

LEISA India Outcome Impact Study

An Interim Report

June 2009

Sources

Readers Surveys – Postal and Electronic
Compilation of 'Inspiring cases'
Proceedings of LEISA Enthusiasts Meetings - South India
Proceedings of LEISA Enthusiasts Meetings - North India
Impact workshops – Proceedings
Field Visits

1. Introduction

LEISA India is a quarterly magazine aimed towards promoting ecological agriculture through encouraging spread of LEISA practice. Starting as a supplement to the global LEISA magazine, LEISA India emerged as an independent Indian edition from 1999 onwards. Presently, LEISA India reaches about 11500 subscribers interested in ecological agriculture, within India and a few in the neighbouring South Asian countries (around 250). The primary contributors of articles to the magazine include NGOs, Researchers, Academics and few farmers

The zonal distribution of **readers** across the country is as follows – South (59%), East (15%), West (11%), North (11%), North East (2%), Central (2%). Presently, NGOs constitute around 25% of the total subscribers, individuals (38%), academic institutions (17%) and research institutions (11%).

As a part of completing a decade, we thought it necessary to assess whether the magazine has made any reasonable impact on the minds and practices of the readers. The objective was also to see if the magazine was making a relevant contribution to small scale agriculture development in India.

LEISA India team, besides **magazine production** has been involved in a number of activities, like **LEISA enthusiasts meets**, which provided opportunities for face to face interactions with the readers. Production of **local language editions** brought us much closer to the grassroot readers. Along with these, proactive communication with the readers helped us to get their views on the magazine on a reasonably regular basis. (*Note on Impact study process and plans circulated 3.06.09*). In addition to what we have circulated earlier, the basis of our understanding was as follows.

Impact is looked in terms of outcomes. Attempt was made to understand and assess the efficiency of our task on hand (dissemination of LEISA practices) - *the sphere of control*. Further, we also tried to find out how best this information shared is being put to use – *the sphere of influence* and to what extent our efforts are able to address the issues of small scale agriculture – *the sphere of interest*. All these were studied using a number of approaches like Readers surveys; Group discussions; Individual interactions; Field visits and Impact workshops.

2. Methodology

LEISA India team has been in constant communication with majority of its readers. This was strengthened, particularly in the past few years, owing to activities like LEISA enthusiasts meets, Knowledge Management workshops, production and sharing of language editions etc. Considering these knowledge exchange mechanisms which most of the time brought us face to face with our readers and contributors as starting points for the impact study, we started to build upon them. Subsequently, we followed the methodology explained below in understanding and consolidating the utility and impact of the magazine as expressed by our readers and contributors.

Surveys

Firstly, we conducted a postal survey. Survey forms were sent along with the issue on “Dealing with Climate Change” during the month of February 2009. Keeping the rural masses in mind, we also enclosed a self addressed envelope to help them respond quickly. We started receiving them from February end to April end. By now, we have received around 1500 responses. (*see Survey Results, circulated in the magazine for details*). These were immediately entered into a database, which gave the quantitative analysis on a daily basis. The major purpose of the surveys *was views as well as Use*.

Once this was through, we felt that probably we had not tapped the interest of the net-connected and net savvy readers through our postal survey. This led to planning an electronic survey. Ways of conducting this electronic survey were explored (for eg., monkeysurvey.com etc.). A survey form in excel sheet was designed which could be sent as an attachment file. Ways were explored for sending bulk mails using mail merge facility. Readers with email connectivity and those who had not

responded to postal survey were shortlisted for sending the electronic survey form. Forms were sent to around 2500 readers and 70 responded. These were again included into the database.

Respondents Mix – Type and period of association

There has been a good and balanced representation across each of the reader category in the surveys. From both postal as well as electronic survey, around 1500 responses were received. Largest response was from NGOs (30%) followed by Academic Institutions (18%) and Farmers (15%). Around 4% of the respondents were students. 10% of the total respondents are women. The mix of respondents includes relatively 'new' readers as well as enthusiasts of LEISA movement over a long period. Around **56%** of the survey respondents were those who have been receiving LEISA India since **0-4 years** and were not part of earlier surveys. Around **32%** of the respondents have been receiving LEISA India since **5-10 years**. Around 8% of the respondents are those who have been receiving LEISA magazine since the time it was published as ILEIA Newsletter.

Individual Interactions

From the survey responses, each survey form was looked for detailed usage mentioned by our readers. Based on that, readers who had indicated usage were contacted and interacted (over email). Custom specific questions were raised for which responses were sought. Readers were specifically asked about the way they had used the content explaining a specific instance.

