

Guideline for S&D

Scouting and Documentation of the innovations is the first step towards the fulfillment of the mission of NIF. Scouting involves extensive fieldwork, travel in rural and urban areas, search for ‘odd balls’ -- the experimenters – and local community and knowledge experts in the society. The process aims at:

- To coordinate with various governmental and non-governmental agencies to mount a national campaign to scout innovations with the help of grassroots level functionaries of education, agriculture, rural development, small scale industry, Panchayati Raj institutions, etc.
- To screen, document and verify the claims about these innovations through various networks of scientific and other institutional initiatives as well as through Honey Bee collaborators, existing databases and field visits.
- To generate and experiment with material and non-material incentive mechanisms for innovators and traditional knowledge holders.
- To provide assistance in forging decentralized networks of inventors/knowledge experts to strengthen the Honey Bee Network.
- To obtain Prior Informed Consent (PIC) of the providers of knowledge.
- To share the innovations permitted by the knowledge providers to be put in public domain through Honey Bee newsletter and other media to enrich the repertoire of the local communities and informal knowledge experts and to support *Shodh Yatras* in different parts of the country.

Various methodologies and approaches used for documentation and dissemination are:

i) Survey of Odd Balls in the Villages through Students.

- A group of students should be given orientation about scouting and documenting innovations and traditional knowledge.
- They should be encouraged to appreciate the grassroots innovations created by their family members and neighbours in the village to begin with.
- The students should be asked to narrate some of their own experiences, which were *interesting, intriguing or inspiring*. By underlining the ones that we find counter intuitive or less obvious, we convey what we are looking for.

- The process of training gets demystified and the purpose of scouting becomes clear because the examples of what we are looking for are drawn from the scout's own experience.
- The students then survey different villages. They also collect addresses of a few farmers who either know about the innovator concerned and/or have fields adjoining the fields of the innovative farmer.
- Letters should be written to these contacts later to have a first round of confirmation. Later, another student/field investigator revisits each site to avoid any error in the process. The best scouts should be given prizes in the annual network meeting.

ii) *Organising Competitions for Scouting Innovations*

- Competitions should be organized in various parts of the country among students and grassroots functionaries of the state/ province government.
- Survey forms should be developed to seek brief information about the innovations scouted by the participants. Application forms, procedure and other details should be explained through meetings in schools/colleges.
- Voluntary teachers should be encouraged to coordinate such contests in their schools and ensure that students work in the spirit of fulfilling their curiosity to learn from informal knowledge experts in our society rather than to earn a small honorarium.
- For launching competitions among the grassroots functionaries, workshops should be organized to explain the purpose of scouting campaigns, as well as to expose the participants about the earlier experiences in scouting.
- A committee should evaluate the entries sent in by the participants and the winners should be awarded prizes and certificates in the network meeting. Revolving trophies should be given to the best district official/development agency that scouts the most interesting innovations and traditional knowledge.

Note: Though one finds that the same, or similar, traditional knowledge, and in some cases, even innovations, are recorded from more than one place, we should not discourage this. This helps us to learn about the capability of local communities and individuals to evolve similar solutions to same problems independently, autonomously and simultaneously. In some cases, such a knowledge or innovation may indeed have diffused from place to another. Our experience so far has been that several innovations and traditional knowledge are discovered from unexpected quarters within a very short span of time through such competitions.

iii) *Scanning of Old Literature*

- There are many visionaries and experts at the regional level who do not get their due credit and recognition just because they did not publish their ideas in English. As a result, many times it so happens that we end up giving credit for ‘reinventing the wheel’. One of the purposes of scanning the old, vernacular literature is to bring these unaccredited knowledge systems to light.
- Old literature should be collected and should be reprinted to give due credit to this traditional knowledge.

iv) *Agricultural and Cultural Fairs*

- Agricultural fairs are vibrant traditional institutions, where people assemble in large numbers, either for religious or cultural celebrations. This platform can be used for scouting and disseminating.
- Many farmers, artisans, community leaders and professionals visit the stalls and get information about the innovations developed by other farmers. While accessing this knowledge base, they also share their own innovations with network members.

