

ILRI Communications Strategy

Connecting People and Knowledge

2003–2010

‘To be effective [in reducing poverty], research must be located more securely in the context of wider knowledge or innovation systems.’
—Overseas Development Institute, UK, 2003

ILRI has developed a strategic approach for its communications work. This strategy paper is an outcome of an internally commissioned external review of ILRI communications held in mid-2003. We also make use of a review and final report of research communications conducted by the UK Department for International Development (‘New DFID Research Strategy: Communications Theme’, Final Report, DFID, 2003).*

1 The first section of this paper outlines the mission and key assumptions of ILRI’s Communications Program. 2 The second provides principles underlying the strategy. 3 The third describes the history, organization and external review of communications work at

Mission of the Communications Program

ILRI’s Communications Program adds value to the institute’s mission by continually communicating the relevance of that mission and disseminating the details and significance of ILRI work and products in ways that enlarge the institute’s world standing, widen its partnerships, deepen its resources, and increase its impacts on world poverty, hunger and environmental degradation.

ILRI. 4 The fourth section matches ILRI’s key stakeholders with its main communication products and circulation vehicles. The fifth and sixth sections describe 5 key outcomes sought and 6 the strategies employed to achieve them.

1 MISSION, GOAL AND ASSUMPTIONS

The goal of ILRI’s Communications Program is to enhance ILRI’s impacts in reducing world poverty. ILRI communications are planned, executed and measured to ensure that the significance of ILRI’s mission, products and impacts is

properly understood by its key stakeholders in both developing and developed countries. Communications are also used to initiate and maintain dialogues with stakeholders to get their feedback and other inputs into the research process; to assess critically how ILRI and its work is perceived by others; and to learn from these two-way flows of information how to achieve bigger impacts on pro-poor policies and practices.

ILRI’s communications strategy is based on the assumption that there will be a continuing, indeed growing, need for international livestock research for development. We assume ILRI will be in position to respond to communication demands and to show the relevance of our products for science and development. We assume donor agencies will continue to favour research organizations and projects that have discernible impacts on reducing poverty, a good reputation, partnership modes of operation, and high visibility. We assume that a strong brand image (attractive, provocative, distinctive, memorable) helps ensure that ILRI work is recognized and respected by the many other stakeholders in livestock research for development.

* This strategy was updated in 2006 to incorporate such developments as a new series of 6 institutional research publications and accompanying ILRI Publishing Guidelines and Style Guide.

We assume that the value of ILRI's knowledge assets is made manifest largely through communications. We assume that when excellence in research is complemented by excellence in communications, the likelihood increases that ILRI and partner products will be adopted and that ILRI—and livestock research for development more generally—will attract greater support. (At the same time, we assume that better communications products will not, on their own, lead to bigger impacts on poverty; see below.) We assume that communications is fundamental to 'innovations systems' that encourage institutional flexibility and cultural change at ILRI and elsewhere. We assume that a communications program must have a strategic focus, with projects planned and implemented systematically, in addition to retaining capacity to respond quickly and creatively to events and circumstances and in so doing exploit new opportunities and minimize threats as they arise.

2 PRINCIPLES

ILRI communications staff aim to work smart, different, responsively and cost-effectively in teams to ensure their communications program makes increasingly bigger impacts on internal and external communications, and consequently on poverty reduction. Communicating the results of research more effectively will not, however, on its own, lead to more or better pro-poor policies and actions. To help close that gap, ILRI's communications team has come up with two pillars for its program:

- (1) more relevant and timely **products for** stakeholders *and their development intermediaries*
- (2) more productive **engagement with** stakeholders *and their wider constituencies*

Four principles guide ILRI's communications strategy:

