



SUCCESS STORY

Virtual Library:

A treasure within the reach of Scientists from Sub-Saharan Africa

Researchers join the international scientific dialog.



INSAH Website.



Training in Chad, October 2009.

Photo: Aguibou Coulibaly INSAH

Nowadays, researchers in much of the world access electronic libraries filled with the latest scientific publications from their desktops with a click of a mouse. But in Africa, well trained researchers often work in institutes lacking real libraries, internet connections and even steady electricity. Often, they retreat to cybercafés to send occasional emails, but still lack access to the world’s scientific archives. Trained and mandated to develop technologies suited to the continent’s problems, these scientists find themselves in the dark.

Starting in 2008, the U.S. Government, through USAID’s West African Cotton Improvement Program (WACIP), supported the *Institut du Sahel* (INSAH) and Michigan State University in setting up an innovative virtual library to allow regional scientists share their reports and publications with the world.

“Our vision is to create a portal, with the cooperation of researchers and experts, to facilitate access to information online and in real time, thus supporting countries and partners in information management and sharing,” says the Director General of INSAH, Dr. Amadou Moustapha.

In 2009 and 2010, INSAH provided equipment (computers, scanners and Internet servers) as well as training to national agricultural research institutes in the four cotton-producing countries of Benin, Burkina Faso, Chad and Mali, referred to as the C-4 countries. Mr. Aguibou Coulibaly and Mrs. Fadima Diarra traveled to each country to teach researchers and librarians how to use this new equipment to upload documents to the web and use the web to find data and research studies. Thanks to the support of the USAID WACIP project, the INSAH technicians taught C-4 research staff to access the Food and Agriculture Organization’s free AGORA digital library (Access to Global Online Research in Agriculture), with access to over 1,200 journals related to food, agriculture, environmental science and related social sciences.

According to Professor Gnissa Konaté, the Director of the Institute of Environmental and Agricultural Research in Burkina Faso, “*This will contribute to improving communication between Burkinabe researchers and their peers by affording them access to more reliable and scientific sources of information.*”

With the assistance of the USAID WACIP project, 151 cotton-related studies have been uploaded to the website www.insahpub.net. Efforts are underway to add another 250 by the end of 2010.