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## The GFU web-portal

### What is the Global Facilitation Unit for Underutilized Species?

The Global Facilitation Unit for Underutilized Species is a multi-stakeholder initiative under the umbrella of GFAR and currently hosted by IPGRI. The Unit is expected to develop a self-sustained facilitation mechanism, which supports and facilitates the work that is undertaken worldwide on different aspects of underutilized species at different levels by networks, organizations, agencies and others.

### Why a web-portal for the GFU for underutilized species?

In the context of the above-described initiative the web-portal will facilitate the access to already available information by using the possibilities of Internet. Additionally the portal will be a tool for the GFU team and other stakeholders to provide information on events, activities, job postings, experts, other relevant websites and documents.

Besides this one-way knowledge-transfer communications tools will be included in the portal. Open discussion fora, interactive evaluation tools but also closed mailing lists will strengthen the communication and information exchange amongst the stakeholders.

### What will be the structure of the web-portal?

The section **About GFU** will give an overview on history, mission, stakeholders and staff of the GFU.

The **Pool of knowledge** will ease access and provision of the actual knowledge in the field of underutilized crops in various ways:

One way is via the *Organizations, Networks & other Stakeholders* link. This entry point focuses on the needs of scientific experts, donors, policy and decision makers. It will inform about other stakeholders, their special expertise and activities and how to get in contact with them.

The entry point *Crops* is wanted to be useful for practitioners such as extensionist workers, technology providers and consumers. This section will give very brief facts about the biology, occurrence and use of each crop and then link to web-sources such as full-text documents, institutes, practical advice, seed producers etc.

*Experts* can be found according to their crop or topic expertise, country of residence or organization.

Links to selected and summarized *portals & other websources* as well as full-text *documents* will be listed.

In the **Discussion fora** all the stakeholders could meet up and exchange information on different levels from practical information on crop production to policy negotiations and other issues.

**The Latest** should give a fast and up-to-date overview on *Newsletters, Events* and available *Jobs* related to underutilized species. *Spotlights* give brief notes on current research, upcoming projects, new publications and much more.

A self-explaining color system supports the navigation and orientation within the portal.

## **What is the future potential of the web-portal?**

If well accepted by information provider and users, actually in an ideal setup both would use and provide knowledge, the portal could become a powerful tool to support most of the GFU activities in order to make them most valuable and sustainable leading to a self sustained mechanism.

## **What kind of technology will be used?**

In the first version pages will be build up using plain HTML.

For the second, the dynamic version technology decisions will be taken whenever it is clear where the portal will be hosted as technology should follow the standards of the hosting organization. In any case a Data Management System (DMS; e.g. oracle, mySQL, SQL server) will contain and manage the data and a scripting language (such as .php, .asp or .jsp) delivering the data to the browser. By using these kind of technologies it will be possible to search all available information in a user-friendly way. Additionally the user will be able to input information via a web-interface directly to the database.

During all steps of the development the special needs of users in developing countries will be a focus. This means no complex graphics on the pages, allowing full content access even when the graphic-mode is turned off, offering off-line browsing by web to e-mail technology, provision of the newsletter and spotlights as plain-text e-mail. Certainly the portal will be reproduced as a cd-rom on a regular base.

## **What's next?**

The GFAR and NARS Steering Committee meetings held in October 2002 in Manila, The Philippines are requested to comment and make suggestions to the portal's prototype structure and content. The comments will be included in the further design of the portal.

Its first version will be available online by the end of 2002. This version will be a static one, which means no database will be connected. Possibly an unmoderated mailing list will be included and a first issue of the "GFU underutilized crops Newsletter" will be published.

Within the first half of 2003 a migration to a database-driven, dynamic version will take place. This database driven portal will allow to carry out multi-dimensional searches e.g. the user could look for an expert on fonio storage in Senegal or he could find publications by FAO on tef as well as all about okra in Mali.

Besides being more powerful for the user searching information the dynamic version will also be easier to maintain by the GFU team and other information providers. Web-based, password protected input forms will allow decentralized data-input, quality check and clearance. Also information duplication and input of the same data (e.g. addresses) on several pages will be avoidable.

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