# The documentation of good practice in sustainable agriculture:

## A survey and study of documentation methods and dissemination techniques

Email: tomejm@gaianet.org

# What is sustainable agriculture?

The opening question of the survey, to which forms a large part of this research paper, invited participants to put forward their definition of sustainable agriculture, whether it be a personal statement or a definition which one associated with. Below are some of the responses. This page is a first step in a process to find some common definition between groups involved in documentation.

"Sustainable Agriculture may be seen as a pattern of agriculture that gives the idea of longevity and durability trough time, based on social processes that valorise and stimulate local culture, knowledge, and autonomy on an ecosystem management that maintains its productivity capacity and dynamics and on economic bases that provides farmers well fare. Within the farmers its more commonly called as agroecolgy or ecological agriculture."

"sustainable agriculture is local livelihood security...Communities have a major role to play in water management, especially in these eco-regions. Even in ecological regions like the plains, where the state already plays an important role, the role of communities and households can be strengthened by making water everybody's business."

"Sustainable agriculture is conserving and promotion of indigenous and local agricultural practices in a holistic production management system, which promotes and enhances agro- ecosystem including bio diversity, biological cycles and soil biological activity."

"Sustainable agriculture is a system of production, which integrates regenerative processes, such as nutrient cycling, nitrogen fixation, soul regeneration and natural enemies of pests, into the food production process. It builds on farmers' knowledge and skills to make productivity use of social capital, by for example collective action for pest, watershed, irrigation and forest management It manages natural resources sustainability."

"Sustainable Agriculture is agriculture which meets today's livelihood needs, without preventing the needs of neighbours or future generations from being met. This is achieved by the continuous efforts of men, women and children to adapt complex rural (or urban) livelihoods to a changing environment, so as to protect and enhance stocks of natural, physical, human and social capital available to themselves and future generations."

## Where can we go from here ?

Amongst the many definitions of sustainable agriculture we find a common thread. Can organisations collectively create some key common points to which all those involved in the documentation process relate to? Would this then encourage greater joint working strategies in the future? This paper invites further definitions and understandings of sustainable agriculture from which future key points could be created. Please email your contribution to: tomejm@gaianet.org

# Evaluation of survey and research on Good Practice in Sustainable Agriculture

This project was initiated by a number of groups involved in the documenting of Good Practice in Sustainable Agriculture (including the Gaia Foundation, members of the UK Food Group and Both Ends from Holland). Collectively these groups felt it timely to take a look at who else was involved in the process of documentation in order to create a clearer picture on which to base possible next steps.

The Project was divided into two areas. Firstly a questionnaire was created and sent round, via email, to a large global audience involved in both the documenting and promoting of sustainable agricultural methods. The survey was written to encourage participants to give information on documentation that they were currently involved in as well as to comment on the possibilities of using good practice in the future, with the potential of creating joint working strategies.

The second area of the project was largely researched-based and focussed on the documentation of good practices in sustainable agriculture on the internet. Here roughly one hundred global web pages, in the field SA, were searched through and only twelve were given a thorough examination. This is because the others simply did not carry enough weight in their content and the author felt it inappropriate to review them (see appendix). The web research complimented the questionnaire to create a number of interesting results. The following document is an analyses of these results and is set-out under four sections (see contents).

The questionnaire and web results collected for this project have been amalgamated and are clearly displayed as 'questionnaire results' and 'web results' in each section. Finally a third branch, 'conclusions, tools and futures', has been added to suggest possible outcomes from the results. Together, these three branches make up the findings of this project.

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The information from this project is for all to look over and use wherever needed. It has been carried out with those involved in the documentation of sustainable agriculture in mind, we hope you find it useful. If you have any queries about this project or would like to find out more information about working in joint strategy with sustainable agricultural groups then please email Tom Doust at the Gaia Foundation: tomejm@gaianet.org

N.B. It is important to point out that this project was initiated in August 2001 when many colleagues in the field of sustainable agriculture, particularly from Europe and North American offices, were on vacation at some point in the month. In hindsight perhaps the questionnaire part of this project should have been carried at a more appropriate time. As a result the surveying of opinions on the questionnaire is not as substantial as was hoped, neither is it conclusive. Ultimately it has endeavoured to gauge an opinion from a cross-section of groups involved in activities relating to this project.

## The language of this document

This research document uses some language that on occasion needs a little explanation. Reference to which is show below.

- This document refers to the term 'best practice' as 'good practice'. Often when working in this field 'best practice' is the preferred term. The term 'good practice' is used in this document so as to remain impartial.

- Occasionally the abbreviations SA and GP appear. SA is an abbreviation for Sustainable Agriculture and GP is for Good Practice.

- Often the word 'portal' is referred to in this document. It is used on its own and in combination with web e.g. web portal. In this case the word is used in the context that a portal is a place (whether it be physical space or cyber space) of entry to a wider field, which harbours information.

