



8th GFRAS Annual Meeting

Rural advisory services and empowered youth for balanced transformation in rural and urban communities

In conjunction with the 2017 APEN International Conference

10–13 September 2017, Ingham and Townsville, Australia

Concept Note

Date, venue and topic

The [8th Annual Meeting](#) of the Global Forum for Rural Advisory Services ([GFRAS](#)) will take place from **10–13 September 2017** in **Ingham and Townsville, Australia**, with side events on 8 and 9 September. The topic is “Rural advisory services and empowered youth for balanced transformation in rural and urban communities”. It is co-organised with the Australasia-Pacific Extension Network (APEN) and there will be a partial overlap with APEN’s International Conference, which will take place from 13–15 September on the topic “Facilitating balanced change for rural and urban communities”.

Background

Rural advisory services (RAS¹), also called extension services, are fundamental in supporting rural people to face existing and emerging challenges, and to improve their livelihoods. GFRAS was initiated in 2010 to provide advocacy and leadership on pluralistic and demand-driven RAS for sustainable development. The forum includes networks representing RAS at regional, subregional and national levels, and actors from all sectors and domains involved in or related to RAS. The GFRAS Annual Meeting is a key mechanism for GFRAS to foster learning and exchange and to discuss and strengthen the functioning of GFRAS, regional networks and national fora. The Annual Meeting contributes to addressing the three strategic fields identified in the GFRAS Strategic Framework:

1. Advocacy and support for an enabling policy environment and appropriate investment in RAS
2. Professionalisation of RAS
3. Facilitation and enhancement of effective and continuous knowledge generation and exchange.

Since its inception the GFRAS Annual Meeting has involved a thematic component, field trips and a functional component (focused on network strengthening). The 2017 Annual Meeting will also include a policy dialogue session.

¹ Rural advisory services, also called extension services, are all the different activities that provide the information and services needed and demanded by farmers and other actors in rural settings to assist them in developing their own technical, organisational and management skills and practices so as to improve their livelihoods and well-being. ([GFRAS Strategic Framework](#))

Meeting objectives

The four interrelated objectives of the meeting are to:

- identify and discuss roles, challenges and opportunities for youth to be meaningful actors in balanced and inclusive rural and urban transformation
- identify and discuss the roles and relations between RAS and youth for inclusive and sustainable rural–urban linkages
- identify and discuss changes in policies and the capacities of RAS needed for both RAS and youth to fulfil their roles
- strengthen capacities of RAS networks through peer exchange and learning.

Thematic component

RAS and empowered youth for balanced transformation in rural and urban communities

The conference theme addresses a strategic contemporary development issue that presents both challenges and opportunities: rapid urbanisation and its implications for agricultural and rural development. Rapid urbanisation is driving profound changes in both urban and rural areas around the world. The lack of effective linkages, synergies and complementarities between urban, peri-urban and rural areas contributes to sustaining development gaps and inequalities – particularly in terms of infrastructure and access to social services. At the same time, however, demographic and social changes lead to increased interdependencies between rural and urban areas, especially – but not exclusively – in terms of labour, employment, goods and services provided by rural people and areas, agricultural activities (especially smallholder farming) and natural resources.

Adopting an approach that acknowledges the interconnectedness of rural and urban areas and that supports a balanced, sustainable and inclusive rural and urban transformation is therefore critical to end hunger, eradicate poverty and achieve the wider 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda. This includes fostering the development of inclusive and sustainable agricultural value chains and food systems, and creating increased opportunities for decent employment and incomes, particularly for young people living in rural areas.

According to FAO (2014), over half of the world’s population of young people live in rural areas, mainly in developing countries. Rural youth hold enormous potential: young people based in rural areas can play particularly important roles in supporting inclusive transformation processes and in enhancing and strengthening a mutually beneficial connectivity between urban, peri-urban and rural areas. In this way they can contribute significantly to inclusive and sustainable development at local, regional and global levels.