We had planned to interact individually with around 40 readers (from all categories of readers) and started contacting them. Of them, 28 promised to share and finally 21 of them responded with detailed responses. They responded enthusiastically and helped us in our study. Of the 21 readers, 8 were farmers, 7 were NGO representatives, 3 were from media and one each from the Government, research Institution and Credit institution. This group included 2 women. Communication was on a continued basis to address the gaps in information provided. They served as detailed 'Cases' as to how they utilised the magazine content and their outcomes. The respondents also shared material (*photos/ audio recordings/ booklets etc*) out of their own interest. This exercise was carried out during the months of March-May 2009.

Group discussions

Interactions with groups of LEISA India readers is being undertaken. We plan to do this using the outcome mapping framework. Group discussions are planned with various reader categories at different places, involving around 50-60 readers.

The first one was organised in Bangalore during first week of June 2009, with the Academic and Research category of readers. The workshop included around 10 invitees representing institutions like University of Agricultural Sciences, Indian Institute of Horticultural Research, Indian Institute of Science, Agriculture Marketing Board, FRLHT and RDT. The participants enthusiastically shared their vision of SA, the threats and opportunities, evidences of use of LEISA content and other sources of Knowledge on Sustainable Agriculture. The second one (15.06.09) was with LEISA India consortium partners – Revisiting their Vision and Collaborative Activities. (Translations, LEISA Enthusiasts meets).

Field Visits

Field visits were planned to see the LEISA practices adopted on the field by our farmer readers. We plan to include 10 farmers in our field visits, where we would see and learn how they have been practicing LEISA on their fields.

The first round of field visit was done during mid May 2009, to Shimoga, a district located around 350 kms. from Bangalore. Of the four farmers whom we interacted during our field visits, three were small farmers owning 2-3 acres of land, growing exclusively plantation crops like arecanut, pepper, beetvine, cashewnut etc. The fourth farmer whom we met cultivated arecanut along with paddy. He was a big farmer owning around 15 acres.

3. Outcomes

3.1 Sphere of Control

The sphere of control was assessed on the basis of results of readers surveys, interactions in LEISA Enthusiast Meets and regular feedback from readers and authors. Readers have been giving their feedback on various aspects of the magazine – its content, outreach, layout etc. They have also been suggesting various ways, not only for making the magazine attractive and meaningful, but going beyond it.

Content

Readers are happy that LEISA India as a magazine serves as a source for alternative agriculture. Around 99% of the respondents have found the magazine interesting. Broadly, the reasons mentioned are it is generating Awareness on alternative agriculture (74%); mix of local and global experiences, on relevant experiences from diverse contexts (55%); it includes emulatable field based experiences (47%) and Sections of sources and networking for deeper understanding and wider contacts (29%). Narayana Reddy column wherein a farmer shares his own experiences has been one of the most liked features of the magazine

However, some feel it could look into certain issues which could make it much more acceptable. For example, there is a feeling that South Indian context gets more focus in the Indian articles than other regions. Though efforts are made to balance the contributions from different regions, it sometime owing to thematic, time and language limitations, this may happen. Some suggestions for inclusion are interviews with traditional farmers, a column on FAQs on LEISA along with answers, a section on emerging issues and current trends, letters from farmers

Though forthcoming themes are announced in the magazine, some of the readers feel that only the current readers get to know. For getting more and relevant articles, particularly by those who do not see the magazine regularly, readers suggest that the forthcoming themes be given wide publicity, like announcements in national newspapers, like Times of India, Indian Express etc. and more number of young scientists to be invited to contribute articles.

Layout and Periodicity

Overall readers are satisfied with the layout. Some opine that colour photos need to be included. Some have felt that the font size is small and could be increased. Some others feel that the layout could be reader-friendly for poor literate farmers with simple illustration & bold type

Some of the readers feel that LEISA India should be produced more frequently, probably every month. This is because the farming situation is so dynamic and a quarterly magazine may not be able to address the issues in the time frame when they are felt important. There is also a feeling that the magazine is reaching them late than what is being published as the month of publication. This does happen as the Indian edition is produced a little later than the global edition.

Outreach

Presently, LEISA India reaches about 11500 subscribers interested in ecological agriculture, within India and a few in the neighbouring South Asian countries (around 250). The primary contributors of articles to the magazine include NGOs, Researchers, Academics and few farmers. The zonal distribution of **readers** across the country indicates that the concentration of readers is in the Southern Zone.