# Contents:

# Symbols

The following symbols run throughout this document. Their meanings are stated below:

? = Questionnaire results

 = Web results

 = conclusions, tools and futures

Section 1

# Establishing a who's who and who's doing what in the field of documenting 'good practice'

## - Definitions of sustainable agriculture -

This concept was put forward in terms of defining sustainable agriculture within the documenting process. It was seen by some as being a hurdle to future joint working strategies simply because there are so many definitions out there. The Questionnaire results brought an interesting pattern between North and South. The web research brought an extremely wide range of definitions. On the whole there were obvious key similarities in defining sustainable agriculture and in conclusions tools and futures the suggestion is made that perhaps a general consensus could be reached with the adoption of straight forward concise terms of reference.

For Southern nation candidates the definition of sustainable agriculture seemed quite clear. Methods of SA are considered very much as a "social process" with strong links to the local farming communities. This 'social process' was there to "stimulate local culture, knowledge and autonomy on an ecosystem management that maintains it productivity capacity and dynamics", whilst maintaining the welfare of the farmer. Water was also seen as a key to maintaining the sustainable welfare of communities from the Southern nations. It was important, commented one candidate, to make water "everybody's' business". Colleagues from nations in the northern hemisphere saw defining SA as more problematic. With so many definitions around it was important to promote the idea of gaining a consensus among NGOs of what the term 'sustainable agriculture' meant in practice.

Given that the Internet is reasonably free and open to those with the technology to upload information, it is perhaps a dangerous place to pursue the term 'sustainable agriculture'. Definitions were varied and often reflected the geo-political climate of the country to which the information or terms on the web-page originated from. What was clear were the basic terms of sustainability e.g. that agricultural methods were, in practice, applied with a view to sustaining the land. However some examples of SA were displayed on the internet as being 'sustainable' simply because they had adopted some sustainable methods. One example, from Canada, documented one farmers success at introducing an integrating system to improve his potato production. His introduction of waterflow wetlands, new mulching initiatives, and the careful planting, instead of removal, of hedgerows earned him the title of 'land steward'. However the documentation quite casually concluded that the farmer, Mr. Webster, quite happily sprayed his fields and that his potato crop turned out to be a newly bio-genetically engineered potato called Russet Burbank New Leaf (all under the banner of sustainable agricultural practices). This example was a dangerous contradiction.

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# - Purpose of documentation -

This question was put forward in the research to determine the general direction behind why documentation was being used and what achievements were sort. The main focus here was to look at the promotion of good practices.

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Respondents from the questionnaire were united in the belief that documentation would promote good sustainable methods of agriculture. Documentation of projects would provide a good basis for those involved in sustainable methods of agriculture to attain knowledge and methodologies, which could then be used and applied for ones own use or for influencing policy makers and critiquing industrial models of agriculture. Documentation was viewed as offering a basis for securing solid networks for the promotion of a better practice.

The web revealed quite a clear reason for documentation. Almost all the closely examined web pages saw it as a promotional tool. Some spoke of it as a way to inspire decision-makers and to network those involved in implementation. Other pages were more specific but generally spoke to the general need to ‘promote’. One site saw documentation as way to reverse the gradual disintegration of support for social and cultural structures while another saw it as the only way to keep up with the information and developments of new studies into SA. Another site echoed this claiming that the greatest challenge [they] faced was to make sure information was made available to others and to work out how best that information could be used.

In the territory surveyed in this project Documentation is clearly considered to be a good way of promoting SA. While there is an agreeing position on this, it is worth considering the next steps (and the steps that have already been taken) regarding how best the information, produced by documentation, can be disseminated. This research attempts to answer some this questions.

# - The audience and outreach -

This area looked at who those documenting where hoping to influence. The questionnaire results lead the way in a unanimous agreement amongst those documenting that the audience was as a large as possible. Questions also posed and considered included how, and with what methods, the audience were reached.

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Answers on the questionnaire included “we try to reach everyone” but largely the following groups emerged: Non-governmental organisations (NGOs), including environmental; development; consumer; farming; and animal welfare, the media, students and teachers, researches, farmers and politicians. There also seemed to be a strong link between the methods used for outreach of the documentation. Publications and articles, seminars, courses, radio and TV programmes, farmer to farmer approaches, and the (potential) use of a web site were all common responses. One innovative idea explained how individuals and interested institutions are presented with the opportunity to go on a paani yatras (water pilgrim). Here those on the pilgrim are taken to see successful ‘community efforts’ in water management, allowing them to interact and learn about the projects first-hand. Examples like this were seen as successful ways of influencing people’s understanding of sustainable agricultural methods, ultimately influencing future outcomes.

Electronic web based documentation largely meant that the outreach was dominantly an internet audience. Those lucky enough to have internet (or any) access could gain from this new medium. However some pages offered their information in conjunction with other methods of dissemination. One such web page had begun as an unpublished book which gained publicity by setting up a web page based on the information in the book. This, the author concluded, allowed her to reach out to a wider audience. Other sites were accompanied by quarterly or by-quarterly publications/magazine which could be subscribed to and were made free to citizens in developing nations. Finally a site, which worked as a best practice database, had it’s entire database of over a thousand case studies available on CD-ROM (however this is still very much a computer aided approach).

