

# **Evaluation of GRAIN's Information Work**

## **Final Report**

**== Executive summary and Recommendations ==**

***“GRAIN's information outputs and outreach”***

***External evaluation for:  
Swedbio (Sweden)  
Novib (the Netherlands) and  
The Fund for Sustainable Biodiversity Management  
(NL – Hivos/Novib)***

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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The purpose of this evaluation was to assess the relevance and impact of GRAIN's overall information work and outreach in order to feed into GRAIN's strategic planning for 2008-2010. The key issues that GRAIN wanted to learn about through this evaluation concerned: a) who their audience is; b) what users thought of GRAIN's information; c) an improved understanding about how and for what the information provided by GRAIN is used; and d) how GRAIN's information could be disseminated more widely and its effectiveness improved. GRAIN's information work is tightly linked to its research and analysis, advocacy, capacity sharing and direct strategy work with partners. In a sense, much of what GRAIN does is information work. However, the evaluation was designed to examine GRAIN's tangible information outputs and their delivery, and assess their relevance and impact so that GRAIN can improve in how it produces and shares them. The following six points summarise our work and findings.

1. We interviewed in person or by phone more than 125 people from about 40 countries in all continents and from many sectors. We also interviewed most of GRAIN's staff, Board and donors. Also, nearly one thousand people answered the three language online survey about GRAIN's information outputs.
2. As informed by this evaluation we can say that most of GRAIN's users are in civil society organisations and are professionals. There are, though, many indirect users of GRAIN's information in social movements, increasing numbers of whom are now receiving information directly through GRAIN's regional staff. Most people who responded to the online survey and many interviewees have come to know of GRAIN within the last four years. While we recorded more people accessing GRAIN's information electronically, printed copies of GRAIN's information are essential reading for many, especially those who have no access to the internet, but also including many who have good internet connections but value the printed word. However, outside of GRAIN's particular niche, it is not well known and even within the agricultural biodiversity community more deliberate recruitment of users could be done.
3. GRAIN is perceived by most people who know the organisation as a key global provider of relevant information. This evaluation has confirmed that the organization is held in very high esteem by defenders of biodiversity in a wide range of professions, organisations and movements in both North and South. GRAIN has uniquely positioned itself and succeeds in being an organization that produces information materials with a truly global projection, which are not perceived as speaking to or for the South. The information outputs are mostly viewed as accurate, reliable, trustworthy and timely.
4. There is clear evidence that GRAIN's principal information outputs help to change policy, for example on seed laws and measures to control Avian influenza. The organization is widely acknowledged as an international leader and opinion maker on key agricultural biodiversity issues. Increasingly, GRAIN is recognised as a key opinion former for social movements and indigenous peoples' organisations. They are using GRAIN's information to help them articulate their positions in terms that are "respectable" in scientific, policy and academic circles.
5. The evaluation has shown that GRAIN's information outreach and profile could be increased by improving GRAIN's international profile, in part through better planned work by existing staff. Beyond this, it will be necessary to increase GRAIN's formal or informal partnerships with other CSOs, consultants and media outlets but these partners will need extra resources, financial or otherwise.

To give an idea of how GRAIN could move forward, the following table, derived from this evaluation, summarises some proposals for priority actions for the future development of nine of GRAIN's information outputs, listed in order of asessed importance. The omission of any specific information output does not mean it is not also important and valued.

