

# THE ROLE OF INFORMATION SERVICES IN AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT OF IRAN. A PROGRESS REPORT

By Nassrin-Dokht Emad-Khrasani

**Abstract:** Taking into consideration the importance of "information" in the economic and social development of developing countries, the requirement for information services and its application in agriculture in these countries has been well recognized. But, since these services need required roles and appliances, because of the lack of necessary possibilities most of the developing countries have not achieved progress in this respect and lack of progress in agricultural information services will cause the stagnancy of agricultural development and extension. On this basis required actions have been taken for the renovation and systematizing the Library of Agricultural Scientific - Information and Documentation Centre in Iran whose stages of establishing and forming has been presented as an experience of an agricultural documentalist in Iran.

## Introduction

Agriculture is one of the most important issues which has always been under consideration throughout the world especially in developed and non-developed countries, as it plays the vital role in economic and social developments of these countries. Therefore, it is necessary to give priority to agricultural development and extension, with the objective of increase in production and redistribution of income as the interest and profits for peasants and farmers in these countries. Although, agricultural development relates to the special attention of the government "Agricultural resources" and "man power" are considered as two effective factors for the growth of agriculture. In other words, existence of utilizable and useable sources in any country as well as the existence of specialists, semi-specialists and experimental manpower, results to an agricultural extension due to a fundamental planning. But, the most important factor which provides such development and extension is "information" which is considered as important requirement for production in agriculture regarding to the modern technology. That is if extension workers and farmers as well as researchers, policy makers and

planners gain suitable information about modern agricultural systems and its related matters, no doubt a better production of foodstuff will be achieved. Skilled and effective man power responsible for the growth of agriculture requires an continuous increase in knowledge. In other words it is necessary to have immediate access to innovations, changes, and the latest results of agricultural research. Nowadays, policy makers and relevant authorities in agriculture in developing countries are well informed of the importance of information and information services in the field of agriculture. But due to the lack of systematic centralization of agricultural information, unfortunately they cannot achieve full information on progress and innovation in agricultural fields. So their production does not have any relation to references and documentary information. Nowadays, scientific and technical information are considered as the basis of material and intellectual sources in different societies, and any society which is able to access more information automatically has more potentiality. In other words, in the present era known as the time of "explosion of information", information is considered as a fundament of power. Among the several scientific and technical achievements of these countries, development and extension of agricultural science have vital importance, due to the thousands of research activities and agricultural development projects performed throughout the world every year and thousands of active researchers trying to promote production of foodstuff as well as the increasing living standard of peasants and farmers. Therefore the outcomes of agricultural research projects have created mass information which are published in different forms such as books, articles, reports, and reviews. Information sciences allows the collected and organized information in different fields of science and technology like agriculture. Distribution of information can be done either collectively or through selective dissemination although in both cases, unless there is a systematic data base, the process of documentation and information services is not possible.

#### **Agricultural information services in Iran**

In Iran, agricultural information services are performed irregularly and dispersely. In spite of a large number of agricultural libraries throughout the country such as academic, governmental, professional associations, trade, corporations, etc., unfortunately, there is no agricultural information network. Also considering the lack of sufficient equipment in most of the agricultural libraries in Iran, and sometimes their managements through traditional and non-standard methods, agricultural information services in Iran do not match with technical advancement in agriculture throughout the world. Therefore, as an agricultural documentalist and as a special librarian, interested in the systematic expansion of agricultural

libraries in the country, and also considering the existing requirements, I have performed several activities in this field since 1980 such as renovation and systematization in the Library of Iran Agracultural Scientific and Documentation Centre. Now I would like to present my experience in the related matter to encourage beginners, especially librarians in the developing countries. Herewith I want assure them that due to this continous endeavour and effort they will certainly achieve their objectives.