v) *Shodh Sankal - a local network of grassroots innovators*

- To generate a lateral learning environment among the grassroots innovators, SRISTI has initiated the concept of *Shodh Sankal* - chain of experimenting farmers.
- The idea is to bring together experimenting farmers and discuss the results of trials that farmers have taken up on their own to solve various local problems. This discussion also enhances the esteem for local knowledge system. It is possible to generate ‘lateral learning’ among farmers by sharing innovative practices found suitable in one region with the farmers in another similar region after on farm testing/trials if necessary.
- This could help to speed up the process of technological change in regions where formal technology generation system has not been very successful, such as dry regions, mountainous regions and other disadvantaged areas. Even in less risk prone regions, it cannot be assumed that an innovative technology will diffuse on its own just because some farmers in a village have evolved it.

vi) *Shodh Yatra (journey for exploration)*

- Based on the experiences of several years, the network launched the concept of *Shodh Yatra* in 1998. The journey of exploration is organised on foot from one village to another for 8-10 days, covering a maximum of 250 kms during extreme summer as well as winter.

- Innovative farmers, artisans, students and scientists join the *Shodh Yatra* and walk with the objective of participatory learning and dissemination of information, as well as spreading experimental and inventive ethics among communities.
- Local experts, whether in traditional knowledge or contemporary innovations, are honoured at their door step in these villages.
- The Honey Bee database is shared with farmers in the local language through laptop computers and print publications. A mobile exhibition on medicinal plants, posters, artifacts, working models of innovations etc, are used for making the presentation more relevant to the local context.
- Biodiversity contests are organised among children while recipe contests are organised among women in some of the villages (particularly with focus on such food recipes in which at least one uncultivated plant has been used).

vii) *Scouting through Innovators*

Unlike the agricultural practices, the search for artisanal and farm machinery innovations is far more complex. One village may have several hundred farmers but only one or two artisans. To meet 100 artisans, one may have to survey 50-100 villages. However, over a period of time we discovered that social network of artisans is reasonably strong. Once we identified an innovative artisan or mechanic, we asked him to look for others of his kind. This process has helped in discovering many innovators.

viii) *Scouting through Media*

Many newspapers and magazines have written about the innovations and traditional knowledge recognised by Honey Bee network. Some of the innovators have approached us after reading about other innovators. This process is further strengthened through circulation of posters of competition among various institutions and stake-holders. A very small number of innovations are also scouted through internet where existing websites (www.sristi.org, www.nifindia.org, www.gian.org, www.honeybee.org, www.indiainnovates.com) of the network have popularised the missions of NIF and other collaborating institutions.

Practices collected from various sources reflect a variety of knowledge systems, problem solving approaches, sectoral areas of technology, and above all, a variety of ethical approaches to evolution and dissemination of local solutions. The technological solutions have been recorded from various fields such as agronomy, plant varieties, plant protection, crop production, soil and water conservation, farm implements, veterinary and animal husbandry, poultry keeping, vegetative dye, forest and other natural resource management, leather tanning, energy generation, transport, general utilities, farm and small scale machineries, household utilities, etc. The methods described above are complementary to each other and are some times followed together. The practices scouted or documented, irrespective of the methods used, are verified by writing letters to the innovators, followed by a personal visit from the team. Innovators are encouraged to

correct the practices and interpretation made of the information provided by them. Verified practices are stored in the computerised database with the names and addresses of the innovators, as well as communicators. If the same practice is reported from other sources without variation, the names of the other providers are also added in the same record. However, the success rate of a particular scouting method may not be the same at every place; it varies over time and space and, of course, the social group attempting to use these methods.

ix) Scouting through the Network

The network collaborators and coordinators of GIAN play a very important role in helping to attain a record of respectable number of innovations and traditional knowledge through their active involvement with the network.

Lateral learning in the network: Experiences shared by the collaborators in their endeavour of Scouting and Documentation

In a recent meeting attended by personnel of NIF, the Honey Bee Network and allied organisations, various collaborators shared their experiences about different methodologies tried by them to scout innovations and traditional knowledge.

It was stressed that our focus need not be only on the number of entries, but also on the quality of entries. Similarly, mere documentation is not enough, conversion of innovations and traditional knowledge into products and enterprises is also necessary.

There was a general consensus that the mobilisation of entries through advertisements was much lesser whereas the results through network contact were much better. NIF's experience at the national level corroborated this.

Out of about 13000 innovations/traditional knowledge examples, hardly 1600 practices/innovations were mobilised through advertisements in the papers.

It was also felt that before detailed documentation, the originality and social importance of the innovation should be ascertained. Those practices, which are well known in a given region, could be kept as open source technology available for wider use.

