
CONSORTIUM OF PLANTATION CROPS RESEARCH LIBRARIES FOR RESOURCE SHARING – A PROPOSAL ISSUES AND FACTS

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Abstract

Information explosion resulted from the rapid advances in all scientific fields has made it vital for all scientists to have rapid, easy access to scientific information. However, scientists in developing countries are hampered by the high cost of subscriptions to various journals. Since air-mail delivery is prohibitively expensive, the journals that are received come six to eight months after the publication date, hampering the work of scientists even further. Fortunately, the Internet has come to the rescue. Online journals are available immediately after publication anywhere in the world, with a few clicks of a mouse. Electronic subscriptions are normally cheaper than print subscriptions. Nevertheless, the costs to institutions are still extremely high, particularly in view of the fact that any institution has to subscribe to many journals to meet the varied needs of its scientists. In view of this urgent need, it is proposed that all institutions dedicated to research on plantation crops come together to form a consortium to subscribe to a core group of international journals, available online, that would benefit all members. This would follow the pattern of other consortia such as INDEST, INFONET and INFLIBNET. Experience gained in an initial experiment are focused.

Keywords : digital library; library consortium; plantation crops; resource sharing; e-journal consortium; INDEST Consortium; INFONET; INFLIBNET; FORSA; HELINET; ICARNET; Consortium for IIMs; ISRO Initiative

1. INTRODUCTION

Socio-economic and academic development is dependent on research which in turn is dependent upon availability of information resources. A clear distinction can be made among developed and developing nations on the basis of their information richness. There still exists a clear East-West divide among the nations in this aspect. Libraries are the repositories of knowledge and knowledge is information in different forms. With the escalating cost of journals and periodicals, which are considered carriers of information or knowledge, many libraries have had to cut down their subscription to information sources like the journals, databases etc. thus seriously affecting research and developmental activities. The concept of consortium approach in subscription to journals and databases has come as a boon to library and information centers all over the world.

Consortia-based subscription to journals and databases is the ideal solution in a situation where funds are scarce. It is a win-win situation where publishing agencies and participating library/information centers/institutes work in a coordinated manner and the libraries deriving maximum benefit in sharing the resources. Interested readers are urged to look up the savings resulting from membership in the INDEST consortium (1).

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The various departments of the Tea Research Association (TRA) at its main laboratories at the Tocklai Experimental Station were asked to submit a list of international journals, available through on-line

subscription, that they would ideally like the library to provide for them. Interestingly, though the departments were asked to provide a list of three or four journals, most departmental lists had eight to ten journals, greatly highlighting the eager desire for access to the latest scientific information. Letters soliciting experience, advice and suggestions regarding forming of a consortium were sent to nearly 20 research/special librarians, Heads of Library and Information Services/Directors.

3. RESULTS

A list of journals, the cost of online subscription and the requesting department are listed in table 1. [It may be noted that "Service" refers to a catchall division that includes laboratories for soil, heavy metal and pesticide residue analysis.] It can be seen that the "wish list" is large, with the requirements of some departments overlapping. As is often the case with surveys, some "respondents" do not respond! In this case, three departments did not give their requirements. Even so, if the wish list were completely fulfilled, the annual cost to the institution would be Rs. 12,29,040 (taking 1 US\$ = Rs. 47, 1£ = Rs.85 and 1 € = Rs. 57). If the silent departments added their requirements, this amount may well cross Rs. 15 lakhs. This is for an institute that focuses on a *single* plantation crop. Institutes with more than one crop in its purview will clearly need to subscribe to more journals. Also, the subscription list does not include the various Indian journals (and in the case of tea, those published by other developing countries such as Sri Lanka or Kenya). Indian journals are relatively low-cost and most institutions can afford to subscribe to them. TRA obtains many journals from sister tea research institutes around the world on an exchange basis. Clearly, no single institution can afford to subscribe to all the necessary journals at their actual cost. This compels us to bring up the idea of a consortium of all institutes and allied institutions that could join hands to subscribe at reduced rates to a group of journals that are of interest to the majority. The consortium can then negotiate for "group rates" with major publishing houses. Alternatively, the concerned ministry of the Government of India, in this case the **Ministry of Commerce and Industry**, can underwrite some proportion of the subscription or negotiate directly with publishers for a rate for the consortium as a whole, with the members paying some part of the costs. Of the 20 special librarians, only 3 responded promptly sending their "wish list" of journals. Table 2.

