

# FADINAP Spearheads Fertilizer Information Networking on the Web

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## ABSTRACT

FADINAP's web site at [www.fadinap.org](http://www.fadinap.org) is the most frequently visited agrochemicals' web site in the region, providing access to its huge agrochemicals' bibliographic database, directory of fertilizer-related information sources, statistical data and many other information resources accumulated over a period of 20 years. The Internet has dramatically transformed FADINAP's ability to disseminate information and has widened its outreach to the fertilizer industry worldwide in times when available resources are very limited

## INTRODUCTION

For the past two decades, the Fertilizer Advisory Development and Information Network for Asia and the Pacific (FADINAP) has served as a focal point for regional information exchange on fertilizers and agrochemicals among 28 member countries. Developing a regional information system was the central issue. Information provided through FADINAP has helped to:

- Make the right choices when purchasing fertilizer for the domestic market;
- Analyzed the strengths and weaknesses of the domestic fertilizer sector, e.g., when comparing production costs and prices between countries;
- Found solutions for improving fertilizer marketing systems; and
- Drawn attention when imbalanced fertilizer use damages the environment, reduces crop yields and decreases farmers' earnings.

Formerly, information produced by FADINAP was circulated in printed form, as country profiles, directories, and special reports (e.g. on fertilizer market liberalization and legislative reforms). When time was a major issue, e.g. for price and trade information, FADINAP's data were circulated by fax, the fastest form of information transmission until a few years ago.

However, with shrinking staff and funds some difficult choices had to be made, resulting in a reduced number and selection of publications and orientation towards electronic data exchange through the Internet. FADINAP became aware of the power of the Internet in 1997. Although FADINAP was reasonably well equipped for electronic data processing, most member countries were not. Moreover, our publications had gained recognition over the years as reliable sources of fertilizer information for Asia and the Pacific and it was difficult to discontinue them. Nevertheless, it was perceived that the Internet was cutting edge technology and training was the first step for us and our partners to exploit it effectively.

This paper shares our experiences in integrating electronic networking into FADINAP's regional information system to sustain, or even expand, its services despite reduced staff and funds.

## THE INTERNET TRANSFORMS FADINAP'S FERTILIZER INFORMATION SERVICES

FADINAP established its website on an experimental basis in 1997. The website served to advertize FADINAP's information services and to provide member countries with updated information. A year later, the rapid development in Internet technology encouraged FADINAP to expand its web-based services and to seriously transform the way it collects and disseminates fertilizer information.

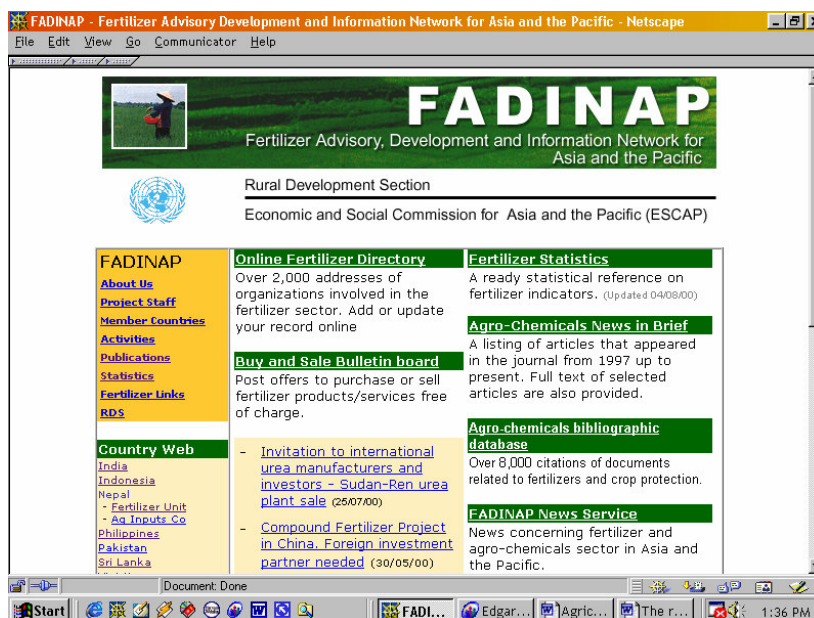


Figure 1. FADINAP Web site at [www.fadinap.org](http://www.fadinap.org)

The launching of FADINAP's online agrochemicals' bibliographic database in 1998 marked the beginning of this transformation. The bibliographic database was developed in 1978 at a time when information on agrochemicals was fragmented or nonexistent. At present, FADINAP's database contains over 9,000 citations of published and non-published literature on agrochemicals, with abstracts. Many of these documents, e.g. unpublished country reports presented at various FADINAP-sponsored regional and national meetings, are not available elsewhere. The central database is located in FADINAP's library. A search of the database can be undertaken either by visiting FADINAP's library or consulting the Regional Information Support Service (RISS), a monthly bibliographic abstract journal, produced by FADINAP and made available to a wide target audience.