One of the important reasons for lesser penetration into other zones of India is the **language** barrier. The English literate are more in the South compared to any other zones. The studies reveal that the language in which the magazine is produced is in itself a limitation if it has to have a wider outreach. Interest in translations in local languages has come out strongly from the readers. Of course, on their own, this is reportedly being done individually into several languages like Bengali, Malayalam, Marathi, Tamil, Kannada etc. But there is a feeling that a regular magazine in regional languages is more useful than just in English. *Understanding this limitation very well, on a pilot basis, LEISA India has recently brought out special editions in three languages – Hindi, Tamil and Kannada, which is receiving a very good feedback.*

What readers are not happy with...some views

LEISA lacks aggressive views to fight MNCs. Corporate farming needs to be addressed forcefully to save small/marginal farmers.

Highlight issues of various Indian states.

It can be made more interesting, it is very normative

The articles based on ecosystem research are lacking, which requires more consideration and invitation for submission of papers

Publishing thematically, prevents inclusion of latest issues

Some have also suggested including at least one article in the regional language for the benefit of readers or producing regional language edition, at least once a year to increase the utility of the magazine. Also inclusion of some articles in local languages in daily newspapers is suggested.

Majority of the readers see that LEISA India should play a much greater role by reaching wider audiences, particularly to those who make a large difference to farming sector in the country. **Wider publicity** in the form of advertisements in regional newspapers is seen as one of the options.

Knowing very well that the mainstream agri-related institutions are the important ones who need to be targeted for bringing about a change in agriculture through information, LEISA India team made a strategic decision during 2007-08, to include all the mainstream institutions. Starting with KVKs which are the extension Units at the local level, a complimentary copy was sent to these KVKs and then upon confirmation these were added to the mailing list. Similar efforts are being done for including other institutions. As of now, LEISA India's outreach includes Agri. related institutions and major academic institutions. However, given the size of such institutions in India, not all have been included as of now. Presently, NGOs constitute 25% of the total subscribers, followed by individuals (38%), academic institutions (17%) and research institutions (11%).

We also realise that it is not only the mainstream institutions related to agriculture, but there are a number of institutions at the taluk and village which need to be reached. For example, there are more than 5500 agri-clinics, 800 Rythu Samparka Kendras (Farmer Contact Points) in Karnataka alone, around 28,000 farmer clubs supported by NABARD – who all could be prospective receivers of the magazine. On the other hand, there is the Government network which is too large. The magazine presently reaches the state level depts. in some states. Some of the readers have suggested to provide a copy to each gram panchayat office. This may be a little difficult in practical terms, as there are around 2,36,000 GPs in India.

Some of them opine that many people are still not aware of the magazine. It is therefore necessary to advertise in papers, and also reach institutions (schools and colleges) which are not agriculture based. It is also suggested to include students from disciplines like rural sociology, extension education and development communication who can benefit greatly from this magazine. It is interesting to note that one of the readers suggested launching the magazine under multi level marketing through readers for wider and faster outreach.

Few other suggestions for increasing outreach are producing e-journals, starting LEISA column in large circulation papers, producing CD on each topic in regional and national language, converting success stories into videos, linking the website of LEISA India to the websites of various development institutions under government and non-government sectors.

Dissemination to a tool for triggering change

More and more readers are seeing this magazine not only as a mere platform for sharing but also as a trigger for changing the conventional agriculture to alternative agriculture.

Some suggestions

The magazine should be published in all major Indian languages

A column on frequently asked questions (FAQs) on LEISA may be included along with answers for the farmers

Start LEISA column in large circulation newspaper and compilation of these columns should be come out as a magazine

Networking with blogs, organize seminars, start district or state level LEISA chapters

They are looking at LEISA India as a 'solution provider' for farm related problems – either by the programme or by the LEISA constituency that is created through the magazine. Suggestions for achieving this include starting a toll free center on organic farming, networking with blogs, conducting e-conferences, organising statewide seminars, workshops; organizing farmers meet and LEISA readers clubs, building statewide alliances, promoting leisa clubs at grassroot level and also a LEISA chair in formal institutions. Beyond this, readers feel that LEISA India should also get into organizing farmer oriented programmes by linking with KVKs, and Universities. Organising training camps and exposure visits are also suggested.

