses, the rest being financed by CITE from its operating budget and the sale of their products.

The services developed around the backstopping provided by CITE: book consultation, book lending, monthly book orders from CITE Antananarivo, a bookstore (sales), a question-and-answer service (processed in Antananarivo), and thematic events. Other services were rapidly added: photocopies, film viewings, and Internet consultation.

The information offer, built from diagnostics of the local economy, is very specific: technico-economic information, targeted subjects, and visual materials—all in local languages whenever possible.

Managers receive training from CITE staff, notably on financial management.

These services rapidly became successful: they have approximately 4,000 visitors per year. Their members are for the most part craftsmen, shopkeepers, farmers and employees.

The current development strategy favours rural communities: awareness-raising campaigns with city mayors, rotating document funds to make documents available to the users in these cities, and partnerships with NGOs and local projects to produce occasional thematic events.

(cont.)

When it comes to self-funding ability, the results are variable, ranging from 80% in Ambalavao to 20% in Ambositra. Additional financing needs are covered in part by CITE and in part by the cities where they are present. Each branch keeps independent accounts with balance sheets, profit and loss accounts, and audits by registered auditors.

Each ADITE branch's operations, actions and strategies are assessed and validated by the Board of Directors and General Assembly of the association, chaired by the mayor of the city concerned.

Such experiences clearly illustrate what is now the central stake for information services: placing information at the service of economic and social development support.

Information professionals must see their activities as a development stake in its own right, include this mission as such, and mobilise adequate means to serve this goal.

They do this when they link their actions to their professional surroundings, when their offer is based on good knowledge of the local economic and institutional context and stakes in their area, and when this offer responds to the needs of actors and complements actions conducted by support structures and institutional partners.

If they do all this, information services will cause local partners (cities, professional groups, etc.), support structures (NGOs, projects, etc.), and donors to take an interest in their development, and thus be able to mobilise the institutional and financial support needed to guarantee their sustainability.

APPENDIX 1

Further Reading

◆ Le métier de documentaliste

Jean-Philippe ACCART, Marie-Pierre RÉTHY

Paris: Électre-Éd. du Cercle de la Librairie, 1999. - 382 pgs. - ISBN: 2-7654-0744-4

This handbook summarises all aspects of the profession of documentalist. It describes all this profession's diversity and wealth with precision:

- users and documentary research;
- the organisation and the business;
- computers and information networks;
- the documentation circuit;
- documentation service resource management;
- information law, etc.

◆ Organiser et gérer un centre de documentation en Afrique : manuel de bibliothéconomie

Inades-Documentation, Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire. 3rd edition, published with the support of IDRC (Canada), April 1991

This book presents the methods to manage a documentation centre, the necessary equipment, and documentary techniques such as cataloguing, indexing, and classification.

Available online at <http://archive.idrc.ca/library/document/091024>

◆ Conduire une politique documentaire

Bertrand CALENGE

Paris: Électre-Éd. du Cercle de la Librairie, 1999. - 386 pgs. - ISBN: 2-7654-0717-7

This book goes over the questions one needs to ask for the growth of one's information service. Evaluating existing collections, elaborating collection growth plans, publicly displaying acquisition choices, and collection management planning-these are the fields of work open today in both public and university libraries. This handbook is directly useable by all professionals for their documentary policy projects.

◆ **Guide pour la gestion d'un centre d'information : la maîtrise des chiffres clés**

Bernard CHEVALIER, Dominique DORÉ, Eric SUTTER, 2nd edition
ADBS.- Information Sciences, Études et Techniques series, 1995. -
270 pgs - ISBN: 2-901046-82-7

This handbook was designed to help information professionals, no matter what position they hold, become familiar with the economic and financial aspects of managing a documentary unit. It allows them to acquire the methods and master the tools needed for the financial management of an information centre: how to elaborate and defend a budget, how to establish an operating account, calculate a production cost or set a price, how to establish a management chart, how to present results to one's superiors, etc. Illustrated by numerous schemas and containing practical exercises and examples from many sectors of activity, this book addresses each issue in three ways, ranging from a brief overview to in-depth coverage. Published for the first time in 1991, the second edition of this handbook has been reorganised, enriched and supplemented considerably.