- (1) **THE BUSINESS:** Generating knowledge products is the institute's primary business; communicating those knowledge products accurately, quickly, powerfully (e.g. in ways that optimize their uptake) is the main business of ILRI's communications team.
- (2) **THE VEHICLES:** ILRI will rely predominately on electronic vehicles (email, web, CD-ROM and multimedia) for its communications products and services to reach the largest numbers and broadest kinds of stakeholders in the fastest and cheapest ways possible.
- (3) **THE FOCUS:** Because the *context* in which research is communicated can be decisive in determining the impacts of communications on decisions and actions, ILRI is widening its focus on scientific communications to encompass scientific relevance, utility, timeliness and engagement with others in the development business.
- (4) **THE ROLE:** ILRI communications teams view their role as *connecting people and knowledge* in iterative, dynamic two-way flows of communication that help establish productive relationships and 'pull' clients towards evidence-based livestock knowledge.

3 HISTORY, ORGANIZATION AND EXTERNAL REVIEW

In 2003, ILRI developed a new poverty-focused strategy, restructured the institute's research into five themes, and brought all communications activities together under a Partnerships and Communications Division. Activities of the latter include library and information services; web-based systems, multimedia and printed publications; public awareness and graphics; and information technologies. In mid-2003, an internally commissioned external review was conducted of ILRI communications.

ILRI Communications falls within the Partnerships and Communications Division. The other units in this division are: (1) *Partnerships*, which is the direct responsibility of the Director of Partnerships and Communications; (2) *Information Technology*, headed by a joint appointee of ILRI and the World AgroForestry Centre (ICRAF), also headquartered in Nairobi; and (starting in 2006) (3) *Capacity Strengthening*, which helps build institutional capacity for livestock research for development and oversees technical and graduate (MSc, PhD) training.

ILRI considers communications to encompass both information services and systems and public awareness work; the 2003 Communications Review looked at both these functions. ILRI's **Information Program** is responsible for: (1) traditional library services (including training and consultancy for national and regional partners) and the design and implementation of the new InfoCentre concept in Nairobi and Addis Ababa; (2) technical development, architecture/navigation design and management of the institute's external website and internal intranet (called 'ilrinet'); (3) design and implementation of project- and collaborators' websites, (4) consultancy services for the design and implementation of Knowledge Management Systems (5) content, reviews and branding of publications published in six institutional series; (6) multimedia graphics services, (7) systems design to enhance internal communications; and (8) design and production of multimedia based training materials for the purpose of capacity building, knowledge dissemination and exchange. The Information Program also participates actively in the ICT-KM Initiative of the CGIAR and is strongly involved in the virtual library project as well as in the e-publishing and e-learning initiatives. Information Services are represented at the national steering committees for agricultural information systems in Kenya as well as Ethiopia.

ILRI's corporate **Public Awareness Program** is responsible for: (1) raising public and donor awareness of, and interest in, ILRI's mission and work, (2) raising ILRI's standing in scientific and development circles, (3) supporting strategically important partnerships of ILRI and the CGIAR, and (4) enhancing internal communications. These objectives are achieved by building corporate identity, maintaining a newsworthy website (content in all sections of the website other than the research theme pages are the responsibility of Public Awareness) series of popular and persuasive print and online corporate materials (e.g. annual reports, briefs, articles). Among recommendations the 2003 Communications Review made to ILRI were to develop a communications strategy that adopts a strategic and systemic approach comprising the following four elements.

(1) Resource communications appropriately for impact.

Increase the percentage of institutional resources committed to communications work. In 2003, ILRI was expending less than 2% of its total budget of US\$30.3 on communications activities while DFID was spending about 4% and other knowledge agencies were typically spending between 10 and 15%.*

(2) Mainstream communications work throughout the institute.

Mainstream communications work at all levels of the institute and ensure that communications is used as a strategic business tool lying at the heart of ILRI's strategy. For example, help researchers communicate better among each other and to communicate the relevance, excitement and high quality of their work to more and more varied external stakeholders.

(3) Raise ILRI's reputation and profile.

Help raise ILRI's reputation as world leaders in livestock science for development. Further develop and institutionalize ILRI's corporate identity and consolidate public awareness activities, producing more flagship products.

(4) Transform ILRI's major information and communication vehicles.