NIF's initiative regarding Prior Informed Consent (PIC)

- While disseminating the innovations and traditional knowledge, one has to take care that one does not put the innovation of creative people in public domain without the informed consent of the knowledge providing individuals and communities. It is true that innovative culture can not be created in the country without such dissemination.
- How much information about an innovation can be disseminated becomes an important consideration in this process. While pursuing Scouting and Documentation function of NIF, getting PIC posed one of the biggest challenge.

The concept being new, most people were not aware of the implications of the PIC.

- It is now accepted worldwide that knowledge of the local communities and individuals should be accessed and used only through their prior informed consent. The issue of informed consent is not easy.
- NIF took a lead in this regard and started developing a form for Prior Informed Consent (PIC). In the first round of the contest, the PIC form that was used revealed several areas of improvement. Subsequently, after discussions with the collaborators and knowledge providers, a new form has been developed. It is obvious that for the people whose knowledge rights have never been even acknowledged, the concept of PIC is not only new but also intriguing. A detailed note has been prepared which highlights the plus and the minus side of saying, 'yes' or 'no' to various choices given in the form. For instance, if an innovator suggests that his knowledge may be shared widely through Honey Bee newsletter and/or on website or through other public channels, we have to explain the advantages of doing so and also the disadvantages from the IPR perspective. After sharing these implications the knowledge provider is well within his rights to say yes or no to this or other options (see Annexure VII for PIC form for traditional knowledge holders, innovators and also a note explaining the implications of the PIC).

Till date we have received more than 450 consent forms from the innovators/TK holders who participated in the second competition. Apparently, as is evident from the figures, the majority of the innovators do not mind sharing their addresses with the interested members. About 92 per cent of them have agreed to share their addresses with others if necessary. Out of these, 50 per cent of the innovators have permitted use of their innovations free of cost, if it is on an individual basis. Regarding technology transfer, the option related to the choice of assigning technology, where the innovators are supposed suggest their preferred proportion of sharing benefits, has not been properly answered in many cases. It may, therefore, be inferred that either the innovators do not have yet proper clarity about their preferences or they are unable to understand the framework behind the suggested benefit-sharing model that NIF wants to set forth. In any case, since PIC framework is a new concept and has never been practiced except in medical sciences, we have to recognize the need for explaining this framework to people at grassroots level- a task that demand tremendous additional resources.

Further, it is considered necessary to have a mutual understanding between the innovators and NIF about flexibility in the conditions that have been already specified in the form. If any need arises to modify any of the conditions specified in the consent form, NIF would like to have an agreement with the innovators authorizing NIF to change the options on their behalf with their prior consent. Likewise, if the innovator wants to cancel/modify his/her conditions specified in one's consent form, they can do so with prior notification to NIF.

Since PIC is a new concept, considerable investment will have to be made in creating awareness among various stakeholders. At this moment, we have no hesitation in accepting that complexity of the form and the options in the background note are not easy to follow by most people in villages. Thus, we have not achieved the kind of success in this endeavor which would have made us proud. In the absence of any major effort to create awareness about PIC, NIF's effort will remain limited in their overall impact. NIF will, however, continue to make efforts to make this process as transparent and effective as possible.

S and D function has faced many other challenges such as communication with thousands of knowledge providers in local language, working with very small transient team of staff, pursuing with various collaborators about the need to improve the quality of documentation, getting their PIC, creating awareness about the National Register, networking with various state governments to create awareness about national campaigns, and matching expectations of Honey Bee network and NIF's capacity to deliver with all its limitations. Information is disseminated to all the district collectors, MPs, and a large number of NGOs, educational organizations and other potential partners who can help us uncover the hidden genius of our society. The kind of traditional knowledge scouted by NIF is briefly discussed in Annexure XIII and some examples of creative traditional knowledge and contemporary problem solving are given in Annexure XIV.

S and D function has also supported dissemination function so far by way of coordinating the media coverage of NIF's activities by BBC world, NDTV, Zee. Star and many other channels as well as print media (see 'NIF in News' at www.nifindia.org website).

Biodiversity Register (PBR) and National Register at NIF

The MOU with IISc is still under discussion but MOU with eight traditional knowledge holders of the Mala village community has been signed on June 14, 2004 between NIF and traditional knowledge holders of Mala community mediated by IISc professionals. This signing of MoA was endorsed by the entire Village Assembly which had one of its regular meetings just prior to the signing of the MoA. The Secretary of the Village Council endorsed the MoA on behalf of the council.