



Using internet technology to inform researchers, policy makers and other stakeholders about sustainable land management in drylands: experience from a large interdisciplinary and international project

N. Geeson (1), E. van den Elsen (2), J. Brandt (1), G. Quaranta (1), and R. Salvia (1)

(1) MEDES, Viale dell' Ateneo Lucano 10, Potenza 85100, Italy (nicky.geeson@googlemail.com), (2) Alterra, Soil Science Centre, Wageningen, Netherlands

In the last twenty years the advent of the internet has made it much easier to share the results of scientific research with a wider range of audiences. Where once there were only scientific journals and books, it is now possible to deliver messages and dissemination products instantly, by email or other media, to huge circulation lists; thereby also addressing non-scientific audiences. Most scientific projects now host a website, but until recently few have exploited the communication possibilities to maximum advantage. DESIRE has been a large interdisciplinary and international project working to mitigate desertification by selecting and trialling sustainable land management practices with stakeholders. Therefore it has been very important to use a general project website, and a separate Harmonised Information System, to ensure that partners and stakeholders are able to understand the sustainable options and learn from one another. The project website has included many useful features, such as general project and partner information, a schedule of future meetings, and repositories of publicly (and project only) downloadable documents. Lessons have been learned about communication preferences between groups with different interests. For example, an on-line forum seemed a good way of allowing project partners to have their say on various topics. However it was not well-used and it was concluded that partners preferred to communicate just by email, a medium that they access most days for many uses. Whereas the project website focuses on the latest news, the Harmonised Information System has been used to document the history of the project, stage by stage, filling in each section as results became available. Information can be accessed from the perspective of both the research aims and each study site. Interactive tools and drop-down menus are among the features that are used to make the information as attractive and as accessible as possible. Although English is the language of scientists, material must be presented in local languages for local people, of which at least 9 are implemented in DESIRE. Of course, not everyone can use a computer or view the internet, so some dissemination products do also have to be downloaded and printed and distributed by hand. The DESIRE website can be accessed at <http://www.desire-project.eu/>, and the DESIRE Harmonised Information System at <http://www.desire-his.eu/>