Innovative and fresh approaches to dissemination of information seem to offer positive solutions to reaching new and existing audiences. It would appear that both the questionnaire and the web results show that there is a strong argument for using all sorts of differing mediums and influence as many different people as possible. The internet and its rapid technological advancement has the huge potential to offer new and exciting methods of dissemination including imagery, video, audio, and downloadable PDFs files (which could carry very useful documentation material). However, a note of caution needs to be added. Globally, the internet is still very much an exclusive tool. If the internet were used in the future, it would need to be accompanied by the already successful more traditional and innovative methods of dissemination carried out by groups across the world.

# - Next Steps -

This area researched and questioned where groups' priorities lay regarding their next steps. The questionnaire results sighted an overall desire for people to keep on advancing with their documentation techniques while the web displayed that forward thinking initiatives were not quite as sustaining.

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The trend showed that candidates answering the questionnaire were all working in sustainable agriculture to push their work forward and to network and work, collectively and in partnerships, to create databases for "social mobilisation". Candidates also expressed an interest in forthcoming global events like the (recently cancelled) World Food Summit +5, The Convention of Bio-Diversity and the Rio+10 Conference on Sustainability. These global events were all seen as possible times when groups could pull together information surrounding documentation and use it to influence decision-makers.

The internet web pages researched displayed less forward-thinking initiatives. Whilst a couple of sites were using documentation with global events in mind (e.g. the United Nations and FAO's contributions) the majority of the web sites reviewed seemed to fall short of displaying a next steps strategy. Some sites suffered from neglect and had not been updated for years whilst others displayed little evidence of using documentation for future happenings despite carrying mission statements stating the importance of using documentation to inspire and empower. One or two of the better web sites did seem to display that their documentation was an on-going project.

It is encouraging to see that communities and groups across the world are working toward improvements in SA. It is worth noting that the majority of web pages documenting good practices are stopping short of producing ongoing projects. This is important to understand in terms of the web becoming a dumping ground of information which is not sustained. Rather than being updated on an existing portal, more and more portals are appearing and, ultimately, creating a waste ground of information to sift through. This leaves outdated web sites on the internet. The best web portals are those which are continually updated, refreshed and well connected or linked; offering something new to offer each time one visits.

Section 2

# Good Practice - a mobilising tool

## - Linking up a world wide network -

This area proposed the concept of linking up nodes across the world to maximise the use of global knowledge. It also looked at the accessibility the internet has to offer to create a super portal of good sustainable agricultural practice documentation and tools. The question also posed that this portal could provide greater accessibility.

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Questionnaire candidates highlighted that the idea was an "excellent" one and that they would be interested in participating in it if it were to go ahead. When questioned on how this could be achieved those taking part suggested that once a clear terms of reference had been developed then a process of funding, designing, identifying, classifying (then setting out plans to maintain a site) should begin. The methods in which these good practices themselves are displayed should also be carefully planned, including how to document the innovative experiences (e.g, their processes, costs and utilisation). Candidates were also asked about alternative ways of scaling up the profile and accessibility of information and those responding suggested that creative global meetings along with new global publications and catalogues of those documenting could either accompany or be alternatives to just a web page.

Research from the internet showed that (to the best of the researchers ability) there did not exist a super internet portal specifically designed for the documentation of good sustainable agricultural practices. There did exist several good portals which included an area for the documentation of good practices. These sites were kept updated (daily) and submitted 'good' practices were added to a kind of continual database. One site had a central web portal which linked off to various offices in the world who intern had their own web pages for that region (hosted by the main portal). These regions included Cairo, Dakar, Delhi, Johannesburg, Nairobi and Singapore. This large Canadian NGO had the capacity for this (given that it could support several nodes around the world). The main portal also displayed two interesting 'ticking clocks'. These two clocks displayed the earth's population counting up and underneath the world's productive land, in hectares, counting down (a very effective message). Another web site, which hosts the concept of nodes, is Greenpeace.org .Here you can visit the main site or go to a Greenpeace web page from about 40 countries which have their own Greenpeace sites.

It would appear that there would be support for the linking up of a global network and that part of this focus could be based on a global web portal. This portal could learn from frameworks that already exist by establishing a main portal and then having nodes from different parts of the world linked to this main portal. The portal could promote awareness on the web and through more traditional methods of communication e.g. publicising or simply exhibiting. The main portal could be set-up so that people from various locations across the world could feed into the content of this site, however some clear terms of reference would need to be established and agreed upon before submission of information. Today web pages are being designed so that people can feed in their own information, indeed a web programmer can construct templates which allow web users to submit material/content. This process could mirror the structure of a magazine/newspaper where someone documenting could submit a piece of work, and the 'editor' of the web site could make sure it falls into the right criteria.

# - Critiquing methods of good practice presentation on the internet -

This was not an area covered by the questionnaire, however the author of this document felt it a necessary inclusion given that the research he conducted revealed that documentation of GPs were not being presented with their full potential in mind.