## PRIORITY ACTIONS

OUTPUT	ASSESSED IMPORTANCE	FUTURE
Briefings	Principal intellectual resource of GRAIN – the core of its information provision upon which much of the other information outputs should be derived	More to be produced per year in all three languages, in part by turning all long analytical documents into Briefings.
Magazines	Seedling is GRAIN's 'flagship' publication – essential reading in printed version for most English language interviewees. <i>La Revista Biodiversidad</i> and <i>Semences de la Biodiversité</i> have equivalent standing in their language zones	More 'Thematic' issues of Seedling. More printed copies for wider circulation. Increase translation of materials.
GRAIN.org website	GRAIN's portal and the main source of information for those with good internet connections	Revise with improved navigation and more, regular updates by all staff
Other websites: Biodiversidadla.org Bilaterals.org	Biodiversidadla.org is an essential resource for Spanish language users and Bilaterals.org is unique for those following negotiation processes for free trade agreements	Must continue, but perhaps with a larger number of contributors, in order to reduce GRAIN's input.
"Against the Grain"	Regular output of short opinion pieces expected. Outreach has been shown to be very wide.	Flexible, short (500 word) articles that respond quickly to current issues
BIO-IPR	Highly valued, but could go 'live' on the website, plus regular mailings with fewer 'docserves'	Modified form, less resource intensive
BRL	A unique resource for many users and consulted often	Keep posting information, delegating task, when possible
Informal and <i>ad hoc</i> information outputs	Part of the regular work of GRAIN staff	Maximise benefit, by sharing information outputs across GRAIN using intranet and posting on internet
GRAIN's information contributions to, or about, international processes and to the media	Always welcomed and essential to maintaining GRAIN's international profile	Needs consistent approach, but GRAIN's input could be lessened through collaboration with partners, consultants and others
Tracker tables	Useful but not read widely	Reconsider priority

The challenge is, therefore, how GRAIN can not only maintain their valued, existing information outputs and services that are so important to most users, increase understanding of agricultural biodiversity issues and give GRAIN global credibility, but also innovate, identify and work on the new threats and challenges to agricultural biodiversity. And to continue to do this in the collaborative style that is the hallmark of GRAIN and is much respected by many, especially in the social movements. This collaborative style needs to include a "permanent conversation" with users for identifying new issues and concerns developing at the grassroots, assigning them their due importance.

### **RECOMMENDATION 1 - GRAIN's INFORMATION OUTPUTS**

**Top priority should be given by GRAIN to the production and the comprehensive distribution of the 'core information outputs', especially the Briefings but also Seedling articles and *Against the Grain*, backed up by BIO-IPR, the databases on Biodiversity Rights Legislation and the [bilaterals.org](http://bilaterals.org) databases on trade treaties. Similar priority to be given to *La Revista Biodiversidad* in Latin America and *Semences de la Biodiversité* in francophone West Africa. Most of GRAIN's derived information should be based on this core but each derived output must retain appropriate references to the key facts and messages from the analysis (the value-added of all GRAIN's information), although the forms of this segmented, derived information will vary according the needs of the different audiences. The websites need continued enhancement. Listserves should be expanded to reach new (but willing) audiences. There should be careful integration of GRAIN's informal and *ad hoc* information outputs into the other information services that GRAIN provides**

**RECOMMENDATION 2 - SEEDLING**

Seedling could increase in size to accommodate more articles in each magazine. Its distribution should be increased significantly and, in addition, CDs should be sent annually with all articles as well as other GRAIN information materials. Decentralised printing and distribution should be organised. A francophone West Africa version of Seedling should be investigated as well as the possibility of other decentralised 'Regional' versions of Seedling. Theme editions should be the norm, with a flexible, rolling plan for some 18 months ahead. Improved signposting, information about GRAIN and listings of other GRAIN information outputs, websites and other key documents and a promotional leaflet should be included in all magazines.

**RECOMMENDATION 3 - La REVISTA BIODIVERSIDAD**

GRAIN should continue to support production of *La Revista Biodiversidad*, especially its decentralised printing of increased numbers of copies and their distribution nationally, and look to further develop the collaboration that would enable local variants of the magazine to be produced nationally, for example a Portuguese edition in Brazil. GRAIN should facilitate regular meetings of the Editorial Board.

**RECOMMENDATION 4 - BRIEFINGS and AGAINST THE GRAIN**

GRAIN should produce more Briefings per year in place of long *Against the Grain* documents. The latter should be short, rapid turnaround documents that are produced in a timely fashion. Print versions could be circulated with Seedling magazine but summaries of all Briefings should be reproduced in some form in Seedling. All should be translated as a matter of course into all three of GRAIN's languages. More 'popular' versions of these documents could be prepared by GRAIN or partners.

