

# AGRICULTURAL INFORMATION AND PUBLICATION SYSTEMS AND SERVICES (AI & PSS) SUITABLE FOR PNG NEEDS

Hilarion Erai<sup>1</sup> and Ray Kumar<sup>2</sup>

## ABSTRACT

*A full-fledged division viz. Agricultural Information, Extension and Publication Systems and Services should be set up with the ultimate objective of upgrading technical skills in the rural agriculture sector and strengthening delivery of technical extension services by providing provincial extensionists with appropriate authoritative information, technical and education materials. The dissemination of agricultural development information through mass media e.g. radio, television, audio-visual aids, newspapers would be a vital function of the proposed division.*

*The development, preparation, production and distribution of wide ranging agricultural publications to different levels of audience throughout Papua New Guinea would be an important objective of the proposed division. This would assist research and extension in PNG by filling in key knowledge gaps by utilising the results from studies conducted elsewhere in the Pacific and other regions and by making information available from international data bases. These would provide Information Servicing, Information Transfer, Data Management and Computer Software Information Packages and nurture the knowledge sector in PNG.*

**Key words:** Information Servicing, information transfer, publications, data management, computer software, knowledge sector.

## INTRODUCTION

Information, both verbal and written, is to-day world's most valuable commodity. Without accurate information - researchers, technologists, media experts and extension specialists would become incapacitated. The advanced countries are already planning electronically operated information highways for "instant" dissemination of information.

The development of new information technologies using computers, satellite communications and compact discs, etc has made information processing and dissemination easier, faster and more efficient. However, a group study on new technologies relevant to developing countries has observed as follows:-

"The introduction of computers and the application of classical computing techniques, while benefitting

the modern sector in urban areas, has had little or no impact on the traditional sector of developing countries, especially in rural areas" (Seshagiri 1983).

The above statement, a decade later, still holds true for Papua New Guinea. Time has now come to devise information and publication systems and services, catering especially for the needs of the Agricultural situation in PNG.

## INFORMATION POLICY

The following considerations would guide the development of Agricultural Information Systems and Services in PNG:-

1. Assist in the upgrading of the technical skills necessary for the transformation of rural agriculture and livestock sector.
2. Strengthen the delivery of technical extension services by providing them with

<sup>1,2</sup> Agricultural Education and Training Division, Department of Agriculture and Livestock, P. O. Box 417, Konedobu, Papua New Guinea.

authoritative information, technical and educational materials.

3. Disseminate Agricultural Information to diverse audience.
4. Development, preparation, production and distributions of wide ranging agricultural publications to different strata of Agricultural professionals.
5. Obtain and provide, to researchers, extensionists and other interested agriculturists results of relevant studies conducted elsewhere in the world.

## STRATEGIES

The Agricultural Information Programmes would be developed to focus on three strata of our society:-

1. Rural Agriculture and Livestock sector composed mainly of smallholders and evolution of an information base for development and planning at village level;
2. Agricultural Extensionists and general public;
3. Agricultural researchers and other professionals.

research projects currently being carried out in an international co-operative network composed of national, regional and international centres, with the co-ordinating centre located at FAO Headquarters in Rome.

CARIS is a source of information to researchers, planners, managers or administrators, policy and decision makers, production and development specialists. CARIS covers the whole range of research in agriculture and related fields. CARIS in PNG was established in 1987 at the Department of Agriculture and Livestock Headquarters at Konedobu. In 1990, CARIS produced the first directory of Current Agricultural Research in PNG (Erai 1993 a). Fiscal constraints have however slowed down and sometimes stopped our operations. CARIS and AGRIS operations would be greatly strengthened under the proposed AI&PSS, scattered information units in DAL such as CARIS, PNGRIS, Marketing, Rural Statistics etc would be brought under one umbrella. They would provide be information servicing, information transfer, data management and computer software packages.

The Central Library for DAL, located at Konedobu, was established in early 1960s and serves all the agricultural institutions in Papua New Guinea. The main functions of the library is to co-ordinate and provide various library services. It has over 20,000 volumes, most print materials and 500 periodical titles the number of which on current subscription has unfortunately been steadily declining due to insufficient budgetary allocations.