Perhaps the most consistent research results which emerged, during the study of the internet, was the fact that examples of documentation were often poorly presented and disseminated. Ultimately this effected their value as a tool. All to often documentation of GPs were pasted on the internet as long streams of text which were not easily digestible nor easily printable (e.g. printer friendly so that a document is printed as condensed and neatly as is possible). This dissemination was neither innovative nor inspiring and one had to question its worth as a tool to be used or applied. Examples which were successful were thoughtfully laid-out and presented clearly and concisely. However all documentation researched on the internet fell short of being to apply itself. This means that documentation of GPs of SA on the internet appeared to lack the information needed if one were to use it for the multiple of uses suggested by those who completed questionnaires.

There is scope and huge potential for the documentation of good practices on the internet. Ultimately large swaths of information fall short of being useful when they are simply pasted on a web page. They are also not particularly useful when they claim to be tools for aiding good practices of SA. Solutions to this problem are research documents like this one. Learning from what already exists and proposing ideas expressed from a wider audience is a good place to start. Further ideas have been expressed in the following branch ‘using good practice as a mobilising tool’.

# - Different ways of using good practice as a tool -

This category researched the idea that good practices could be used as a mobilising tool to promote sustainable agriculture. The questionnaire received comments of differing ideas in which GP could be used while the web researched ways in which GP documentation was being displayed and what was trying to be achieved. In solutions, tools and futures are some conclusions and potential future outcomes.

On the whole it was agreed that good practices would be a useful tool for promoting issues of sustainable agriculture. The questionnaire proposed that communities schools and universities, NGOs, and new digital mediums could all be areas where good practices could be used to promote SA. This was largely agreed with by all participants of the questionnaire. Comments were also made on some of the proposed practices. Providing good practices as a tool for communities across the world was seen as a good way of highlighting alternatives and benefits of sustainable agriculture. Awareness building within communities through media publications and publicity events was also key in creating wider support for SA The use of GP for policy proposals was seen as a good opportunity to finding a general consensus in defining sustainable agriculture. New mediums of technology were also seen as positive steps to keep up with more institutional views of Agriculture, which were perhaps occupying the ground.

There is clear evidence on the web that many are attempting to promote SA by documenting good sustainable practices. There is also clear evidence that sites documenting see their documentation as a tool. Indeed www.bestpractices.org they view their documentation as a way to 'develop new learning tools and methods' and the Indigenous Knowledge and development Monitor saw knowledge as "the cornerstone of development". Some web pages suggested that their documentation could be seen as part of a useful tool kit made up of other useful tools like articles and policy papers (methods of implementation are explained in tools, solutions and futures).

Given that there seems to be clear support for GP and its use as a valuable tool, ways into the future could look at the possibility of bringing information together and making it available for all. One clear answer would be to have a Web portal where information is freely available. The idea of hosting an online Tool Box for information on sustainable agriculture is also a possibility. Within this tool box would be successful examples of SA. These Good Practices could then harbour information for all levels of application of sustainable agriculture. E.g. whether it be that you wanted to apply sustainable agriculture to your policy paper or report, apply sustainable agriculture in ones school or University or simply wanting to apply sustainable agriculture in ones back garden - the information would be available. One of the main problems with current documentation of good practices on the web is that it often falls short of allowing itself to be applied (as discussed in the previous branch 'critiquing methods of Good Practice on the internet'). One such programme which could make this application of good practice suitably available would be 'Acrobat PDF writer'. This programme allows one to create and neatly present entire documents of differing sorts, it's potential is huge and it offers many creative and imaginative options to disseminating information. Once a document is created it is then reasonably condensed (as a file) and then easily downloadable for all to either print out or view on ones computer.

Once again it is important to note that whilst these suggestions seem like forward-thinking solutions, it is also important to bare in mind that not 'all' have computers, printers and internet access. Indeed global technology is still very exclusive. If the technological option of promoting good practices were to be pursued then there would need to be a system which would allow those without access to have the information available. Suggestions include a network of global nodes who could distribute information locally (by post) on demand or who could hold a small space/library with the resources available for people to come and use or attain.right criteria.

# - The potential for the creation of an information Portal -

This category looked at the possibilities behind continuing the promotion of documentation in partnership with the potential creation of a web portal. It gauged support for the idea and researched to see if a portal was necessary. The questionnaire and web results also pull from various other branches of this research.

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The questionnaire posed a question relating to 'what more could be done' in terms of encouraging GP for the future. Respondents to the questionnaire agreed that encouragement would be a good idea and seemed keen to keep the process in motion. By propelling further documentation candidates felt that there would be inevitable advantages and that the process would benefit from the launching of a web site.

After extensive research on the internet this study came to the conclusion that there are very few well-maintained web sites on the internet, which deal with the case studies and the documentation of good/best practices. At one stage this study become disillusioned over the idea that an information/web portal, carrying good practices, could be created. Given the vastness of information that exists on the internet, would the creation of a new web portal simply add to the trillions of pages of information that float around in a cyber space? And how accessible would a new portal be? If GP is regarded as a tool, would people use the internet as a tool to promote sustainable agriculture? Answers to these questions are proposed below.

