Communication for development, community media and ICTs for family farming and rural development

> " Creating social change through media is not about the tools you use, the technologies, the perceived quality of the media produced. It's about a real and deep understanding of needs: knowing what will work for your community. "
>
> Professor Clemencia Rodriguez - Colombia

Summary

Communication for development, community media and information and communication technologies (ICTs) can help family farmers to acquire and exchange knowledge and information, strengthen rural institutions and give voice to their concerns, but only if they reflect and respond to the needs, objectives and conditions of farmers and their communities.

Participants in the latest e-Agriculture online forum and related discussions concluded that better policies were among the keys to creating an enabling and inclusive environment for rural communication services.

This policy document summarizes key observations and recommendations for policymakers made through the online forum, in which participants underscored that effective rural communication strategies and services would need to, among other things:

- be centered around the active participation of family farmers in information and knowledge sharing;
- help to reduce, rather than widen, observed gender-based digital divides;
- foster youth involvement in content development and policy processes;
- provide more information on, and analysis of, the ways in which ICT tools support family farmers' access to information and knowledge exchange;
- view technology as a means to better rural communication, rather than an end in itself;
- expand physical access to infrastructure, services and tools;
- promote public-private partnerships;
- clarify the roles of, and relationships between, ministries and other entities involved in rural communication services.

Introduction

From 22 September to 6 October 2014, the e-Agriculture Community of Practice organized its **24th e-Agriculture forum**, as part of a series of virtual consultations and face-to-face participatory discussions on the theme, "**Communication for Development, community media and ICTs for family farming and rural development**," organized by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters (AMARC). The forum took place within the framework of the International Year of Family Farming (IYFF).

The e-Agriculture forum complemented the outcomes of three regional online consultations on the same topic, which took place from 25 August to 12 September 2014 through the following online platforms: Onda Rural, for Latin America; YenKasa, for Africa; and ComDev Asia, for Asia and the Pacific. The inputs collected during the participatory discussion process subsequently contributed to an international, face-to-face **Forum on Communication for development and Community Media for Family Farming (FCCM)**, held on 23 and 24 October 2014 in Rome, Italy. The FCCM identified policy options and strategic initiatives to promote rural communication services in support of family farming and rural development and allowed a global alliance, including farmers organizations, community media, and research and development institutions, to move this agenda forward.

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About FAO

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) is the UN agency responsible for e-Agriculture, one of the "Action Lines" of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS). The e-Agriculture community of practice (www.e-agriculture.com) looks at how ICTs can improve agriculture and contribute to rural development. FAO also leads Communication for development efforts in the field of family farming and rural development (http://www.fao.org/communication-for-development/en/)

About AMARC

AMARC is an international, non-governmental organization, which serves the community radio movement and its listeners, with a network of nearly 4000 members and associates across 150 countries (www.amarc.org).

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Key observations

During the two-week e-Agriculture forum, the following key recommendations emerged:

Family farmers at the center of action

The successful implementation of communication, information and capacity development programmes in rural areas will depend on **knowing family farmers**. This involves understanding the cultural, economic and social landscapes in which they are operating, and involving them directly in developing and using rural communication systems. Every development programme should place a priority on participatory approaches, which serve to ensure the ownership and commitment of the different stakeholders. This bottom-up approach involves extensive discussions, conversations, and decision-making with the communities involved.

Integrated approach

An integrated approach is needed to ensure that rural communication services facilitate equitable access to knowledge and information, while giving a voice to farmers and communities. This requires an appropriate combination of technologies and communication methods. An integrated approach also implies promotion of communication and/or ICT policies for the rural sector that are designed to bring together rural institutions and farmers' organizations, as well as enhance the capacities of the service operators and communities involved in the process.

Accessible content

The relevance and quality of content provided through communication services is of fundamental importance. Farmers usually find agricultural information and related topics most useful when the content has been repackaged to suit their needs. Additionally, content is more useful to farmers when it is dynamic, delivered through a medium which they find convenient to access and comfortable to use, comes from trusted sources, and is developed with their direct participation.

