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The Relevance of Information Exchange Networking in Sustainable Agricultural Development. The Case Studies of ILEIA in Leusden, the Netherlands and ECHO in Ft. Myers, USA.

Masterthesis at the Department of Agricultural Engineering

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Abstract

In its simplest form, a network is a group of institutions or individuals who share information on topics of common interests. Networks perform many of the same information, dissemination functions of professional journals already presented in this paper, but most importantly, what makes them essentially different and relevant to sustainable agricultural development is their "aim of generating interaction among their members".

ILEIA, our first case study, gathers information on the experiences of indigenous farmer technology development in third world countries for the main purpose of sharing this information among the development community and to bring the concepts of Low External Input and Sustainable Agriculture (LEISA) and Participatory Technology Development (PTD) to the international policy agenda. These objectives and goals are reached through publishing a quarterly newsletter, organizing thematic workshops and facilitating the evolution and growth of networks in developing countries by providing information, support and training for local documentation centres.

ECHO, our second case study, has the primary mandate to strengthen the work of missionaries and development workers as they themselves assist small farmers and urban gardeners in the third world. This goal is reached predominantly through publishing a quarterly newsletter, sending seeds of underutilized tropical food plants, responding to questions, providing study opportunities, and organizing an annual conference. All these activities encourage the information and material exchange in the network. The

conference with its workshops especially emphasizes the importance of the personal networking and interacting aspect, linking people and organizations who work in development together.

In the end, networking can indeed be relevant to sustainable agricultural development not only in overcoming information deficits, but furthermore as a means of establishing effective links between farmers, researchers and NGO's in both the North and the South. How all the aspects relevant to promoting sustainable agricultural development can most productively and equitably be managed and used is a major future challenge for networking.