◆ **La diffusion de l'information en milieu rural dans les pays en développement : mesure de son efficacité et de son impact**

D. ROSENBERG

Paris, UNESCO, 1997. 118 pgs. (Report CII-97/WS/11)

This document describes the applicable standards for rural information centres and sets forth practical methods to assess how well these centres meet the needs of their users. It provides a sampling of assessment tools and suggestions on how to exploit assessment results to improve services. It also contains a good analysis of Internet use in rural libraries and indications as to which information and media are most useful for rural populations. This book is distributed free of charge by UNESCO's Information and Informatics Division, Paris, France.

◆ **L'art d'informatiser une bibliothèque : guide pratique**

Pierre-Yves DUCHEMIN, 2nd edition supplemented and updated. With the participation of Dominique LAHARY

Paris: Électre-Éd. du Cercle de la Librairie, 2000. - 587 pgs. -
ISBN: 2-7654-0784-3 and 2-7654-0608-1 (previous edition)

This book covers the various strategic stages of computerising a library or documentation centre and emphasises

methodology and needs assessment, the major library functions, the technical and practical aspects of writing specifications, and new technologies (digital publishing, network development, Internet).

◆ **Internet : comment ça marche ?**

Preston GRALLA

Paris: First interactive, 2002. - 352 pgs. - ISBN: 2-84427-316-5

This book unveils the secrets of how Internet works: how wireless connections work, how email messages reach the right inbox, how web pages are displayed, how firewalls work, etc. All publics.

◆ **Trouver l'info sur le Web : 50 fiches pratiques pour mieux approvoiser les outils de recherche**

Olivier ANDRIEU

Paris: Eyrolles, 2001. - XIII-261 pgs. Bibliography. Index. Glossary. Websites. - ISBN: 2-212-11000-6

This book offers a practical method and descriptions of Internet search tools. Olivier Andrieu also offers a website (www.abondance.com) that is frequently used by professionals. Useful to optimise searches with the help of the most popular search engines and directories: Google, Yahoo!, AltaVista, Nomade, HotBot, Excite, Lycos, etc. To learn how to formulate queries to obtain more relevant responses: choice of keywords, combining several keywords, etc.

◆ **Recherche et veille sur le Web visible et invisible : agents intelligents, annuaires sélectifs, interfaces des grands serveurs, portails thématiques**

Béatrice FOENIX-RIOU

Paris: Tec et Doc, 2001. - VI-233 pgs. - ISBN: 2-7430-0450-9

This book offers search methods, detailed users' manuals for the most efficient tools, lists of guides and selective directories, umbrella sites, thematic directories, search and watch agents, etc. It also reflects on using these tools.

◆ **Building Cyberspace**

Geneva, Paris: UNITAR, UNESCO, 2002 ("Internet in the South" collection), CD-ROM

This CD-ROM attempts to gather and organise the primary equipment, technical tools, laws and regulations for cyberspace and offer reflections on the social and economic stakes behind the information society for developing coun-

tries. It aims to help those who have weaker infrastructure and older computers. It was notably designed for those who use associations', universities' and cultural centres' cyber-café, clubs and multimedia centres.

It is organised in three main sections: laws, stakes, and technical tools

◆ **Max Hits: Building & Promoting Successful Websites**

Mike SLOCOMBE

RotoVision, 2002 . - 176 pgs. - ISBN: 2-910565-13-0

This book offers a method to create your website. It analyses crucial issues like information accessibility, functionality and architecture through case studies and concrete examples. Provides understanding of the advantages of searches and organisation, as well as practical website design, navigation and management methods.

◆ **Internet, clefs pour la lisibilité :
se former aux nouvelles exigences de l'hypermédia**

Guy BARRIER

Paris: ESF pub., 2000. - 144 pgs. ("Formation permanente en sciences humaines" collection). - ISBN: 2-7101-1413-5

A guide to answer the questions of those who want to create a site, host pages on the web, reference them, and maintain their messages: What visuals? What are the criteria to judge readability and visibility? What "paths of meaning" strategies should one adopt in hypermedia?