However, rural youth – particularly women and girls, migrants and vulnerable groups – face major challenges in realising their potential. They often have limited access to assets such as land, natural resources, finance and markets. Similarly, they lack education and employment opportunities, and have limited access to knowledge, skills, services and appropriate advice.

While there is rural–urban youth migration for perceived employment and education opportunities, as well as to be able to send remittances home, urban centres do not always provide the economic and social opportunities hoped for. Evidence has shown that suitable policies and investments need to be put in place to adequately address the particular needs of young people in rural and urban

transformation processes. For example, policies and investments can be developed that support young people's livelihoods, education and remunerative employment opportunities in rural as well as urban areas. More participatory and inclusive governance structures (e.g. in farmers' organisations and cooperatives) can also be encouraged to provide spaces for young people to feel represented and valued and to voice their concerns.

Rural advisory services can play an important part in enhancing the roles of young people in revitalising their communities. On one hand, RAS can strengthen and empower young people, particularly women and girls and vulnerable groups, with new skills and knowledge that can enable them to contribute successfully to improving livelihoods and incomes in their communities. This might include providing advice and resources to undertake new ventures and entrepreneurial activities; supporting them with appropriate training and education options; strengthening access to innovations, infrastructure and communications (including ICTs) in rural areas; and engaging young people in remunerative opportunities at every stage of key agricultural value chains. Rural advisory services can help strengthen the voices of their clients – particularly smallholders, youth, women and vulnerable groups – not least by working with the rural organisations to which they belong. Such services can also advocate for better policies that respond to their clients' needs.

On the other hand, there are potential roles for young people in making RAS more effective, demand-driven and up to date, for example as local RAS providers themselves, or as lead farmers sharing innovations and new approaches with their communities. Young people can provide services along the value chain, especially when assisted by use of ICTs.

During the GFRAS Annual Meeting, participants will have the opportunity to share evidence and discuss the diverse roles and relations between RAS and youth in fostering sustainable and inclusive rural and urban transformations. Participants will focus on identifying actions that each participant will be able to implement on return to their country, along with the structural changes required in national and regional policies, and the new capacities that RAS need to fulfil such roles.

The GFRAS Annual Meeting will provide a unique opportunity to explore, learn, discuss and make recommendations on the topic. In plenary sessions, participants will gain a common understanding of the different concepts, learn from evidence and gain insights on some innovative examples.

Parallel sessions will then be held for participants to discuss experiences and evidence on the role of RAS in empowering youth; the roles young people can play in empowering RAS; and the potential roles RAS can play in addressing structural patterns such as migration and contributing to better policies and investments that support the opportunities available to young people. The following questions will guide the parallel sessions.

Parallel session 1: The role of RAS in empowering youth for sustainable rural–urban transformation

- What are new business, employment and livelihood opportunities in agriculture and agriculture-related domains that are attractive to youth? (Including new ventures such as agro-tourism; start-ups along agricultural value chains; new generation of tech-savvy farmers, etc.)
- What role can RAS play in strengthening the knowledge, values, skills and services needed by young people to overcome the challenges and seize these opportunities?
- What changes in policies and in the capacities of RAS are needed to enable them to empower young people?

Parallel session 2: The role of youth in strengthening RAS to be more inclusive, context-sensitive and demand-driven in the processes of rural–urban transformation

- What roles and opportunities are there for youth to strengthen RAS in the context of sustainable rural–urban transformation?
- What challenges are there in engaging young people in the provision of RAS?
- What changes in policies and in the capacities of RAS are needed to overcome the challenges and seize the opportunities? Who should be the key stakeholders in this transformation?

Parallel session 3: RAS, youth, and rural–urban, urban–rural migration patterns:

- What is the impact of youth migration patterns on rural areas?
- How is, can, or should RAS be involved in these dynamics (for example in mitigating rural–urban migration)
- What changes in policies and in the capacities of RAS are needed to accommodate these new dynamics?