At the outset, there are many who feel that, what LEISA India as a magazine offers, is more than sufficient. As one of the readers puts it, *LEISA India is a magazine of different style, and authentic information focused on alternative agriculture and allied activities with a global outlook. It is incomparable and unique.*

3.2 Sphere of Influence

This section looks at how the magazine is influencing our readers. Here, readers are considered as "boundary partners" who are using the magazine content either directly or are influencing others in the spread and application of LEISA. Sphere of influence gives an understanding of what readers are doing with the information they receive through the magazine and how it is resulting in a change in *thinking, behaviour, and practice.*

Surveys indicated that readers have been using the content in various ways. *Around 96% of the survey respondents have reported to have made use of the magazine content in various ways – field application, teaching, training etc.* The survey also revealed the way they have used the content - where *84% of the respondents have shared specific instances of the content use.*

While surveys did indicate the nature of use and its impact on their thinking, the actual outcomes of such use have been elicited from much more deeper interactions done at individual level with selected readers.

a) Change in mindsets

One of the major outcomes of LEISA India programme has been a **Change in mindsets** - change in thinking reflected by every category of reader (farmers, NGOs, Academics etc.). These changed mindsets are reflected in terms of changed field practices, changing cropping systems, changing research agendas etc. which are discussed later.

For farmers, who have not been able to make a decent living on farming and who had lost hope, experiences described in LEISA India has come as a **hope for agriculture**. The existence of alternatives and the fact that there are many farmers around the world who are like them and have made it possible through LEISA approach, has rebuilt their confidence in farming. **"Determination to continue as a farmer"**, as one farmers puts it, has been the major outcome in farmer readers.

For development workers, realization of alternative agriculture as a means of livelihood has enabled them to look at development holistically. Earlier, they were involved in promoting discrete income generating activities, not really having knowledge on how to promote safe agriculture. With access to information on alternative agriculture to promote among farmers and participatory methods to work with rural masses, they find their interventions, now more meaningful.

Researchers are getting more inclined towards *people-centered research; location centric research and traditional knowledge*. Methodologies to follow such methods have built in a confidence in promoting such people centered approaches.

For the academics, LEISA India has been a source of knowing what is happening around the world both in terms of research as well as practice. With practical experiences reflecting successes in alternative agriculture, there is a shift in thinking – from conventional farming to alternative farming practices. Having strengthened their confidence in the knowledge and its importance in bringing about a change in farming, this is being reflected in the way they have been sharing with the students and younger generation to keep it going. In the process **students** are also gaining and understanding a

different perspective on agriculture.

Media which was hitherto relying only on the department content for preparing its programmes has found a source in LEISA India, which is not easily available elsewhere. This has resulted in sharing practical sustainable alternatives through meaningful programmes.

b) Better clarity on concepts/methodologies

Around 74% of the respondents expressed that LEISA India was a source which gave a clear understanding of alternative agriculture. Some of them *opined that it was the only source* which covered the various themes/issues in a *simple way*.

The articles helped them to understand the concepts much better like **IPM, SRI and living soils**. Some felt that the **editorial** was so comprehensive that it gave an overall understanding of the various dimensions of an issue.

Participatory methodologies like **FFS and PTD** were quite new and LEISA India articles provided a great deal of clarity on how such methodologies could be put to use. Some of the readers have also tried out the methodologies like PTD and FFS in their contexts and found good results. For example, Yuva Chetana Kendra, Deoria, adopted **RAAKS** methodology which was described in LEISA India.

c) Changed practices/systems on the farm

Readers have been practically applying the ideas, practices and systems resulting changed practices and systems on the farms. Around **39%** of the survey respondents have reported to have applied practically on the field or used the ideas/concepts in some form.

Changed practices in the field are quite visible. **Farmers** have been using LEISA India contents practically, applying them on the field. About **58%** of the farmer respondents have used it for field application. (*See Readers Survey results*). Practices like organic manure application, use of compost, vermicompost, azolla, to name a few have gained momentum. For example, *Mr. Nandish* in Shimoga district started cultivating rice on raised beds after being inspired by an article '**Growing paddy on permanent rice beds**', in LEISA India. He feels the method helped him reduce the cost by 50% which equal to making a profit by 50%.

It is not just application, farmers have also learnt to prepare these along with **biologicals**, depending less on outside help. We can observe many farms shifting to a total non-chemical type of farming.

Farmers are going in for recycling farm wastes to organic manure. Some farmers in Shimoga believe in irrigating water mixed with organic manure, which also help them in saving labour as compared to soil application of organic manure. Many farmers are becoming chemical free farms. Some innovative farmers are trying out alternatives like growing **green manuring** and thus totally avoiding application of organic manure. For example, *Mr. Nandish* in Shimoga, grows various varieties of green manures, mostly leguminous and follows green culture method.