APPENDIX 2

Organisation Descriptions (Case Studies in this Book)

◆ Agro-PME - Cameroon

Created in 1987, Agro-PME supports development actions in the fields of agrifood, rural development, business development, information services and NICTs, and vocational training. Agro-PME is made up of three structures:

- Agro-PME Fondation, which operates like a private development agency and targets the development of small and medium businesses, entrepreneurs' capacity building, socio-professional insertion and business information services, and the promotion and sale of agricultural products;
- Agro-PME Ingénierie, a consultancy firm whose activities focus on private sector development support studies, financial engineering, and BDS services; and
- L&A Financial Software, active in the microfinance sector.

Contact: Agro-PME Fondation, 114 avenue Kennedy, Immeuble les Galeries, BP 10 087 Yaoundé, Cameroon. Tel.: +237 222 16 57. Fax: +237 223 96 92. Email: agro.pme@cenadi.cm. Website : www.agro-pme.com.

◆ BIMTT (Bureau de liaison des centres de formation rurale) - Madagascar

Federation of Christian-inspired organisations providing training and promoting rural self-promotion. The BIMTT's members include 65 training centres for rural development that organise experience exchange workshops, training courses, and experience capitalisation. In addition to a liaison newsletter in Malagasy and French, Tantely, the BIMTT publishes technical factsheets and books, and manages rural documentation centres.

Contact: BIMTT, Lot A Faravohitra, rue Joël Rakotomalala, Antananarivo 101, Madagascar. Tel.: +261 20 22 604 04. Email: bimtt@dts.mg.

◆ **CIMDET (Centre d'information mauritanien pour le développement économique et technique) - Mauritania**

Designed to support the private sector and promote trade, this information centre provides Mauritanian players with access to economic information on their country and foreign countries.

In addition to a public information service which includes a question-and-answer service, dossier publication, and a cyber-business room, this organisation would like to set up an expertise fund to conduct feasibility studies for investment projects and assist project promoters in all phases of their projects.

Contact: CIMDET, BP 2119, Tevragh Zeina, Nouakchott, Mauritania.
Tel.: +222 525 87 38. Fax: +222 525 87 38. Email: cimdet@toptechology.mr.

◆ **CITE (Centre d'information économique et technique) - Madagascar**

Created in 1967 in Antananarivo by French Cooperation to disseminate scientific, technical and economic information, CITE became a Franco-Malagasy association under Malagasy law in 1996. It targets businesses, craftsmen, development projects, NGOs, professional associations, universities, researchers and students, etc.

This structure offers a information services, studies and advice in technical, legal and economic fields as well as a place where Madagascar's economic and social stakeholders can meet.

Contact: CITE, Rue Samuel Rahamefy, BP 74 Antananarivo 101, Madagascar.
Tel.: +261 20 22 253 86. Fax: +261 20 22 336 69. Email: cite@cite.mg.
Website: www.cite.mg.

CITE Branches

CIPE Analakely (Centre d'information pour les entreprises)

Located in the centre of the Analakely commercial district of Antananarivo, this CITE branch is open only to entrepreneurs and craftsmen. It provides them with access to documentation suited to their needs (newspapers, technical journals, specialised books, etc.), Internet access with the possibility of being helped by a specialist, and business development advice thanks to the PAEPEM project (Projet d'appui aux petites et moyennes entreprises).

Contact: CIPE, Espace Rarihassina, Analakely, Antananarivo, Madagascar.
Tel.: +261 03204 733 79. Email: cipe@cite.mg.

Torohay

Set up in 1996, this information and event centre is devoted to small entrepreneurs and craftsmen; it aims to facilitate their access to technico-economic information and foster networking among them. Question-and-answer service, thematic events, Internet access and training, bookstore, etc. are activities conducted by this branch, which holds a prominent place in the regional economic development of Antsirabé.

Contact: Torohay, Lot 20 F 160 Ambohimandrisoa, Antsirabé 110, Madagascar. Tel.: +261 44 492 49. Email: torohay@dts.mg.