**RECOMMENDATION 5 - BIO-IPR**

BIO-IPR should continue and entries should, if possible, be posted 'live' on the [grain.org](http://grain.org) website. The summary emails collated, perhaps by a GRAIN information person, should be routinely sent out each month and they should also contain in them links to other relevant information produced by GRAIN, such as that sent out in New from Grain mailings.

**RECOMMENDATION 6 - SEMENCES DE LA BIODIVERSITÉ**

*Semences de la Biodiversité* is a popular information output that should continue and be enhanced. The demand should be met, however, for more GRAIN materials in French (both electronic and in print), for these to be written in a style that is more easily understood in the Region, for them to be referenced with appropriate and credible French language sources, for their translation into local languages using different media including audio and video CDs and for their dissemination throughout the region, including through local radio. It may be that further collaborative information projects, such as those which produced the information toolkits on GMOs and IPRs should be explored. GRAIN should develop a strategy for systematically planning the development and dissemination of its French language materials in ways that to allow people in francophone West Africa to have a way of proposing themes and even to contribute to developing ideas that take into account their concerns.

**RECOMMENDATION 7 - GRAIN.ORG**

GRAIN should consider upgrading the [grain.org](http://grain.org) website to be more of a portal on agricultural biodiversity issues in general, as perceived by GRAIN, making the site more immediate, and seeking to collect more information, and possibly donations, from people who visit the site and download information. More staff should be uploading information. The inclusion of 'live' additions of BIO-IPR entries to the website would improve its immediacy. Continual improvements to the sites' usability, 'signposting', navigation, searchability and so on should be built into the planned redevelopment of the website.

**RECOMMENDATION 8 - BIODIVERSITY RIGHTS LEGISLATION database (BRL)**

GRAIN should continue to maintain and update the BRL database and publicise its existence through targeted outreach, more links in other GRAIN website pages and on BIO-IPR listserv emails and improve specific links within the BRL pages back to other GRAIN information, including [bilaterals.org](http://bilaterals.org).

**RECOMMENDATION 9 – TRACKER TABLES**

GRAIN may want to re-evaluate the priority given to the Tracker Tables and/or use them as part of the process of updating the website to make it more 'immediate'. Some could be retired from the frontline menus, for example the GM tracker table.

**RECOMMENDATION 10 - BILATERALS.ORG**

[bilaterals.org](http://bilaterals.org) is a unique collaborative initiative that needs continued full support from GRAIN including extending the collaboration in order to reduce time commitments from GRAIN staff and continued technical enhancement of the website. Although it is not a sole GRAIN initiative and needs to be seen as something separate, links to it from GRAIN's website and listserv emails should be enhanced.

[bilaterals.org](http://bilaterals.org) could explicitly take on more of the work on TRIPS plus and BIO-IPR over the next period, always maintaining, though, the links to this information – or duplicates - on GRAIN's website and listserv emails.

**RECOMMENDATION 11 - BIODIVERSIDADLA.ORG**

[Biodiversidadla.org](http://Biodiversidadla.org) is another example of an excellent collaborative project and requires ongoing support. In the redesign of [biodiversidadla.org](http://biodiversidadla.org), a greater visibility of Portuguese language pages, from the home page, would be welcomed. Also, attention needs to be given to ensuring that URLs / links are carried forward, or redirects are supplied from existing URLs to equivalent pages in the new site. Increased 'tagging' with keywords and greater sub-division of materials posted could facilitate easier in-site searchability and navigation. While, Google searches are effective, as the site is trawled regularly, its Google ranking could be improved by better links to it from high ranked sites e.g. mainstream international organisations.

**RECOMMENDATION 12 - INFORMAL and AD HOC INFORMATION OUTPUTS**

The recording of the production and use of GRAIN's prodigious output of informal and *ad hoc* information materials needs to be systematised and commonly archived copies of all should be stored on the GRAIN intranet with in hard copy in the GRAIN's archives, putting them on the website when appropriate. Sharing of these experiences among staff, and perhaps wider, across regions could be enhanced through the circulation of multilingual summaries on a regular (quarterly) basis.