If the ambitious [collective] creation of an information/web portal were to be carried through then the following web design thoughts would (potentially) need to be taken into consideration.

-Firstly that a portal would need some careful planning with its creation. As opposed to simply pasting good practices on the web with heavy text content, good practices would need to be concise and clear and offer options for application. This way those visiting the information portal would be able to find what they were looking for relatively quickly and be able to download the information they need so that this could be viewed Offline on the computer or printed out from a printer. It would also need to look distinct in design, using small symbols, small images and easily navigable links (This method has been very successfully adopted at BBC online: www.bbc.co.uk along with use of new media options like online Audio-Video).

-Secondly the web portal would need to be well-maintained. This would mean that one person would need to be given the responsibility of regularly updating a web portal with information (including up to date news). These are the kind of things that attract people back to a web page as opposed to flicking through it once and never returning. This would also help build a reputation for the web page, that it would be a place to go for ones needs.

-Thirdly the information portal would need to be clear that its development was for a specific purpose. This means that careful evaluation and assessments would need to be carried out in order evaluate the success of the project. This kind of evaluation could accompany a report to show whoever was funding such a programme.

-Finally, the logistics of the creation of such a portal would need looking into. Perhaps one of the most encouraging things is that if this kind of project were web based then the cost of setting-up and maintenance would/could be low if existing skills are enhanced. Higher costs may be incurred during the accumulation of GP examples..

Section 3

# Joint Strategies

## - Advantages to potential joint strategies -

This looked into possible joint working strategies which could be formed between organisation involved in the documentation of good practices. It is worth noting that the questionnaire results do not address as broad an opinion as was hoped, however there does seem to be a general agreement among those working in documentation of SA that by coming together, groups could lift the profile of the issues.

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The questionnaire showed that people thought that there were advantages to joint strategies and that the benefits would include things like a greater sharing of information, the organisation of joint events, working together and bringing information together to take a greater stance on lobbying. Also it showed that joint strategies would be achieveable through the setting up of a web page and through working toward events like FAO+5 and Rio+10. The questionnaire also looked at the advantages joint strategies would bring to 'promoting' SA. Answers looked at the opportunity to enhance dissemination of information and create a greater political voice. It would also promote clarity of SA information, which could then be condensed into a more concise argument against the mainstream system of food production.

The Internet does not show much evidence that joint strategies are being forged to promote the documentation of SA. One site worked as a network portal, linking sustainable eco-villages across the world. However the web showed signs of individual NGO work as opposed to any joint strategies being forged. This shows that there is the potential for the creation of a joint-working web site. The advantages could be extremely beneficial as shown in the questionnaire results.

The future looks like there is potential for working joint strategies. Possible next steps could include the continuation of work already being carried out to form a definition and deeper understanding of SA (perhaps opening it out on a global scale). This work could form the concise criteria needed for a web page if it were to carry examples of good practices. It is worth noting that already working joint strategies exist and the promotion of these strategies will increase the excellent work being carried out by those working in this area.

# - Potential obstacles -

This is an area that was not specifically looked at by any research or surveying. Instead it is an area where the author of this research felt it worth pointing out the potential obstacles that, to some, are an issue. The suggestions made are attempt to put forward some positive approaches.

Potential obstacles are based upon issues surrounding things like 'defining' sustainable agriculture, bringing together a global understanding of what SA is and how it should be applied, particularly with regard to documentation. While these examples are very real issues, it is important to focus on the positive as opposed to the negative. There is a potential for getting bogged down in definitions and collective understandings. Remaining as concise and clear as possible is of the uppermost importance. Research already undertaken in the field is also crucial (as a point of reference). The most important issue here is to find agreement, a consensus and an understanding and act upon it.

# - The use of global events -

With several important global events taking place over the next 12 months, the research felt it important to address the issue of representation. The questionnaire asked whether organisations found large global events useful as a time to promote issues if SA.



All those involved in the questionnaire felt that the use of global events were important although those from the Northern countries cited the larger events as the most important as opposed to those from southern nations feeling that regional events were of equal importance. The main global events were cited as the FAO+5 and the Rio+10, although there was a sense that the RIO+10 was an event that all saw the opportunity to be present at to present a more global opinion. One candidate stated that their organisation would hope to attend the Rio+10 with farmers and colleagues from their good practice projects as a means of promoting SA.

The internet did not specifically express a sense that any portals were working toward large events with use of good practices at the forefront. One site did specifically call for the submissions of good practices or 'success stories' as means of promoting and "sharing positive experiences". However given that this site actually dealt with the issues at hand, it seemed little more than a place to harbour 'positive experiences' with no further steps of implementation taken into consideration.

Given that one site actually had been, in part, established to document good practices for the promotion of SA for (in this case) the FAO+5 (for site address see Appendix), one has to question how successfully these stories are disseminated or used by others? These examples seemed purely to serve as a 'moral' booster and, yet again, showed no immediate means for implementation or further use being pasted on the internet as document with little sustainable use for the future.