◆ **Fekitrana (Fédération chrétienne des paysans malagasy) - Madagascar**

Created in 1988, this farmers' union of national scope in Madagascar currently has approximately twenty regional structures and 500 members in all.

Fekitrana represents rural populations and acts as their spokesman and defends their interests and rights. Its goal is to attenuate rural poverty through farmer-chosen programmes and support the structuring of grassroots farmers' organisations.

Contact: Fekitrana, Lot IV M 7 Ambodivona, BP 1291, 101 Antananarivo, Madagascar. Tel./Fax: +261 20 22 658 67. Email: fekitrana@dts.mg.

◆ **IAV Hassan II (L'Institut agronomique et vétérinaire Hassan II) - Morocco**

Institute of higher education, research and development, IAV offers training in diverse subject matters: agronomy, veterinary sciences, the agrifood industry, topography, horticulture, and equipment. The Institute has three university farms and has also set up an agricultural documentation centre which is a reference for information in the agricultural and agribusiness fields, as well as a scientific and technical publication service, Actes Éditions.

Contact: IAV Hassan II, BP 6202 Instituts, 10101 Rabat, Morocco. Tel.: +212 37 771745/58/59. Fax: +212 37 778135. Email: a.bamouh@iav.ac.ma. Website: www.iav.ac.ma/index.html

◆ **Inades Formation (Institut africain pour le développement économique et social - Centre africain de formation) - Côte d'Ivoire (headquarters)**

Inades Formation is an international non-profit association located in ten countries in West, Central, and East Africa. Set

up as a network of national associations unified by their objectives, strategy, and financial resources, Inades Formation provides support to farmers' organisational dynamics through reflection workshops, correspondence courses, training sessions, and the production of suitable didactic materials. It notably publishes the "Les Dossiers de développement Agripromo" series.

Contacts: Inades Formation, 08 BP 8 Abidjan 08, Côte d'Ivoire.
Tel.: +225 22 40 02 16. Fax: +225 2240 02 30. Email: ifsiege@inadesfo.ci.
Inades Formation, 01 BP 1022 Ouagadougou 01, Burkina Faso.
Tel.: +226 34 28 29. Fax: +226 34 05 19. Email: inadesb@fasonet.bf and inades.ouaga@liptinfor.bf.

◆ **Media & Technology - Benin**

This small business is specialised in press publication and broadcast production for the rural world. In addition to a monthly information, education and communication newsletter for the rural world, Agri-Culture, this business has developed other information products such as practical handbooks and radio programmes, and publishes newspapers for professional organisations.

Contact: Media & Technology, Qtier Sémé, BP 1229, Abomey Calavi, Benin.
Tel.: +229 36 05 46. Email: agriculture@avu.org.

◆ **MIESL (Maison des initiatives économiques et sociales locales) - Congo**

Inaugurated in March 2003, the MIESL is the information, communication and event tool of the FJEC (Forum des jeunes entreprises du Congo), a professional NGO supporting economic and social integration through initiative. The MIESL offers office services, mini-media, a cybercafe, and a meeting place, in response to the needs of both the FJEC and an outside public. A documentation and information centre should soon open its doors.

Contact: FJEC - MIESL, Quartier Milice Villa 43 B, Avenue de l'OUA, BP 13700, Makelekele, Brazzaville, Republic of Congo. Tel./Fax: +242 81 56 34.
Email: fjebrazza@yahoo.fr.

◆ **Saïld (Service d'appui aux initiatives locales de développement) - CDDR (Centre de documentation pour le développement rural) - Cameroon**

Created in 1984 as an international NGO, Saïld's vocation is to support farmers' organisations in Central Africa. Thanks to its eight branches in Cameroon and Chad, its teams have

conducted numerous extension actions and events. Sald is made up of three branches of activity: "Sald appui" (Sald support), "Sald communication", and "Sald enterprise" (Sald business). It relies on the two primary communication tools that it has developed: La Voix du paysan and the Centre de documentation pour le développement rural (CDDR, documentation centre for rural development).

