

An assessment of IPGRI's publication outputs

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Editor's note:

This paper represents an assessment conducted for IPGRI's External Programme and Management Review in 2002. It has not been published previously.

The full version of this Impact Assessment and Evaluation Discussion Paper can be found at www.ipgri.cgiar.org

Background

In 2002, the International Plant Genetic Resources Institute (IPGRI) created a database of all the publications it had produced between 1996 and 2001. A total of 563 publications produced by IPGRI staff, interns, honorary research fellows, consultants and commissioned authors were recorded. This report summarizes the data collected and discusses its implications. The objective of the study was to assess the publications output of IPGRI staff and partners between 1996 and 2001, with a focus on technical papers produced by staff or their partners as a result of IPGRI sponsored research.

Methods

Because of IPGRI's partnership approach, five categories of authorship were expected: IPGRI staff as lead author; IPGRI partner as lead author with IPGRI as co-author; IPGRI partner as author with IPGRI related or sponsored work; IPGRI as editor of multi-authored publication; or IPGRI editor of monographs with single authors. The following key questions guided the research:

- How many publications have been created between 1996–2001?
- Who has published?
- Where have they been published?
- What types of publications have been produced?
- To what extent have IPGRI partners published results from joint work?
- To what extent has IPGRI staff published with partners?
- What kinds of topics have been published as a result of IPGRI's work?
- What gaps exist in the range of topics covered, *vis-a-vis* IPGRI's programme priorities?
- Who were the intended audiences for the IPGRI publications?
- To what extent were IPGRI publications produced jointly with partners?
- In which languages did IPGRI publish?

To answer these questions, the consultant hired by IPGRI identified staff employed by the institute during the years under review. Searches in various databases were then performed for publications by these staff, using both individual names and corporate affiliation criteria. The consultant also catalogued publications that were reported in IPGRI Annual Project Reports for the period in question, and compared these with the findings of the database searches. From these searches, a master database was developed. Lists of publications were then circulated to staff still in the employ of IPGRI for their review and to add any publications that were missing.

Results

The 563 publications include conference proceedings, workshop reports, books, technical and training manuals, descriptor lists, fact sheets, directories, bibliographies and reviews. An overview of the publication outputs by year and by category is given in the table below. All three types of publications are important in the advance and assessment of science. IPGRI has produced a good balance between publication types, offering a wide 'reach' through journal articles as well as a 'rich' content through conference proceedings and technical manuals and books.

The publication of articles in peer-reviewed journals is a good indicator of the quality of science and its impact in reaching a wide audience, as well as being a permanent record. IPGRI has published 217 journal articles in 98 refereed journals—an average of 36 articles per year.

IPGRI thematic and regional groups produced a total of 127 publications. The Genetic Resources Science and Technology Group produced 31% of these and regional offices produced 38%. All

IPGRI publications by type (1996–2001)

Publication type	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	Total
Journal articles	39	60	59	58	48	47	311
Books	29	33	17	17	18	15	129
Conference proceedings and workshop reports	26	18	27	21	19	12	123
Total	94	111	103	96	85	74	563

scientific groups published during the period of study, even those with a limited publication mandate such as Documentation, Information and Training, which takes the lead role in editing, layout and publishing but has a limited role in researching and writing articles and books.

To assess how well its publications relate to IPGRI's priorities, publications were categorized by theme. Most publications addressed the broad theme of 'conservation and use' (42%), with 31% related to the topic of 'conservation and use of specific crops'. All themes were addressed to some extent, but fewer publications covered socio-economic and policy issues, information management and forestry.

IPGRI plays several roles in the production of publications, including authoring and co-authoring publications, editing and publishing. For approximately 60% of the publications produced, IPGRI personnel were authors or co-authors. The rest were edited or published by IPGRI. The data confirmed the partnership approach that IPGRI takes towards authorship. An equal number of IPGRI publications were published with IPGRI staff as partners rather than as senior authors. In addition, 72% of publications were prepared with one or more external partners.

Although IPGRI has published in eight languages, 84% of publications were in English, despite the fact that IPGRI aims to address a global audience. However, it is possible that the types of publications that IPGRI produces in other languages are of a more informal nature and were not included in this study, or that publications were translated by partners.

Conclusions

Assessing the publications produced by a research institute is a useful way to evaluate its effectiveness. IPGRI's reputation as a centre of excellence for plant genetic resources depends partly on how widely it is known and how well it is respected in the plant genetic resources and broader scientific and development communities. A good publication output helps maintain and enhance that reputation.

The study has many positive findings. IPGRI produced a significant number of publications during the period assessed, and a relatively high number of articles appeared in peer-reviewed journals. This has been accomplished despite the fact that IPGRI conducts little basic research itself, but concentrates on facilitating the research of others, particularly research institutes in developing countries. The effectiveness of the partnership approach taken by IPGRI is confirmed by the data showing that IPGRI publishes almost three-quarters of its publications in collaboration with partners. All sections of IPGRI produce publications, with over a third produced by IPGRI's regional groups. This indicates effective performance by the different sections and effective decentralisation of the institute.

However, the study also raised some issues that should be considered by IPGRI management. The overall number of publications appears to have declined during the period of study. Several important topics, such as socioeconomics, policy and information management, have not been addressed to a significant degree. IPGRI has produced few training materials or practical handbooks, but has focused more on academic publications, such as journal articles, books and conference proceedings.

Since most of IPGRI's research is conducted through partners, an assessment of its publications has to consider the publishing rationale rather than just a quantitative assessment of outputs.

IPGRI established a publications policy in 1995 and set up a publications committee to oversee its outputs and to ensure they are produced in an 'integrated, efficient and effective manner'. However, the publications committee has tended to focus on the publications clearance process. The committee might now consider taking on a more advisory role, for example, providing guidance on the extent to which IPGRI staff should be publishing, the priority for publishing versus other responsibilities related to project management, and the identification of publishing priorities.

Related IPGRI Impact Assessment Briefs

- 1 Adoption of IPGRI crop descriptors: a case study
- 13 Evaluating the impact of IPGRI's publications

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**Readers should send their comments and feedback on the papers to:
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