Section 4

# Conclusion

## - Should we encourage further documentation of good practice and if so why? -

This area looked at trying to assess the feeling of greater encouragement for good practices to gauge whether further documentation would be a sensible move.

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Once again there was agreement that further evaluation could be carried out and that it was a good idea (if there were enough working hours in the day!). The objective of such a process would be to analyse good practices to identify the principles, processes and conditions that allowed the success of some GP's and the failures of others. This evaluation would then be integrated and used in a future strategies of documentation. Ultimately the sharing of results of an evaluation and the exchange of experiences would create a firm foundation for future documentation.

To some extent this research has carried out an evaluation already. It has concluded that the documentation of GP on the internet has so far failed to be effective with regards to its methods of dissemination. It has touched the surface of how successful good practices appear to be however it has not carried out a deeper analyses of the true successes and failures of these examples, simply because this evaluation should be carried out by someone who is more connected to the practicalities of documentation that are not just internet based.

As suggested above future steps could be made to find someone to carry out a short evaluation of this topic and feed the results back into the process of future good practice documentation steps. The key element here would be the effective analysis of information so that the relevant information could be made available.

# - Is there a need to further evaluate the success and failures of good practices? -

Given that a number of organisations are currently involved in the documentation of sustainable agricultural good practices this branch surveyed to see if a consensus could be found on the possibility of evaluating the successes and failures of good practices.

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The questionnaire brought a resounding YES to the encouragement of further documentation and candidates saw advantages from developing stronger contacts between NGOs and governments through to the development of co-ordinated joint strategies on a global level. One candidate saw a simple ends to the further encouragement of good practice by simply stating that what was needed: “Launching a web site initiative, promoting the event and affording the process”.

This research has suggested that there are strong argument for the further documentation of sustainable agricultural good practices and that this could be achieved by creating a central portal (potentially on the Internet) for a global community to submit information and make it easily usable and freely available to all for application and promotion of SA across the planet. Perhaps now is the time for consolidation of information accompanied by a collective response to pulling together good practices, making sure that these good practices fit within a concise criteria and then feeding into a process of agreement on methods of dissemination. This research is perhaps a starting block for the future.

# - The lessons learnt and a potential way forward -

This project set out to establish who else was involved in the process of documentation of sustainable agriculture in order to create a clearer picture on which to base possible next steps in this field. While it perhaps struggled to gain as wider picture as was hoped with regard to the questionnaire, it has received some very interesting results from both the questionnaire and internet research undertaken and gives many thanks to all those who gave their time.

On the whole, candidates thought that the potential ideas put forward in the questionnaire seemed like a good idea. These ideas worked along the lines of solidarity between groups, working in the field of documentation, and how this solidarity could be brought together as a sense of collectively taking issues of sustainable agriculture forward, using documentation as a means of promoting it.

The research carried out on the internet also brought some interesting results regarding how documentation of SA GP’s were being carried out. In conclusion this research tentatively paves the way for a next steps strategy. Overleaf are potential ideas for next steps. They are presented on three levels of implementation: local, continental and global. They have been included in this document so as to invite feedback from all who receive this paper. This next step process will carry significantly more weight if those involved in this field feedback into this process. Please read over the short proposals over the page and send comments to:

email: tomejm@gaianet.org
Tel: +44 (0) 20 7435 5000
Post: Tom Doust, The Gaia Foundation, 18 Well Walk, Hampstead, London, NW3 1LD, UK

## Concept1
## - A local initiative -

This concept would propose to individual nations that they begin a local initiative based on the results that have emerged from this research. In the case of the UK, for instance, a project could be established to network as many groups involved in the documentation of sustainable agriculture as possible. The project would then accumulate the documentation and disseminate the information through a web portal. The portal would be a user based information site for those interested in issues of sustainable agriculture from lobbying governments through to farming the land. This initiative would be a forerunner to expanding such a project on a wider scale (e.g. Global).

## Concept2
## - A continental initiative: -

This concept would follow a similar format to first initiative but network groups on a continental level. For instance in Europe a portal could be established along with several national nodes from differing European countries. The portal would be available in several languages e.g. French, Spanish and English and would document practices from around Europe and be open to documenting practices from outside the region.

## Concept3
## - A global initiative -

This concept would open the documentation of sustainable agriculture on to a global level. This would involve the setting up of nodes from different areas across the world and establishing a web portal. Groups would then be invited to submit examples of good practices. These examples would need to fit a certain criteria in order to effectively disseminate their results. This initiative could start small and gradually grow- allowing for an organic growth (this growth would be an indicator of how successful the portal and nodes were e.g. if successful then interest would grow with more organisations wishing to submit documentation).