Besides practices, many farmers have started believing in integrated farming systems and have switched over from conventional farming systems. Particularly the **one acre model** that was described in the magazine caught the attention of many farmers to adopt the same. Many farmers also visited this model farm and followed some of the practices and systems.

One of the most important changes that LEISA India has brought about is in the paddy production systems. LEISA India has been one and the only source for many years on the **System of Rice Intensification (SRI)**. About **40 readers** have reported that LEISA India was the primary source of information on SRI. They have either adopted SRI on their fields or have promoted SRI among farmers. For example, *Mr. Pradeep Kumar* from Orissa says that he could **promote SRI amongst 1000 farmers** in Orissa based on the understanding gained from the magazine. This was much before the Government took initiative in spreading SRI in the State (*See Inspiring Cases for more details*).

Besides farmers, **NGOs** have also been promoting ecofriendly practices on the farmers field from the knowledge gained through the magazine. The survey indicated that around 39% of the NGO

respondents promoted practices like **vermicomposting, green manuring, SRI** etc., among the farmers. For instance, Vermicomposting as an enterprise was introduced into the community of Akot, a remote village in Uttarakhand, the idea of which was taken from the LEISA article; Based on the article on **azolla** as a livestock feed, it was promoted in the milksheds of Maharashtra and Goa with a good feedback. Azolla was also tried out in dairy company by one of the readers who finds good results now. Mr. Sachin Suresh, a development agent, guided farmers on management of Gundhi bug using crabs, which was mentioned in one of the issues. Similarly, SEEDS, an NGO in Tamil Nadu started promoting Azolla, vermi composting etc., the knowledge of which was gained from LEISA India. Starting with 4-5 farmers, these practices has spread to many more in the project villages. (**Source: LEISA Enthusiasts Meet -South**)

The impact is observed on the minds of **Researchers** too which is translated into action. For example, model organic farm for arid zone was developed in **CAZRI** based on the ideas discussed on soil health and EPM. The Krishi Vigyan Kendra (**KVK**) which are the extension units at the local level are also using a lot of ideas from the magazine. For example, KVK in West Bengal has taken up marketing of organic cotton. (*See Inspiring Cases for details*)

d) People centric approaches/development

There is a visible shift in the thinking and approach of people who are designing development programmes, at various levels. People are in the center of development. Mainstream institutions and NGOs have tried to adopt the participatory methods discussed in various issues of the magazines. Particularly for methodologies like PTD and FFS, the magazine has been a motivating source as they give with examples. To quote an example, the **Sugarcane Breeding Institute** in Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu, tried out participatory varietal trials one of the sugar factories and helped in its revival (*See Inspiring Cases for details*). Similarly, many readers/NGOs have found FFS interesting and have tried it out in their contexts.

Participatory approaches and group approaches like collective marketing are gaining momentum. There is increasing awareness on locally relevant development, which is visible in the media programmes, efforts for setting up community centers, community radios etc.

NGOs have also been instrumental in bringing about **new institutional forms** like producer company, after understanding the concept from the magazine. For instance, farmer groups in Nadukuppam village, Marakanam block, Villupuram district in Tamil Nadu are in the process of being formed into a **producer company** by an NGO (See Inspiring cases for more details). Based on an article on fair trade issue, a farmer has reported to have procured organic certificate to his produce. Farmers in the Attapady region in Kerala were organised and formed a **cooperative** called FARMA with the support of AHADS, an NGO. AHADS contacted the authors of an article on fair-trade, learnt much more on organizing farmers which led to the formation of FARMA. (*See Inspiring Cases for more details*)

e) Building knowledge on LEISA

Magazine has been a source for developing training content for agricultural programmes for farmers as well as development agents. Organisations which hitherto were not aware of ways of promoting ecological agriculture find meaningful content in the magazine which is used for their training purposes.

The content is being used for training purposes, particularly by NGOs. 57% of the NGOs have reported to have used for training farmers and 55%, for training NGOs. They have been using the content for creating awareness and better understanding among farmers and training farmers on concepts and methodologies.

The readers in the development field are able to add greater value to their programmes, based on the knowledge they have been gaining. Many of the NGOs are into training SHGs and are supported by the government. They find such trainings useless as they only focus on income generating activities. By reading the magazine, they have started incorporating the farming content into their trainings as they feel this brings about a real change. Moreover, most of the NGOs lack sources for alternative agriculture to include in their trainings. In such cases LEISA India comes in handy. (**Source: LEISA Enthusiasts meets**). Therefore there is a definite value addition to the programmes, in terms of content and also methodology. Inclusion of ecological agriculture as a livelihood option in training programmes and adoption of participatory methodologies in varietal selections are a few examples

that could be mentioned here.