Table 1. "Wish list" of journals given by scientists at TRA

Journal	Cost	Department(s)
Agricultural Water Management	\$335	Technology Transfer (TT)
Agronomy Journal	\$50	Agronomy, TT
Applied Microbiology and Biotechnology	€ 3,500	Mycology
Bioresource Technology	n.a.	Service
Chemical Health and Safety	n.a.	Service
Comm. Soil Science and Plant Analysis	n.a.	Service
Crop Science	\$600	Agronomy, T0054
Current Microbiology	\$765	Mycology
EMBO Journal	\$144	Biotechnology
European J. Clinical Microbiology & Infectious Diseases	€ 440	Mycology
European Journal of Soil Science	£222	Service, Soils, TT
Food Science and Technology-LWT	\$534	Biochemistry
Functional and Integrative Genetics	€ 110	Mycology
Genome	\$129	Biotechnology
ICID Bulletin- Irrigation, Drainage & Flood Control	\$30	Technology Transfer

International Microbiology	€ 285	Mycology
Irrigation & Drainage System	\$80	Technology Transfer
J Agric Science [UK]	\$630	Agronomy, TT
J. Agricultural and Food Chemistry	\$75	
J. Agronomy & crop Science	£630	Agronomy, Soils, Service, TT
J. Environmental Quality	n.a.	Service
J. Industrial Microbiology & Biotechnology	€ 900	Mycology
J. Irrigation and Drainage	\$110	Technology Transfer
J. Microbiology. & Biotechnology	\$120	Mycology
J. Natural Products	\$60	Biochemistry
J. Plant Nutrition	\$1,295	Agronomy
J. Science of Food and Agriculture	n.a.	Biochemistry
Molecular Breeding	n.a.	Biotechnology
Nucleic Acid Research	\$2,450	Biotechnology
Phytochemistry	\$4,172	Biochemistry
Plant and Soil	n.a.	Service, Soil
Total cost	Rs. 1229040	

*n.a. price not available on journal/publisher's web site

Table 2. List of Special/Research Libraries

- Tea Research Foundation, UPASI, Valparai, Tamil Nadu
- Indian Society for Plantation Crops, Kasargod, Kerala
- Indian Society for Spices, Kozhikode, Keralaarch, Kasargod, Kerala
- Society for Promotion of Oil Palm Research and Development, Pedavegi, A .P.
- Central Plantation Crops Research Institute, Kasargod, Kerala
- Rubber Research Institute, Kottayam, Kerala
- Central Coffee Research Institute, Chikamagalur, Karnataka
- Coconut Development Board, , Kochi, Kerala
- Indian Cardamom Research Institute, Myladumpara, Kerala
- National Research Centre for Cashew, Puttur, Karnataka
- National Research Centre for Oil Palm, Pedavegi, A. P.
- Indian Council of Agricultural Research, New Delhi
- Darjeeling Tea Research and Development Centre, Darjeeling, West Bengal
- Institute of Himalayan Bioresource Technology, Palampur, Himachal Pradesh
- Regional Research Laboratory, CSIR, Jorhat, Assam
- Assam Agricultural University, Jorhat, Assam
- Rain Forest Research Institute, Jorhat, Assam
- Central Muga Eri Research & training Institute, CSB, Jorhat, Assam
- University of North Bengal, Raja Rammohunpur, West Bengal

4. DISCUSSION

The following are some examples of consortia fully operational at present in the country.