Section 4

# Appendix

## A) Web Pages researched:

On the whole the research of web pages did not reveal any conclusive results. Ultimately the majority of what already exists on the internet appears not to meet the needs for those interested in 'user based' aspects of documentation of good practice. All too often the web sites would claim to offer so much, however in reality this would not translate once one entered the documentation area. During the research a number of pages were looked over and 13 were chosen as suitable or appropriate for a more detailed examination. Other sites simply did not display enough relevant content for closer analysis. The 13 pages reviewed fall into two categories. Category one shows results from two pages - these pages displayed positive methods of dissemination. The second category displays 11 pages, which used methods of dissemination that this research felt reassured the rationale of this paper (that documentation of SA on the internet would be of greater use if it were properly disseminated).
Web pages were searched using the Google internet search engine, arguably the best search engine on the internet. Searches were made using differing combinations of key words (e.g. documentation, best practice, sustainable agriculture, case studies etc). A more detailed analyses on these thirteen pages is available on request. Email: tomejm@gaianet.org

### Category 1) Pages which displayed positive methods of dissemination:

i) www.unep.net

This page delivers environmental information, from a large UN database, through several methods of dissemination. Firstly, the site allows you to search by topic e.g. agriculture, water, waste all in all there are about 35 topics to search from. This is an effective search engine and the information 'results' vary between data, maps and graphics, policy and assessment and 'other'. Secondly one can also search from a large database of national environmental information (many countries displayed) and pull up a whole source of information on one particular country. This is a well thought out site. Methods of dissemination appear successful in some circumstances and there are several topics which would be of use to the sustainable agriculture buffs e.g. Agriculture, Soil and Water. A Critique of this site would question whether the information provided was from viable sources and would suggest that through grassroots initiatives would produce more effective, reliable and sustainable results. However this web page does still to deliver information using a similar format to which a future sustainable agriculture project could adopt.

ii) www.bothends.org/encycl/encycl.html

Both Ends (from Holland) offer an Encyclopedia of Sustainability, a best practice database of over forty initiatives which have successfully adopted sustainable practices. Within this encyclopedia the examples cover mainly best practices in sustainable land use and water management from Europe, Africa and Latin America (predominantly developing countries). This documentation is impressive and offers an abundance of information as well as scope for replication. There is also good contact information. Replication is offered in a 'potential for you' however this is the smallest section in each documentation and it leaves one thinking that this process could go a step further and focus the efforts of converting the success of the practices into 'information packages' e.g. downloads where one can get the information one requires in order to replicate, promote issues, and use as a tool.

## Category 2) Pages which reassure the rationale of the research paper:

i) www.bestpractices.org

Consists of a searchable database containing over 1100 proven solutions from more than 120 countries to the common social, economic and environmental problems of the urbanising world (including sustainable agriculture) and is part of www.sustainable development.org : An information nexus for sustainable development which claims to utilise the latest in Intranet Web technology to provide a community-centre atmosphere for storing, searching and disseminating of sustainable development information. This not a free service and although documentation was informative, it did not show large potential for replication.

ii) www.floridaplants.com/best

The world wide web virtual library on Sustainable Agriculture. Contrary to its web address this site offers examples from across the world however its poor methods of dissemination and broken links leaves the user frustrated and feeling very un-empowered.

iii) http://www.cals.ncsu.edu/sustainable/peet/index.html

Sustainable practices for vegetable production in the South. Originally a book which was put on the internet and then eventually published, this site attempts to provide farmers in the southern states of the U.S. to look at more sustainable practices in an area not traditionally open to sustainable agriculture. Good use of symbols and easy to use pages however the site was out of date and had felt a bit like a ghost town.

iv) www.gaia.org

Global eco-village Network (GEN). The Global Eco-village Network (GEN) is a grassroots organisation linking together a highly diverse world-wide movement of autonomous eco-villages and their related projects. Many Eco-villages offered sustainable agricultural practices though their documentation of their projects did not offer ant signs for replication.

v) www.seedballs.com

seedballs.com: An information/documentation site describing the sustainable qualities of ‘seedballs’. The Seedball method is a traditional approach of food production descended from native American farming practices and are considered to be a very effective and sustainable agricultural method. This site offers some interesting methods of dissemination however was rather reckless with it’s information with regard to replication. e.g. not enough information supplied on the dangers of introducing seedballs into an agricultural system.

vi) www.nuffic.nl/ciran/ikdm

Indigenous Knowledge and Development Monitor. The Indigenous Knowledge and Development Monitor is a journal that serves the international development community and all scientists who share a professional interest in indigenous knowledge systems and practices (IKSP). The Monitor, produced by Nuffic-CIRAN in co-operation with the indigenous knowledge resource centres in various parts of the world, has two sections: articles (examples of good practice) and communications. Examples of good practice were lengthy and came across as write-ups of success stories as opposed replical case studies.

vii) http://www.idrc.ca

The International Development Research Centre (IDRC) is a public corporation created by the Canadian government in 1970 to help developing countries find long-term solutions to the social, economic, and environmental problems they face. This includes support for the promotion of a food security. It also promotes links between those in the developing world with the development and strengthening of electronic networking capacities of institutions in developing countries that receive IDRC funding. Headquarters are based in Canada however there are offices in Cairo, Dakar, Delhi, Jo’Burg, Nairobi, and Singapore - they all have accompanying web sites. Documentation took an interesting format however feel short of providing information for further use.