Social network

The biggest factor to influence success in working with different communication technologies seems to be a **well-functioning human network**. The use of ICTs can help to support this process by enabling the exchange of information and knowledge and by establishing contacts, but only human action will really change behaviour. **Social media** can play a role by allowing farmers to be both disseminators and producers of information at the same time. In addition to well-known platforms like Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, other forms of interactive media can address specific needs. Documented approaches include online discussion forums on small-holder practices; websites that allow farmers and others to enter information and receive feedback on good practices; and telecenters which allow rural farmers to access and share information through the use of web-based tools. Additionally, the use of ICTs for human interaction and even entertainment can help to tackle the feeling of isolation in rural areas and reduce the likelihood of migration to urban areas.

e-agriculture

Gender and diversity

Access to community media and ICTs for women, youth, older farmers and people living in the most remote areas, has been hindered by persistent social and economic inequalities and the pricing of ICTs. A gender-based digital divide persists and is found more frequently in rural than urban areas. The potential for information inequity following introduction of new ICTs into a community can be reduced through proper design and implementation of a rural communication strategy based on a bottom-up approach involving the community itself.

Youth

ICTs can play a role in **countering youth migration** to urban areas by enhancing access to market information, production techniques, new technologies and financing opportunities. Youth typically adopt ICTs

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more easily than other groups in the community and play a vital role as **early adopters and intermediaries** in rural areas where literacy levels are low, disseminating the information they acquire to help the rest of the community. However, it is important to ensure that both young males and females have access to technologies and capacity development and that youth are able to participate in content development and policy processes.

Technology as a means, not an end

Technology is not an end in itself but a potentially powerful means to support the objectives, and meet the needs, of family farmers. Equitable and affordable access to ICTs remains a challenge in many communities, as well as information and training in the most effective use of those technologies. Where technologies like mobile phones are increasingly available, for example, they are not necessarily used in the most effective ways.

Information and analysis

There is a significant need for more information on, and analysis of, the ways in which ICT tools support family farmers' access to information and knowledge exchange. Information on **unforeseen problems or possible negative impacts** related to the use of ICTs in previously implemented projects also need to be documented. Such information provides opportunities to learn lessons and to help develop more effective rural communication strategies.
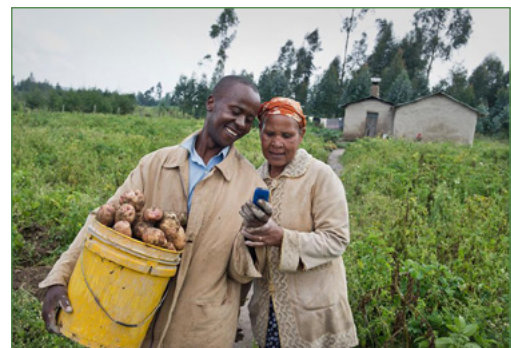
Better policies, greater potential

There is a clear need to better inform ministries in charge of agriculture, planning and telecommunications of the potential offered by rural communication services and ICTs. Effective policymaking is fundamental to the development of inclusive,

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affordable and evidence-based strategies for improving rural communication services. These services would

benefit from adequate research and investment, public-private partnerships and the full participation of farming communities and organizations.

In most countries, members reported the **absence of appropriate policies** to support the improvement of rural communication services, by responding to actual needs and by fostering better linkages between the different sectors involved. Developing the capacity of policymakers in this regard is essential.

Recommendations for policymakers

Contributors to the forum pointed out the need for policies, which do the following:

- include youth and women;
- foster, and make use of, comprehensive research into the information, knowledge and communication needs of government extension service providers; private extension enterprises; farmers; and telecasters across the agricultural value chain;
- promote public-private partnerships;
- respond to actual needs of the rural communities;
- enable moderate prices by lowering taxes and facilitating infrastructure and service providers;
- ensure equitable and affordable access;
- expand physical access to services and tools;
- regulate the functions and relationships of the various ministries, institutions and organizations involved in rural communication services;
- intervene at both the national and local levels.