A lot of training materials are developed based on the content of LEISA India. Around 39% of the NGOs reported the usage for content for developing training materials. eg. **FFS** methodology. Similarly, the academic institutions also use the content for training farmers and NGOs and around 58% have reported to have developed **training material** out of LEISA India content.

A **syllabus** was also developed on organic farming for training a farmers network.

f) Influencing the minds of students

Academic institutions have been using LEISA India for teaching as well as in training. The content is being used as a teaching material, both for the undergraduate as well for the post graduate courses in agriculture. The content is also taught to students of environmental economics and used in vocational courses for rural youth in agriculture.

LEISA India has been source for developing education material on topics like Sustainable agriculture, Sustainable development, Organic agricultural practices, Farm business management, Soil health, Water management, Insect ecology etc.

Courses and curriculum have also been developed using the content. Gandhigram Rural University, Tamil Nadu has included LEISA as one of the five units in its course. Every three years when the syllabus is revised, a lot of content from the magazine is used. Fundamental courses in extension have been developed. The University is also planning a Center on Climate change, *inspired by the issue on climate change* in LEISA (Source: *LEISA India Impact Workshop -with Academics and researchers, 06.06.09*). The American College n Madurai in Tamil Nadu has used in developing curriculum on bioresources management. (Source: *Readers Survey*)

At the rural and peri-urban levels, the content is being shared with school students as well. It has helped in designing school environmental projects, student project works and assignments. In Ganjam district of Orissa, one of the readers who is a teacher has promoted an organic kitchen garden in a school involving students. Students gain good knowledge and competencies of several environment related aspects. (See Inspiring Cases for details). One of the Professor reader said that he has been using LEISA India in his practical sessions, where students are asked to read the article and understand the concept behind it. (Source: *LEISA India Impact Workshop -with Academics and researchers, 06.06.09*)

A number of students have reported to have used it for their research and PhD work.

g) Changing research agendas – leaning towards alternative agriculture

Majority of the researcher and academic readers are finding LEISA India as a source of ideas for alternative agriculture. They are not just gaining knowledge but are also bringing about changes in development research programmes by incorporating these ideas in their project proposals. The survey also indicated that some of the research and also **Ph.D research** is being guided on these lines while some of the ideas are being incorporated in preparing new project proposals. This indicates that sustainable agriculture is finding its way in the mainstream thinking and practice, though in a small way. This could be either due to the shifts in priorities and strategies of institutions or could be purely driven by the enthusiasm of select individuals.

Research Institutions have used the contents for designing demonstrations as well as for motivating farming communities in adopting them through Field based studies and Demonstrations on SRI.

Around **35%** are using it as a reference material in research activities. Researchers are using it for developing project proposals, for eg., ideas for a project on climate change was taken from the magazine. Indian Institute of Horticultural Research received a **project** worth 9 lakhs on para agents, the idea of which was used from the article on para-veterinarians. Similarly, based on an article on soil reclamation, IIHR prepared two proposals on consortium of microbes in a compatible medium

The mainstream institutions are also basing their project proposals on the ideas/content gathered from the magazine. For example, Dr.CV Patil of Raichur, Karnataka recommended **biodrainage** for

reclamation of problematic soils in TBP area to the authorities of CADA – TBP. His recommendations were prepared based on the knowledge gained from the magazine.

Based on the issue on "**farmers innovations**" Dr. D.N. Chakravarty, Development Worker and his team submitted a project proposal to ICSSR on "study on innovative technologies for agriculture in Assam". Similarly, Inspired by Vol 4 no. 1, Dr. N.C. Behura, (105259), KVK, Koraput, Orissa prepared a **project** on "optimising livestock production for sustainable livelihoods..." to ICAR

Content is used as a source of ideas for preparing project proposals, by NGOs as well. Based on information provided by the Director of NATURE, an NGO in Kerala on community radios from Leisa India-**Rural Communication Issue**, the government agency is about to start a **community radio** station in the tribal area.

"We found the magazine a good source for writing innovative projects. 75% of the projects written on ideas taken from LEISA India have succeeded. For example, the scaling up project of post-Tsunami – the idea was from LEISA magazine". (Mr. Sylvester E G, Human Formation Organisation (LEISA Enthusiasts meeting).

h) Spreading awareness on LEISA through various means, methods and media

Besides getting aware by reading the magazine, the readers are spreading awareness on alternative agriculture in various ways.