## THE AGRICULTURAL INFORMATION AND PUBLICATION SYSTEMS AND SERVICES (AI&PSS)

With a view to implement the policies and strategies outlined above it is proposed that the existing Information Services Section (ISS) of the Education and Training Division be upgraded to divisional status with the title of "Agricultural Information Systems and Services (AI&PSS). The various components of this division may be further discussed as follows:-

### A. NATIONAL CARIS CENTRE AND CENTRAL LIBRARY

CARIS (Current Agricultural Research Information Systems) deals with information on agricultural

### B. AUDIO - VISUAL TOOLS

Video programmes can greatly assist the extensionists by showing farmers how exactly to do something or what a crop/livestock looks like or should look like. It doesn't require a high standard of literacy and combines words, pictures and music.

A person typically retains about 10% of the information he reads, a full 20% of what he hears, but 80% of what he sees, hears and discusses. This is the potential of visual and audio visual screening as a teaching tool. And if "hands on" practice or demonstrations is included, a person's retention-level can rise to a high 90% to (Erai 1993 b).

Some twenty two (22) films produced by the DAL Audio-Visual Unit in English, Pidgin and Motu

using hired equipment have proved highly popular. Under the proposed AI&PSS the use of audio-visual tools as an aid to extensionists would be emphasized and strengthened.

### C. RADIO COMMUNICATIONS

ISS provides ideas, informations and staff for the formulation and production of National Broadcasting Corporation's agricultural radio programmes. These send out simple messages on practical agriculture that can be understood even by someone who cannot read and write. The messages are received quickly, and absorbed over long distances by large groups of our people.

The development of above programmes is only possible if the staff have the backing of a well run and up-to-date agricultural library with latest books, journals, research reports, handbooks, encyclopaedias, bibliographies, literature guides, directories, reviews, and other publications.

### D. PUBLICATIONS

These are the single most important means of information by which research-extension-farmer linkage in agricultural sector is maintained. For the continuity of publications, the system must ensure regular publication of results. The publications from DAL publication unit address various strata of our society and are intended for didiman, didimeri, teachers, farmers, general public, extensionists, research workers, project co-ordinators, national and international organizations, experts and consultants, scientists, technologists and other professionals in schools, colleges and universities throughout Papua New Guinea. They fall into the following categories:-

#### 1. Extension Publications

ISS publishes as a wide range of Extension Bulletins, Farming Notes, Rural Development Handbooks, Village Talks, Field Pocket Books, DAL Posters, Discussion Papers, Agriculture in Economy Series and Agriculture Booklets. Also produced are extension materials such as videos, films and audio-tapes on agricultural topics and developments.

ISS produces and publish the only extension journal of developing South Pacific nations viz. HARVEST which is a widely distributed and eagerly sought after journal.

#### 2. Rural Newsletter

The widely read Agricultural Newsletter, Didimag has been hailed as the best Rural Newsletter in PNG and needs to be strengthened.

#### 3. Scientific Publications

ISS publishes specialist scientific bulletins, technical reports, research bulletins and PNG Journal of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries which is the only Agricultural Journal being published from the developing Pacific Island nations. This scientific journal published since 1935. This journal has had standards and presentation which earned it an international recognition. It is a national heritage publishing articles based on research in PNG and the Pacific Island nations.

The above wide range of agricultural extension and scientific publications aimed at different levels of audience are prepared by ISS staff specializing in writing, editing, designing, typesetting. They distribute 10,000 publications and over 50 titles each year throughout PNG. A recent Reader and Listener survey showed that there is demand for more publications to be distributed to more centres.

### E. KNOWLEDGE SECTOR

According to a February 1993 issue of the Economist the fastest growing part of all rich countries is neither manufacturing nor traditional services but the "knowledge sector". The magazine noted that over half of all workers in rich countries are currently employed in the production, storage, retrieval or distribution of knowledge. New journals are being established at the rate of one day in the industrialized world. We are therefore often hoodwinked by people who discourage us either from starting new journals in the world or revitalising old ones on the pretext that there are enough journals already and it is in a scientist's interest to publish in a Western Journal.

We need to wrench ourselves from the above legacy, by establishing high-level scientific journal worthy of the best papers from anywhere else in the world. The stocks-in-trade of scientific journals are ideas, high standard of published papers and regularity of their appearance, and we must therefore be in the market-place for journals if we are to be competing participants in this trade.

The proposed AI&PSS would greatly further the cause of knowledge sector in PNG. Unless we are prepared to invest in the "knowledge sector" now we would find it very difficult to catch up with the brain power of our competitors, in the 21st century.

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