1. **INDEST** [Indian National Digital Library in Engineering, Science and Technology]: INDEST was/is set up by the Ministry of Human Resources Development, Government of India [MHRD, G.O.I.]. The Ministry provides funds to some 38 institutions of higher education which come under the purview of the Ministry/UGC / AICTE and to some other private institutions. INDEST is operating from its Head Quarters at IIT, Delhi campus. [1].
2. **INFONET** and **E-JOURNAL**: These are the two consortia launched by the University Grants Commission [UGC] to promote the use of full-text journals and electronic databases by the research and academic community in the country. The programme is wholly funded by the UGC and all universities, which come under the purview of the UGC, will be members of the programme. This programme is being executed by Information and Library Network [INFLIBNET] Center, Ahmedabad
3. **E- JOURNAL CONSORTIUM OF CSIR**: NISCAIR [National Institute of Science Communication and Information Resources], formerly INSDOC, is the nodal agency for developing the consortium for CSIR laboratories for accessing electronic journals and databases. The activities of NISCAIR range from creation to maintaining of access facilities of scientific periodicals published by leading international institutions. The objectives as stated in their policy document are:
 - “To strengthen the pooling, sharing and electronically accessing the CSIR library resources.
 - “To provide access to world S & T literature to CSIR laboratories.
 - “To nucleate the culture of electronic access resulting into evolution of digital libraries.” [3].
4. **FORSA** [Forum for Resource Sharing in Astronomy and Astrophysics] Established in 1981 is the earliest example of consortium for sharing resources. At present FORSA have eleven members from different government departments, DST, UGC, DAE etc. and the number is growing every year.[9]
5. **HELINET** : A shared budget model consortium to cater to Health Libraries and Information Network.
6. **ICARNET** : Consortium of Indian Council of Agricultural Research libraries network is being developed.[9]
7. **CONSORTIUM For IIMs** : Six Indian Institute of Management have formed a consortium for subscribing to and resource sharing in the area of management , social and behavioral science journals and databases. [8]
8. **ISRO Initiatives** : The resource sharing initiative taken by Indian Space Research Organisation libraries are expected to result in savings of Rs. 41 lakhs per year by way of avoiding duplication of journal and database subscription. [8]

The objectives of the INDEST, INFONET and E-JOURNAL consortia, FORSA, ICARNET, HELINET, IIM Consortium, ISRO Initiatives are similar to those of NISCAIR's. It is interesting to note that while a number of similar consortia are coming up/being formed, agriculture and plantation sector do not yet have any such consortium of libraries and information centers for resource sharing. Some of the plantation institutions coming under the Ministry of Agriculture / Indian Council of Agricultural Research utilize the resources of NICNET [National Informatics Center Network]. NICNET provides access to some databases all of which are not totally useful for plantation crops researchers.

Table 1 (above) lists some of the important core journals which are essential for research scientists to keep them abreast with developments in their respective areas. The list is not exhaustive but only indicative and has been compiled on the basis of information provided by the respective TRA departments. It is interesting to note that the existing consortia do not cover most of these journals. It can be inferred that since the areas of research prevalent in most of the plantation crops institutes are similar to that of TRA, the same set of journals and, in some cases, many more will be necessary.

While non-conventional crops/plants are continuously being added to the traditional list the major plantations crops that are grown in the Indian sub-continent are: tea, coffee, cardamom, cashew, rubber, cocoa, areca nut, coconut, oil palm, palmyrah, and spices which include more than 63 crops including black pepper, cinnamon, nutmeg, cloves, smilax, allspice, vanilla, curry leaf, chillies, celery, turmeric, ginger, fennel, fenugreek etc. None of the existing consortia is suitable for most/all of these institutes; hence there is a need for a separate consortium for the plantation crops research.

It is, therefore, suggested that libraries of the institutions listed below join hands to form the

5. CONSORTIUM OF PLANTATION CROPS LIBRARIES

- Tea Research Association, Tocklai Experimental Station, Jorhat
- Tea Research Foundation UPASI, Valparai
- Indian Society for Plantation Crops, Kasaragod
- Indian Society for Spices, Kozhikode
- Indian Institute of Spices Research, Kasargod
- Society for Promotion of Oil Palm Research and Development [SOPOPROD]
- Central Plantation Crops Research Institute, Kasargod
- Rubber Research Institute, Kottayam
- Central Coffee Research Institute, Chikamagalur
- Coconut Development Board, Kochi
- Indian Cardamom Research Institute, Myladumpara
- National Research Center for Cashew, Puttur
- National Research Center for Oil Palm, Pedavegi
- Indian Council of Agricultural Research, New Delhi[4-7].

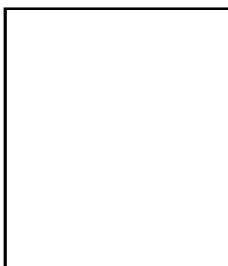
Membership of the consortium can be open to any other interested group/organisation.

The disciplines covered by each one of these institutes are basically similar. It is hoped that all who read this article will share the views of the author. It is interesting to note that the concept of Consortium is not altogether new to library profession. Co-operation among libraries is as old as modern librarianship. Consortium simply put is co-operation for one or the other objective. Despite the success stories of many of the leading consortia that are operating in India, the Consortium movement is yet to catch up with the new generation librarians.

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