The ideas and experiences are spreading quite extensively. Around 95% of the reader respondents share the contents with others through various means and mechanisms. 54% of them reported sharing with farmers, 41% in workshops and meetings; 53% are sharing with professional colleagues.

The Academics, researchers and students are **sharing a lot of content during workshops and meetings** through their presentations. LEISA India forms the source material on sustainable and ecological agriculture, which are referred to for preparing papers and presentations. They are based not only on the LEISA articles, but also by referring to books and sources provided in the magazine. (Source: **Readers Survey**)

Sharing is also happening across country borders. A few readers have indicated that based on LEISA India content they were able to project and discuss about alternative agriculture in India as well as those with friends in the West. For example, Raj Mohan, training expert in Human Resource Development (a non- agriculture professional) has discussed about the alternative agriculture possibilities with the knowledge gained from LEISA India, with the agriculture officials in the Sultanate of Oman. They are further having dialogue with the Government of India. (See **Inspiring cases for more details**)

Readers are also **translating the content** on their own and sharing in different ways – in local papers, magazines etc. For instance, for topics like IPM and BT, LEISA India formed the first source which was translated by a reader into local language (kannada) and shared. (Source: **LEISA Enthusiasts Meet - South**). Many of the articles are translated into various languages like Bengali, Oriya and Malayalam. In **Malayalam magazine** called "One Earth...." a journalist reader has translated around 10 articles of LEISA India (Source: **readers Survey**). Of late too, permission was sought by a reader group to translate it into Marathi language

Media is using the content/message and **repackaging reaching wider readership** – in the print, AIR and TV programmes. Readers from the print media have used the content in rewriting articles in local languages. For instance, a reporter from the Kannada language daily - Prajavani, wrote about one-acre farm model (which was earlier published in LEISA India) for which he received **5000 calls** asking for more information. Similar efforts are made by **All India Radio** in spreading the message through their farm programmes. AIR-Gulbarga had interviewed Shri. Narayana Reddy, the columnist of LEISA India, which received an excellent feedback (See **Inspiring cases for more details**). Infact, Prasar Bharathi, Doordarshan Director says that LEISA India has been "the source" for ecological agriculture and is being recommended to his staff in developing farm related programmes.

Agricultural Credit institutions like NABARD and Rural Banks have been using the content in creating awareness among the farmers and also developing their programmes. Requests were made by the Top management in NABARD for sending the magazine copies to its offices for wider awareness among their staff.

3.3 Sphere of Interest

The sphere of interest is about going a step further – trying to understand the nature, issues, challenges and threats for promoting sustainable agriculture, particularly among the small holders. The objective was also to know as to how the magazine is contributing to the promotion of small scale sustainable agriculture at large. We are trying to understand SA in the Indian context, the possibilities and limitations, through a workshop involving magazine readers.

The **first one** - Impact workshop with Researchers and academics on 06.06.09 was done with the readers from the mainstream research and academic institutions. Few representatives who belong to local premier institutions were invited based on their perceived interest in sharing their views. Out of the fifteen who were invited, ten could make it for the discussion. Also, as is the general principle, we invited those who are not the highest in hierarchy, but reasonably influential and also those whom we were meeting for the first time face to face.

A suitable process was created to facilitate high interaction and independent expression of views. Besides *views* and *opinions* the effort was to capture concrete *evidences of practice*; future *intentions for action*; as well as *other sources of inspiration*.

The focus of the meeting was on visualizing a development paradigm which looks at farm based rural livelihoods based on a type of agriculture which can promote livelihoods on one side and environmental stability on the other. The objective was to evolve a common vision, how we have been operationalising such vision (Mission), the type of influence LEISA India has in terms of changed behavior action or practice and the other sources of inspiration. (Details in Proceedings of Impact workshop, 06.06.09).

Evolving a common vision

The participants came out with the following ideas as their vision of SA

- Can attract small farmers
- Is the handing over of nature (land, water, air) to our future generation, in original condition which we have borrowed from our ancestors
- Need more research
- Healthy food
- Food for all
- Nutrient food
- Less cost more income
- Good agriculture practice
- Good marketing practice
- Micro-problem solution extension work
- Adapt opt training method
- Farmer's and consumer oriented agriculture and marketing system
- Low External Input Technology (Endogenous development)
- Develop strategies for resource management (Conservation)
- If we want this planet to see more centuries SA is an inevitable choice
- "Better management of natural resources, equitable development, Minimum damage to ecology could extend the life of earth"
- It is localised, sporadic, adopted by selected farming communities at present
- Participatory technology promotion programme based on needs of communities and demand driven practices would facilitate large scale adoption of SA
- Transfer of available integrated, eco-friendly and healthy farming practices
- Large scale documentation, evaluation and popularisation of need based, conservational (yet intensive) integrated farming practices

- Integrated efforts of concerned developmental agencies under a single mission for large scale spreading of SA

Endogenous development was felt as the crux of SA as the present problems were largely due to interventions made from outside, resulting in loss of people's indigenous/traditional knowledge and practices. It was felt that it should be need based micro changes with an integrated approach. As of now, most of the programmes are being politicized and each department is ignorant of what others are doing. There was also an opinion that one needs to be practical and not driven by dogmas.