Further exploit the exciting opportunities of new information and communication technologies to transform the libraries into state-of-the-art InfoCentres and electronic Portals that make ILRI a livestock knowledge reference centre of first resort. Develop a holistic electronic communications strategy and plan that transform ILRI's intranet and website into the institute's prime vehicles for internal and external communications, respectively.

4 STAKEHOLDERS AND PRODUCTS

Following consultations during and after the 2003 communications review, which included capturing perceptions and recommendations from ILRI partners and clients, communications staff determined who ILRI's prime stakeholders were and matched these with ILRI communications products, with the technical level suiting each stakeholder group, and with primary dissemination vehicles for each stakeholder groups[§].

(1) SCIENTIFIC EXPERTS

ILRI scientists and scientific partners in the CGIAR, IARCS and NARS.

This stakeholder group is served by the following expert communications:

- Specialized scientific publications, including refereed journal articles.
- ILRI 'Project Report' Series.
- ILRI 'Proceedings' Series.

Circulation is largely via print and online scientific channels, with scientific abstracts, posters and whole books and papers posted on ILRI's website theme pages and partner websites (e.g. vSLP, AGORA, SINGER) and via ILRI's Libraries, InforServices and virtual InfoCentre and InfoPortal; with databases, decision-support tools and training materials available online (e.g. ILRI Bioinformatics Website and AGR training materials).

* Canada's International Development Research Centre, for example, in 2003 was spending 14% of its annual budget on 'knowledge-intensive' activities over and above substantial communications activities conducted within the research projects themselves. Starting in 2003, DFID increased its communications budget in three ways to increase its impacts on poverty: (1) it raised expenditure on communications activities conducted outside its research projects to 10% of DFID's total research budget; (2) it reserved another 10% of specific project funding for communications activities to be conducted within projects; and (3) it reserved a further 10–25% of the total research grant for research on communication issues. DFID also raised its communications staffing to IDRC levels, which then amounted to 2.2 professional communications staff employed per million pounds of research. (ILRI, in contrast, with a total 2003 budget of about £20 million, employed just 7 communications professionals [only 2 of them at international levels]—which represents 0.35 communication staff per million pounds of research. If ILRI maintained the same staff/budget ratio as IDRC, it would be staffed with 44 rather than 7 communications professionals.)

[§] Regarding ILRI's web-based vehicles of dissemination, both ILRI's internal intranet and external website employ state-of-the-art content management systems and a distributive system of focal points to feed the sites information. ILRI's intranet ('ilrinet') enables two-way information flows among staff that promote openness, inclusiveness and transparency while also serving as electronic workspaces, ILRI's daily newspaper (with more than 30 focal points posting news largely independent of managerial oversight), a one-stop depository of current institutional information, and an archive for institutional memory. ILRI's (external) website not only broadly disseminates ILRI knowledge products among external readers but also solicits and disseminates reader feedback, thereby monitoring perceptions about ILRI, deepening relationships with ILRI's stakeholders, and channelling inputs into ILRI's learning processes.

(2) **DEVELOPMENT PROFESSIONALS**

Donor agents, development experts, UN agencies, development media, think tanks, policy analysts, national bureau of statistics, professional and learned societies, research councils.

This stakeholder group is served by the following authoritative communications:

- Annual reports, institutional brochures and other corporate handouts.
- Special reports (high-profile ‘white paper’ reports on international public goods).
- ILRI ‘Research Report’ Series.
- ILRI ‘Discussion Paper’ Series.

Circulation is via expert consultations (e.g. on national Poverty Reduction Strategies), ILRI information packages disseminated at major events, one-on-one distribution by directors to visitors/those visited, ILRI’s website home page and via postings on donor and partner websites (e.g., Wellcome, FAO, OIE, SAKSS).

(3) **POLICYMAKERS**

Decision-, opinion- and policymakers, politicians, global knowledge networks, development banks, regional organizations (e.g. ISAAA, ASARECA, COMESA), public affairs programs, charitable foundations.