viii) http://www.fao.org/wssd/SARD/discuss-en.htm
Sustainable Agriculture and Rural Development (SARD). The FAO's contribution to Rio+10. It's motto, "to meet the needs of the present without sacrificing the ability of future generations to meet theirs." It is also a site which houses documentation of 'success stories' in sustainable agriculture: http://www.un.org/esa/sustdev/success.htm  This is by no means a site for those working in the NGO or civil society sectors.

ix) http://www.infoagrar.ch
info agrar: The Agricultural information and documentation service for development co-operation run by the Swiss Agency for Development and Co-operation (SDC). Its aim is to facilitate access to relevant information, based on the needs of professionals dealing with agricultural issues in international development co-operation. The focus is on information related to agriculture in Africa, Latin and Central America, Asia, and Eastern Europe. This is a conservative sustainable agriculture site! Meaning not all best practices appear to be sustainable agriculture friendly. An example of the dangers of the internet providing information which says one thing however in practice may mean another.

x) http://www.peisland.com/agrtour/index.html
Environmentally sustainable practices on Prince Edward Island, Canada. This web site is intended to provide visitors with background information, farm profiles and descriptions of environmentally sustainable agricultural practices being implemented on farms across the Island. Again this site offered sustainable agricultural practices yet methods revealed in documentation included genetically modified potatoes!

xi) www.fao.org/ag
Agriculture 21 is an online magazine provided by the FAO and provides features and resources. It is also available in 5 languages including English, French, Spanish, Chinese and Arabic! One of the resources this site offers includes FAOSTAT an on-line databases currently containing over 1 million time-series records covering international statistics including the following areas: Fertiliser and Pesticides, Land Use and Irrigation and Agricultural Machinery. The database works as a flexible search engine and is also available on CD-ROM. It also links to a number of other databases. This site moved away from sustainable methods of agriculture the more one searched through it.

## B) Web thoughts:

The following paragraphs are thoughts and ideas that where had during the web research. Some have been integrated in the report however, for some, it was more difficult to include them. The author thought it worth including them in this Appendix for readers to use as reference points/notes.

**Methods of Dissemination:** Given that my research has shown very bog standard info. being put up on the screen, perhaps we need to look at new ways of dissemination. What is needed is a new and fresh method of dissemination giving information credibility, value and an ease of understanding.

**Subject Categories:** The use of documentation e.g. under categories. E.g. you could have Soil Rotation, organic produce, food security as subject categories and then under those there could be techniques of best methods.

**Counting Clocks:** These are quite effective ways of displaying information to people. E.g. the world's population going up and the global land mass available going down (www.idrc.ca). We could use one for Loss of habitat, loss of species etc.

**Symbols:** A documentation site should look heavily in to the use of 'symbols' e.g. BBC site use of video/audio symbols.

**Indigenous Knowledge:** This is very important aspect and if eve there were to be a 'this is how you' section, indigenous knowledge or elders would be the ones.

**Access:**
The Web is still dominated by the US, other countries are a little way behind. Europe is catching up and developing countries are a little less connected in terms of access, speed, and technology. This is quite key in terms of the Web being a tool. There are perhaps ways round this.

**Updated:**
Good Global web pages are always updated (daily). The bbc.co.uk is a great site and it is lucky enough to be a news service hence it is always updated. We should look in to ways in which we can update ours daily with news perhaps (e.g. vidi-printer).

**Global Nodes:**
Greenpeace.org has 38 countries linked into its international homepage. This is pretty impressive stuff. From Brazil to India, Sweden to Lebanon.

**Unique:**
How can something be created differently in an online world with billions of web pages floating around? Creating a unique page is essential in this cyber world.

**PDFs:**
Perhaps this TOOL has the most potential for dissemination of information. From creating Fact Sheets to making documents for those in the field, this method is vitally important and has a real potential to make a difference. a) An idea could be to have dissemination nodes across the world. These nodes would be housed in an area and access would be given to all those interested in finding out more information on an issue. The node would also act as a disseminator. Armed with a good computer, good internet access and a good printer, the node would disseminate information by receiving PDFs and sending them out (by post) or simply delivering them to people. These PDFs would be a larger replica of 'good practice' as displayed on the internet. They would be very clear and concise (almost layman's terms) easy to use.

**Photography:**
Looking back at things like the FSA in the 1930s Depression years and how photographers like Dorethea Lang really depicted the Great Depression, For many her pictures marked the turning point in understanding the massive crisis on the farms and with poverty caused by the Dustbowl etc. (also literature e.g. Grapes of Wrath). Are there ways in which we can learn from history? Could we look at Sabastio Salgado exhibition on workers as well as FSA and perhaps get a famous photographer to travel round the world documenting the state of agriculture? The state of are food etc.? Amazing project, could seek private funding.

**Tool Kits:**
This came up when researching on the net. The Earth Summit site offers Tool kits for Women on how to analyse good practice and how to write up a case study for good practice. Perhaps a PDF Toolkit could be produced as an educational method of how to document. The only thing here is dictation, they need to be straight forward guidelines as opposed to 'we know best'. Perhaps they could follow an indigenous knowledge format? Or our wise supporters e.g. Vandana Shiva could write one etc.