### **The progress report**

The Library of Agricultural Scientific Information and Documentation Centre is the result of continous efforts, struggles, unifications, knowledge, and experiences which started its activity on the basis of principles of modern library science on February 8th, 1981. It was not easy to begin. Bundles of different books, documents, periodicals, and even papers were without any arrangement in the storeroom. This room which later became entomology museum had no light and air. After a hard, long and tiresome work with assistance of lizard, beetles and rat excrements, it was only the will for the best that pushed me forward to arrange the publications. After three months, according to the project presented to the head of the Centre, I hold many consulting meetings with my professors to make the necessary planning. Afterwards, to begin routine activities, I started the training of five female non-specialist staff heaving secondary school diploma and bachelor degree other than library science. After a while we moved to a new building consisting of a hall and a few rooms about 900 sq. meters, and finally after seven months of hard work even in holidays, the Library was ready for the clients. In this respect, the most important aspect is the effort and endeavour which took place to establish the Centre with the least possibilities. Some believe that it is impossible to be effective without primitive possibilities such as semi-specialist or at least trained staff as well as the required equipment such as card-cabinet. But according to my experience the case is just the opposite. For example concerning the expansion of activities, the Center needed a higher number of personnel and also considering that there was no possibility to employ specialists and semi-specialists, immediately I started to instruct young girls interested in library science. This training lasted one year during which the collection of the Library was arranged. Now those obliged to read some books and texts of library science are able to work as semi-specialist librarians and after the removal of employment restrictions, some were employed in the center as daily-paid librarians and some are able to perform the entrusted duties actively in different sections, i.e. cataloging and classification, indexing of documents, articles and audio-visual materials, circulation, and organizing periodicals. On the other hand in spite of

the importance of tools and equipments, and general appliances of libraries, lack of possibilities and required equipment the work didn't result in stagnation. For example sometimes instead of card-cabinet we used airmail envelopes and cardboard boxes and afterwards the cardcabinet was delivered to the Centre. The Library had started its activities, but the users were occasional and countable. The Library should become more active and its public services should be extended. Therefore, expansion of circulation section took place in form of interlibrary loan among the local libraries of the city and then throughout the country and finally abroad. Expansion of circulation was not the only way and ways should be found to attract and absorb the interested persons. Therefore, providing information sources such as publications of a quarterly bulletin containing the latest scientific and research information about agriculture was considered as an effective contribution. In this connection on the basis of regulations required action was undertaken to collect all publications of the Ministry of Agriculture throughout the country. It means that each of such publications was registered in the Centre in the form of copyright and as a result yearly bulletin was prepared and published: "The union catalog of the publications of the Ministry of Agriculture". Publication of informal sources resulted in increase of work and users, but even now the Library needs more expansion and has to become known among the clients. The other activities were attending agricultural specialized laboratories, attending the farms and visiting research places, and negotiating with researchers at the site. Most of the researchers did not have time or other problems to attend the Library, and as a result they were not aware of agricultural information or did not receive the publications frequently. Consequently a plan was presented to provide direct services to these persons. Existence of a monthly current bibliography such as "Agrindex" was considered to be an effective way and its advantages and methods were discussed. Some of the researchers benefited from it properly and for those groups who did not have time or mood to attend the Library, the Library presented its services directly. In this connection, the Centre could perform correspondence with several national and international agricultural libraries and received required publications. The most important aid was done to the Library by SDI section of FAO. Because of the lack of the necessary information in the existing sources in Iran, the centre requested through telex or correspondence.

The other activities of this Centre were as follows: establishing a profile of agricultural researchers on the basis of the subject of their research; providing a data bank of the particular agricultural writers and translators; establishing workshops for experts and researchers in different fields of agriculture to become familiar with the method of utilizing library and special sources in agriculture;

training of students in the field of library science at the Centre and education of non-specialized librarians of other libraries affiliated to the Ministry of Agriculture; mutual cooperation with other state libraries like the National Library of Iran, consultation and supervision for systematizing of other agricultural libraries of the country.

Anyway, this Centre was established, but it has not still achieved its real development and I hope the Centre to be useful and effective in the agricultural development considering the information technology and positive efforts.

Emad-Khorasani, Nassrin-Dokht  
Ministry of Agriculture  
Plan and Programm Department  
Project: The Bibliography of Agriculture of Iran  
Keshavarz Boolvar  
Teheran  
Iran