Threats and Opportunities in promoting SA

Readers identified the following as **threats** to promotion of SA.

- It deals with measures which lead to incremental income, Hence limited interest form farmers
- Large farmers may be interested in large surpluses, may not be interested in SA
- Small land holdings
- Mindsets of farming community
- Less innovative and knowledge gap
- Less commercial and entrepreneurial nature
- Ag programmes most of times politicized
- Lack of required extn and training
- Policy inadequacies
- globalisation and market economy
- Population pressure
- Resource depletion
- Following the western system
- More and more land going out of farming (SEZ)
- Market conditions (poor support systems)
- Size and number of small farmers
- Infrastructure development
- Soil reclamation is time consuming
- Mindsets of government
- Dependency syndrome of farmers
- Unorganised group of farmers.
- Government policies

However, it was felt that of the threats listed out, some of them were not real threats but could be managed. For example, mindsets of farmers could be addressed by imparting knowledge, Poor extension systems – could be made more meaningful if there was commitment. They felt these could be solved through participatory and inclusive approaches.

But what was considered as real threats for SA were Policy inadequacies; resource depletion, population pressure and poor implementation of programmes. More over the issue of Special Economic Zones, where more and more farming land is being demarcated for industries was also considered a real threat. There was an opinion that, due to the above reasons the poverty in India increased by 10%. Lack of leadership and value based farming were also considered as causes for this.

Following **opportunities** were identified for promoting SA

- Depends less on purchased inputs – hence cost saving, so more attractive to farmers
- Many farmers who think of the future may be willing to go for SA
- Small farmer agri as in India may go for SA gradually
- Good land and natural resources
- Abundant human resources
- Service minded people
- Less expenditure system
- Not lost everything – still can reverse to SA
- Awareness is already there in some people

- About 60% still dependent on ag – 80% small and 70% - dryland farmers – LEISA is most relevant to them
- Increasing demand for organic products – national and global
- Awareness on health
- Developing markets
- Better management of pest and disease
- Inclusion of SA in student curriculum like environmental science
- Conducive climatic conditions

With growing awareness and good efforts of several NGOs and individuals, in Tamil Nadu, there is a considerably good movement going on for organic agriculture. With Shri. Nammalwar and Shri. Subhash Palekar as role models, many farmers are switching to sustainable agriculture

Other Sources of Information

Readers said that through LEISA India is one of the important sources on alternative agriculture, there were other sources as well which help gain knowledge on ecological agriculture. The most widely accessible source, especially for the mainstream institutions was the Internet. Other sources mentioned were Library books with practical tips on organic farming, mass media like Doordarshan, Newspapers and magazines. There were a couple of magazines available in Kannada language and around 7-8 magazines in Tamil which included aspects on organic farming. While field oriented people expressed that field was another source, where they learnt a lot from their own documentation of field experiences, some others expressed the importance of discussions with people with wisdom as their source of learning.

‘Boundary Partners’ – LEISA India consortium partners – Impact workshop (15.06.09)

In the case of LEISA India consortium partners meeting which also served as a core group meeting, the vision reflected the role civil societies are playing in terms of helping farming communities in terms of NRM as well as markets. The increasing challenges of ‘limited understanding’ of mainstream institutions in terms of Ecological agriculture as a package of practices rather than holistic link to livelihoods was debated.

The role played by the partners in spreading the message through magazine, translated editions and alliance meetings were reviewed. The next step obviously was to look for continuity in activity as well as ‘value addition’ in terms of impact in awareness; Practice and possibly Policy.

One of the suggestions was to look for more agencies in the region who could serve as nodal informal sub networks for spreading the LEISA message through enhanced outreach of translated editions (sphere of control); more exchange of information on ‘practice’ through informal civil society platforms (sphere of influence) as well as ‘identifying’ spokespersons and organizing them into a ‘group’ who ‘will’ be heard in policy circles (sphere of interest).

Specific activities include plans for production of another translated edition within this year -in Hindi , Kannada and Tamil.