This stakeholder group is served by the following re-purposed/policy-oriented communications:

- ILRI ‘Policy Brief’ Series.
- Stakeholder workshops.
- Speeches and presentations at high-profile fora.

Circulation is primarily via brochures; tailor-made information packages; ILRI and partner websites (e.g. ASARECA, NEPAD, SDP, FARA, IPMS, BecA); repackaging services (e.g. ID21, ELDIS, Global Development Network, SciDevNet) and broader learning platforms (e.g. on-line interactive gateways, e-conferences); newspaper op-eds and paid-for advertisements, and oral briefings and slide presentations.

(4) **DEVELOPMENT INTERMEDIARIES**

NGOs; CSOs; women’s groups and other change agents; government officials; national media, service providers, entrepreneurs and universities; private industry; development and research providers.

This stakeholder group is served by the following advisory/advocacy-oriented communications:

- Issue and position briefs.
- Multi-institutional brochures.
- Multimedia productions.

Circulation is largely via ILRI’s website top pages, displays and handouts at workshops, conferences and major events (e.g. WSSD, CBD COP), specialized information networks (e.g. One-World Net, PANOS, e-discussion lists), and mix-and-match information kits created on demand.

(5) **MEDIA AND PUBLIC**

International media and the general public.

This stakeholder group is served by the following popular/lay communications:

- News releases and feature stories.
- Video clips of staff interviews (e.g. in ‘Hard’ and ‘Soft’ Talks filmed at ILRI’s APM)
- ILRI ‘Research for Development Bulletins’ Series.

Circulation is largely via mass and specialized media (e.g. *New Agriculturist* and press offices in partner institutions); media launches, panel discussions and other high-profile fora; ILRI’s

web home page and bi-monthly email newsletter; media packs and other printed handouts; national television and radio programs.

(6) **END USERS**

Agricultural trainers and extension agents; livestock farmers, marketers and consumers and their organizations (e.g. consumer and producer organizations) and local knowledge networks (e.g. cooperatives); local politicians; local teachers and trainers and their educational and training institutes.

This stakeholder group is served by the following educational/instructional communications:

- Radio interviews and shows.
- Newspaper inserts.
- Training manuals and guides.
- Questionnaires and surveys

Circulation is largely via radio programs (e.g. via AGFAX radio packs and TVE's Hands-On videos), specialized websites (e.g. ILRI-FAO Dairy Portal); and printed materials and CD-ROMs distributed at agricultural shows, open days and training courses and by our downstream development partners.

5 OUTCOMES SOUGHT

Greater utility

Staff and partners are provided with state-of-the-art communication products, vehicles and services. Classical library services are transformed into communications centres with inviting physical facilities conducive to high-profile art exhibitions, seminars and meetings and with a video and multimedia corner, an internet café and more. Information is packaged in formats appropriate to the needs and interests of ILRI's six key stakeholder groups: (1) scientific experts, (2) development professionals, (3) policymakers, (4) development intermediaries, (5) media and public, and (6) end users. (E.g. publications of proceedings of meetings, for example, give greatest prominence to syntheses, recommendations and highlights of discussions.) South-North, North-South and South-South research communication flows are increased and enhanced. Increasing numbers of local and individual scientists are able to engage international research groups and their investors.

Greater influence

ILRI's sphere of influence is enlarged beyond the CGIAR. Mainstream journalists and their editors are persuaded of the value of publishing livestock-oriented stories. Public understanding of the need to conduct research to address livestock challenges in developing countries is advanced and livestock issues impinging predominantly on the poor are brought to the front of the development agenda. Public and donor perceptions and expectations of livestock research for development work are managed to sustain support for that work over the long term and to mitigate threats to that work as they arise. New constituencies, networks and momentum are built to mobilize livestock research for development. Policy analysts and processes are identified, reached and engaged to introduce new concepts and ways of thinking about livestock issues. ILRI becomes widely known in research and development circles in the North and South as the world's leading international livestock research for development institute and becomes a primary source of livestock information.