Functional component

Strengthening capacities of RAS networks

Regional and subregional networks and country fora are the main partners of GFRAS in implementing its work and in strengthening and advocating for RAS within their regions. They ensure that the work and focus of GFRAS remains grounded, relevant and demand-driven. The GFRAS 2016–2025 Strategic Framework and corresponding five-year operational plan place a strong emphasis on strengthening the capacities of the regional and subregional networks and country fora to fulfil these roles. Capacity assessments undertaken in 2016 show that, while the different networks have specific needs and demands depending on their context, they face some common challenges. These include mobilising sufficient funding and skilled human resources, and building capacities to advocate effectively for policies and investments that strengthen RAS.

Evaluations of past meetings have shown that peer exchange between networks is perceived as critical for networks to strengthen their own capacities, and the 2017 Annual Meeting will provide space for extensive peer exchange and learning between networks. This will be guided by experts on networks and network functioning, and will lead to the development by the networks of realistic roadmaps for action toward the 2018 Annual Meeting.

A synthesis of the results of the network capacity assessments undertaken by GFRAS will be presented in the plenary session. A keynote speaker will be invited to present experience on healthy networks and tools that networks can use to strengthen their functioning. Networks will then have the chance to share experiences in a peer-to-peer learning session, in which they will coach each other based on the needs identified in the assessments. After that, participants will have the time to convene within their network to discuss how they can meet some of the identified capacity needs, assess their progress since the 2016 Annual Meeting, and develop a realistic roadmap to the 2018 Annual Meeting.

Draft agenda and preparation of inputs by participants

The 8th GFRAS Annual Meeting will be a participatory learning event with a range of different types of sessions, including keynotes, panels, presentations in plenary, group work, parallel workshops, short presentations, a share fair and field trips. Participants will be given a wide range of opportunities to provide inputs that will include lessons from practical experience and reviews of evidence. Inputs may take the following forms:

- presentation in one of the parallel sessions
- blogs beforehand and short presentations during the meeting on experience, case studies, stories or evidence on youth and RAS
- a stand at the share fair
- side events or trainings on 8 or 9 September (see below).

A draft agenda as well as requirements, application process and deadlines, and selection criteria for all inputs and preparatory activities can be found on the [website](#).

Participation and registration

Online registration and the call for inputs will open mid-March and close on 20 June 2017. Participants from all regions of the world working or interested in RAS or in related fields are welcome to attend the meeting. Stakeholders from different sectors – public, private and civil society – are encouraged to register for the meeting, including representatives of farmers' organisations, private companies, research and education institutions, development agencies, media and others.

In order to guarantee a participatory meeting with a focus on networking and exchange, the number of participants will be limited to approximately 150. If more people register, participants will be selected in a way that secures the best possible balance of regions, subregions, gender, sectors and age. Limited funding will be available to sponsor some representatives from different regions to take part in the meeting.

There will be a registration fee of USD 200 for all participants, which can be paid online before the meeting, or in cash (USD) directly at the meeting once registration is confirmed. For more information [on participation, registration and sponsorship](#) please check the GFRAS website.

Budget and funding

While the main funding for the event is provided through GFRAS, other organisations and institutions can co-fund the event or side events. For more information, please contact the GFRAS Secretariat (annual-meeting@g-fras.org).

Logistics

Logistical information will be continuously updated on the [Logistics](#) section of the Annual Meeting website.

Monitoring and evaluation of the Annual Meeting

The meeting will be evaluated on the final day. The results of the meeting will be also monitored and assessed by the participants, working groups, regional networks and country fora via regular progress reports and annual reports.

Annual meeting organising committee

The organisation of the 2017 Annual Meeting is strategically guided by an organising committee that comprises representatives of the host as well as all larger GFRAS regional networks: APEN plus Pacific Islands Rural Advisory Services Network (PIRAS), Red Latinoamericana de Servicios de Extensión Rural (RELASER), African Forum for Agricultural Advisory Services (AFAAS) and Asia Pacific Island Rural Advisory Services (APIRAS). The meeting is chaired by the GFRAS Secretariat.

Further reading

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World Bank. 2012. agricultural innovation systems: An investment sourcebook. Washington, DC: World Bank.

Find all further information on the [GFRAS Annual Meeting webpage](#).