The starting point for improved rural communication services as part of agricultural policies should be to address the real needs of farmers and involve them in the different stages of the development process. In this way, policymakers would be able to give voice to rural people and ensure inclusive and demand-driven communication services.

This process needs to be supported with sound information gathering and analysis of successes and failures as well as better alignment of efforts in various sectors through information and knowledge exchange and collaboration.

There is a strong need to facilitate the dialogue among different constituencies (e.g. farmers' organizations, development agencies, governments, private investors) about the need for communication policies in support of the agricultural sector.

Many of the observations made during the forum are mirrored in the Outcome documents of the World Summit on the Information Society +10 and more specifically in the section dedicated to the e-agriculture Action Line and its Vision beyond 2015: www.itu.int/wsis/implementation/2014/forum/inc/doc/outcome/362828V2E.pdf

The full view of contributions from the
22 September-6 October 2014 e-Agriculture forum can be
accessed online in the e-Agriculture forum archive:
www.e-agriculture.org/fr/forums/forum-archive

Resources & references

🍂 IICD: International Institute for Communication and Development: www.iicd.org
🍂 IICD: ITC solutions for inclusive agricultural value chains:
www.iicd.org/about/publications/ict-solutions-for-inclusive-agricultural-value-chains/
🍂 GFAR: Global Forum on Agricultural Research: www.egfar.org
🍂 Maru A., Bourgeois R., Mayer W., ICTs Improving Family Farming, FAO, 2014:
www.egfar.org/documents/icts-improving-family-farming
🍂 YPARD: Young Professionals for Agricultural Development: www.ypard.net
🍂 IICD, ICT4D Effects: Youth, ICTs and Agriculture:
www.iicd.org/about/publications/ict4d-effects-youth-icts-and-agriculture
🍂 FAO, e-Agriculture Review Report – Action Line C7. ICT Applications: e-agriculture, 2014
🍂 UN-APCICT: United Nations Asia and Pacific Training Centre for Information and Communication
Technologies for Development: www.unapcict.org
🍂 ICT Price Basket: www.itu.int/ITU-D/ict/ipb/
🍂 WSIS+10 High-Level Event outcome documents:
www.itu.int/wsis/implementation/2014/forum/inc/doc/outcome/362828V2E.pdf

Contributions posted from the following countries:

🍂 Europe: Belgium, Italy, France, Spain, The Netherlands, Ukraine
🍂 Africa: Senegal, Kenya, Zambia, Uganda, Malawi, Ivory Coast, Tanzania, Benin, Burundi
🍂 North America: United States of America, Canada
🍂 South America: Nicaragua, Guatemala, Colombia, Argentina, Uruguay
🍂 Asia: India, Republic of Korea, Bangladesh, Lao People's Democratic Republic
🍂 South Pacific: Samoa

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🍂 Michael Riggs - Programme Officer | UN-APCICT/ESCAP
🍂 Alberto Solano - CEO for Latin America | Grameen Foundation
🍂 Simon Wandila - Country Representative Zambia | YPARD

Links to regional consultations, simultaneous discussion and Forum webpages:

- Communication for Development, community media and ICTs for family farming and rural development in Asia Pacific - ComDev Asia: http://goo.gl/y7cmOz
- Comunicación para el desarrollo, los medios comunitarios y las TIC para la agricultura familiar y el desarrollo rural en América Latina - Onda Rural: http://goo.gl/R5w5Fu
- Communication for Development, community media and ICTs for family farming and rural development in Africa – YenKasa Africa: http://goo.gl/FjE49u
- During the e-Agriculture forum, there was a discussion on Youth sustaining family farming through ICTs organized by ARDYIS, CTA and the African Youth Foundation (AYF), which contributed to the forum: http://ardyis.cta.int/en/activities/others/item/244-e-debate-youth-sustaining-family-farming-through-icts
- Reference to the FCCM webpage with all the resources of the face-to-face forum: http://fccm.cccomdev.org/