Greater engagement

Public awareness of, and participation in, livestock research for development is raised. Many more of our partners speak on our behalf and do so more powerfully and with greater effect. Opinion makers, civil society leaders and agricultural research end users are increasingly engaged in livestock discussions and feedback. Relationships with ILRI's traditional stakeholders are refreshed while relations with new kinds of stakeholders are built, both leading to increased financial and intellectual support for pro-poor livestock research.

Greater impacts

Governments, donor organizations, think tanks, universities, international institutions, non-governmental- and civil society organizations, private industries and others are helped to make informed pro-poor decisions in livestock research and development. An increasing number of evidence-based policies and actions that favour sustainable livestock pathways out of poverty are implemented in an increasing number of regions, impacting increasing numbers of poor people.

6 STRATEGIES EMPLOYED

COMMUNICATION PRODUCTS

- 1 Simultaneously increase the quantity, quality, relevance and utility of information ILRI makes available to its stakeholders and others.
- 2 Establish an internet-based database of basic information about all ILRI research projects and products.
- 3 Focus on research project outcomes rather than projects themselves.
- 4 Expend significant resources each year amassing new high-quality stories and images for the annual report and then annually recycle these in a dozen other spin-off products (e.g. calendar, posters, postcards, screensaver) that keeps the corporate image fresh.

DISSEMINATION VEHICLES

- 5 Shift ILRI's communications centre of gravity from print to online for bigger and more cost-effective impacts and devolve responsibility for posting information on ILRI's intranet and website to a distributed system of staff focal points.
- 6 Build and/or support open-source environments to democratize information flows between North and South and help construct advanced and cost-effective communication platforms for other key actors in livestock research for development (e.g. AU, NEPAD) to enhance their communications.
- 7 Institutionalize e-publishing systems that facilitate on-going creation of a hierarchy of linked communications products published on a variety of platforms for a wide assortment of users.
- 8 Disseminate new knowledge widely and quickly by building an electronic livestock research portal.
- 9 Rather than create new communications delivery systems, systematically use research 'conveyor belts' to disseminate news and information and encourage repackaging and recycling of research information by plugging into existing communications systems (e.g. email and internet); networks (e-discussion lists and bulletin boards, e-research networks, regional research networks); development intermediaries (NGOs, CSOs); partners (FAO and OIE); and specialist agencies (SciDevDet, WRENMedia's AgFax).

INTERNAL COMMUNICATION SERVICES

- 10 Provide electronic platforms that align administrative, research and other systems and help improve knowledge management within ILRI.
- 11 Step up communication services to regional staff and develop a slide show and multimedia product introducing ILRI for travelling staff and visitors that, together with the rest of ILRI's portfolio of corporate products, help inculcate ILRI's core messages into staff and populate those among outsiders.
- 12 Form a publishing review committee that ensures all research activities have planned for appropriate communication strategies, processes and products with sufficient budgets to implement/produce them.
- 13 Develop publishing and branding guidelines to ensure all ILRI researchers adopt an approved unified style in their communications, get them reviewed appropriately, and employ the most cost-effective vehicles for delivering their products to stakeholders.
- 14 Strengthen the communications skills of scientists and research managers, particularly in synthesizing and putting research into context so its relevance is clear, promoting research products and policy recommendations, and managing the media (e.g. being interviewed, developing talking points, staying on message).

EXTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS

- 15 Provide information and information services that encourage not only adoption and adaptation of new livestock technologies and knowledge but also feedback on their use.
- 16 Exploit global news and events to highlight the central importance of livestock, livestock research and livestock development in pathways out of poverty.
- 17 Develop products that are story-driven (relying on anecdotes, messages, images) rather than information-driven to attract people to our knowledge (as against pushing it at them) and to keep their attention.
- 18 Systematically link all project communications posted on ILRI's website to the websites of the major agencies funding and otherwise supporting those projects.
- 19 Monitor and evaluate ILRI communications for feedback that will sharpen communication impacts on poverty reduction.