**RECOMMENDATION 13 - OUTREACH and MEDIA**

In order to increase its outreach and media coverage, GRAIN needs to work proactively with partner, information and media organisations to ensure coverage of the issues that GRAIN and its partners are dealing with and to ensure that this information is delivered to the different audiences in forms that they can use. GRAIN should develop an international rapid response capacity that can respond to media enquiries and meet their deadlines. Equally, GRAIN should explore new ways, with the help of partners, of communicating with grassroots organisations using different media, for example audio. GRAIN needs to develop its contacts databases.

**RECOMMENDATION 14 - STRATEGIC PLANNING**

GRAIN should set up robust systems planning, modifying and executing its outreach strategies. In so doing, it should ensure that coverage of long-term key issues and processes continues, either by GRAIN or other organisations to which GRAIN can link its audiences, despite changes in emphasis in GRAIN's work and short-term pressures. GRAIN must also retain flexibility in these planning processes so as to be able to make use of new opportunities for outreach as they arise.

**RECOMMENDATION 15 - RESPONSIVENESS OF GRAIN**

GRAIN should discuss with important social movements at international, regional and national levels how best it can respond to their requests for information. While GRAIN should protect its autonomy, it should also be prepared to dedicate some resources to responding to the social movements' requests for information within a time frame of their choosing.

**RECOMMENDATION 16 - COLLABORATIVE WORKING**

GRAIN must further develop its partnerships on collaborative information work in all regions in order to be able to achieve more. However, these must be carefully negotiated in order to ensure that there are net mutual benefits and that the costs do not outweigh these. This should include a consideration of seeking

new formal partnerships with activist groups and social movements in the North, starting in Southern Europe and Canada.

#### **RECOMMENDATION 17 - INTERGOVERNMENTAL PROCESSES**

GRAIN should continue to provide a consistent monitoring, analysing and information function of intergovernmental processes concerning the governance of agricultural biodiversity. These include the processes of UN organisations, in particular WIPO and its committees, FAO and especially its CGRFA and the Treaty Governing Body, and the CBD's working groups, as well as, to some extent, the CGIAR. This work should be done either by GRAIN staff, contracted consultants or partners. GRAIN should also organise its existing information resources in ways that enable easier access to sets of information concerning intergovernmental processes, improving the signposting to information about these processes on their websites, listserves and in their magazines.

#### **RECOMMENDATION 18 - PROFILE**

GRAIN should be more proactive in promoting its information materials in the context of the struggles in the defence of agricultural biodiversity. While GRAIN should not change in terms of maintaining a low institutional profile it should do more to help its audiences to have access to good quality information. GRAIN should achieve this principally through working with partners in the social movements in their media campaigns, particularly in local and national media. But if occasions arise, GRAIN should opportunistically ensure that appropriate information is disseminated directly under its own name, especially in international circles.

#### **RECOMMENDATION 19 - GRAIN'S 'RESPONSIBILITY'**

GRAIN should accept the 'responsibility' of maintaining a wide coverage and oversight of all relevant agricultural biodiversity issues as viewed from their perspective. In addition to the dissemination of materials already undertaken and planned, GRAIN should actively seek to occupy as many 'spaces' as possible where agricultural biodiversity issues are discussed or disseminated in order that their perspective on these vital issues of global significance is available to all.

#### **RECOMMENDATION 20 - RESOURCING GRAIN'S INFORMATION WORK**

GRAIN should use this report to inform its donors about the breadth and depth of GRAIN's information that is valued and used widely by many people and organisations, especially NGOs and social movements, and to such good effect.

The donors should be encouraged to provide long-term support that will allow both a continuation of the research and analysis that underpins GRAIN's core information outputs as well as increased outreach of appropriately adapted materials, which are disseminated to GRAIN's many audiences, through the internet and in other forms, and through partner organisations and media outlets.

GRAIN should also explore how to utilise the excellent relations it has with its donors not only to build greater synergy with their networks and partners as part of GRAIN's outreach strategy, but also to engage with them in discussions, which follow up the findings of this evaluation, so that the effectiveness of GRAIN's information provision and dissemination is further enhanced.