The demand for the services offered in the abstract journal was high, but with the withdrawal of donor support, FADINAP was forced to seek other alternatives. With the Internet, the development of an online bibliographic database appeared to be the answer. Practically anyone who has an Internet connection can now consult and perform a literature search, 24 hours a day. Hard copies of literature are available upon request for a small fee to cover photocopying and mailing charges.

It became obvious to FADINAP that the Internet offers many possibilities to further improve its information services with minimum cost. Consequently, in 1997 FADINAP embarked on another major project – the launching of the Database on Pesticides and the Environment on the web. Developed through collaboration with ESCAP, the EU and 10 Asian countries from 1992 to 1996, the database contains much technical information pertaining to the agronomic use and adverse effects of pesticides on human and animal health, as well as the environment. The database was distributed on diskettes to cooperating agencies and others who had requested copies. With the web version, the Database on Pesticides and the Environment is now accessible worldwide.

More recently, FADINAP has launched an online Fertilizer Directory and Fertilizer Trade Bulletin Board. The Fertilizer Directory was first published as the Directory of Sources of Fertilizer-related Information with Special Reference to Asia and the Pacific in 1986. The Fertilizer Directory was subsequently revised in 1991, and again in 1995. The publication became a very important reference tool. Governments and FADINAP Technical Liaison Offices were given free copies. The directory holds about 1,800 addresses of producers, traders, government agencies and other institutions involved in the fertilizer sector from about 100 countries worldwide.

The on-line version of the directory allows users to add, update or modify their profiles. It also allows searching by country, product, and type of business. The information provided is a valuable source for both traders and producers. This facility has attracted attention from fertilizer industries worldwide and captured the headlines of the *Fertilizers and Agriculture*, May 2000 newsletter, published by the International Fertilizer Industry Association (IFIA). The Fertilizer Trade Bulletin Board provides a venue to advertize products and services. This facility has greatly assisted FADINAP in satisfying many requests from member countries to advertize their fertilizer tenders and bids.

### **FADINAP Assists Member Countries to Use the Internet**

Parallel to the development of its website, FADINAP conducted a series of Internet training courses in seven member countries namely, India, Indonesia, Nepal, Pakistan, the Philippines, Sri Lanka and Vietnam. The training program consisted of two parts: a one-day Internet orientation session and a three-day website development course. The former served to demonstrate the power of Internet technology to boost efficiency and effectiveness in communication and information management, and to indicate the extent of fertilizer information resources available on the Internet. The orientation session targeted management and technical staff of government and private fertilizer organizations and aimed at increasing their awareness and appreciation of the Internet. Participation ranged from 10 to 35 people in each country, representing senior officials from the Ministry of Agriculture, heads of fertilizer regulatory authorities, fertilizer producers and traders and information officers. A total of 145 people in the seven participating countries benefited from the orientation session.

The majority of those participating appeared to have no background in the Internet, some had used e-mail only, and a few had never used computers before. So it was a real challenge for FADINAP to share its expertise in this area and to assist participants in becoming efficient and effective users of the Internet. It was an even bigger challenge to encourage them to become providers of information on the Internet through the development of national websites.

The second part of the training addressed this more challenging task—a three-day course on website development. This course was restricted to those who were given direct responsibility for the website. The training program resulted in the creation of national web sites, which are linked to the FADINAP website thereby establishing a one-stop information site on the fertilizer sector in Asia and the Pacific. These websites offer numerous benefits to the whole information network. For member countries, it is inexpensive and provides rapid access to FADINAP's online databases, statistical data, and other related information, and to establish contact with numerous organizations worldwide. Through the web, FADINAP has been able to expand its outreach to target clients considerably.

## **CONCLUSION**

The Internet has provided FADINAP's information service with renewed strength in times when available resources are very limited. It has transformed FADINAP's ability to disseminate information and has widened its outreach to the fertilizer industry worldwide, moving from a limited readership to include agricultural/planning ministries in the region, the fertilizer industry, international organizations, universities, and research and development centers. Furthermore, the Internet has empowered FADINAP's member countries to become involved in the supply and dissemination of information by setting up their respective national web sites. Thus, in a limited way, FADINAP has bridged the 'digital divide'. However, as much as we are determined "to go Internet", the advent of the electronic age does not mean abandoning our printed or other forms of publications entirely, as they are still of great use to our members.