La Voix du paysan is a monthly news, training, debate and exchange publication on the rural world, published in three languages, with a print run of 30,000 copies.

The CDDR's vocation is to "extend, or even democratise, information, particularly that which helps grassroots populations flourish socio-culturally and economically". For this, the CDDR manages a bookstore, a question-and-answer service and a press room, enables the on-site consultation of and lending from its documentary fund, and organises information days, round tables, buyer-seller meetings, and exhibits.

Contacts: Sald, BP 11955, Yaoundé, Cameroon. Tel.: +237 222 46 82/222 62 44.
Fax: +237 222 51 62. Email: sald@camnet.org. Websites: www.sald.org –
www.lavoixdupaysan.net.

CDDR, BP 7519, Yaoundé, Cameroon. Tel./Fax: +237 221 26 88.
Email: cddr@globenet.org.

UTAP (Union tunisienne de l'agriculture et de la pêche) - Tunisia

The UTAP is a national professional union that works in the agricultural and fishing sectors throughout the country. Its goal is to foster the integration of its members in the economic and social fabric and involve them more fully as actors in the development process. In addition to extension and training activities, the UTAP organises an agricultural fair every year and publishes diverse publications for Tunisian farmers.

Contact: UTAP, Rue Alain Savary, Cité El Khadra, Tunis 1003, Tunisia.
Tel.: +216 1 800 800. Fax: +216 1 797 282. Email: utap.tunis@email.ati.tn.
Website: www.utap.org.tn.

Technical Centre for Agricultural and Rural Cooperation (ACP-EU)

The Technical Centre for Agricultural and Rural Cooperation (CTA) was established in 1983 under the Lomé Convention between the ACP (African, Caribbean and Pacific) Group of States and the European Union Member States. Since 2000, it has operated within the framework of the ACP-EC Cotonou Agreement.

CTA's tasks are to develop and provide services that improve access to information for agricultural and rural development, and to strengthen the capacity of ACP countries to produce, acquire, exchange and utilise information in this area. CTA's programmes are designed to: provide a wide range of information products and services and enhance awareness of relevant information sources; promote the integrated use of appropriate communication channels and intensify contacts and information exchange (particularly intra-ACP); and develop ACP capacity to generate and manage agricultural information and to formulate ICM strategies, including those relevant to science and technology. CTA's work incorporates new developments in methodologies and cross-cutting issues such as gender and social capital.

CTA

Postbus 380 - 6700 AJ Wageningen
The Netherlands

Groupe de recherche et d'échanges technologiques (GRET)

Created in 1976, GRET, the Research and Technological Exchange Group, is a professional international solidarity and cooperation association that works in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and Europe to contribute to sustainable, fair development and alleviate poverty and structural inequalities. Its actions aim to increase the incomes of rural and urban populations, reduce their vulnerability, improve their access to quality infrastructures and services, and develop their ability to be heard.

From the start, GRET has placed particular emphasis on experience capitalisation. Publisher and distributor of specialised works on development, it produces various collections of technical, methodological and strategic references and makes these references available to development actors in the South and North.

GRET

211-213 rue La Fayette 75010 Paris
France

Facilitating and Managing Information for Rural Development

Information Service Tools, Methods and Experiences

This handbook is designed for rural professionals and development professionals (support NGOs, groups, farmers' organisations, etc.) who want to set up and run information services.

Information plays a decisive role in professional practices. It is vital to increase stakeholders' knowledge and improve their skills, and as a support for action, innovation, and problem solving. For this, information must be operational, practical and immediately useable—that is to say, targeted and concise, formatted, and disseminated in appropriate formats. The major stake for information services is elaborating an offer of products and services suited to the needs of a specific public and establishing information and communication strategies that fit the development objectives of zones targeted. Increasingly, the roles of mediation and dissemination find themselves at the heart of the information specialist's profession.

This handbook presents effective working methods and tools in a simple and didactic manner. Full of examples, it covers the main issues involved in facilitating and managing information in rural areas and aims to improve information professionals' mastery of the various aspects involved.



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