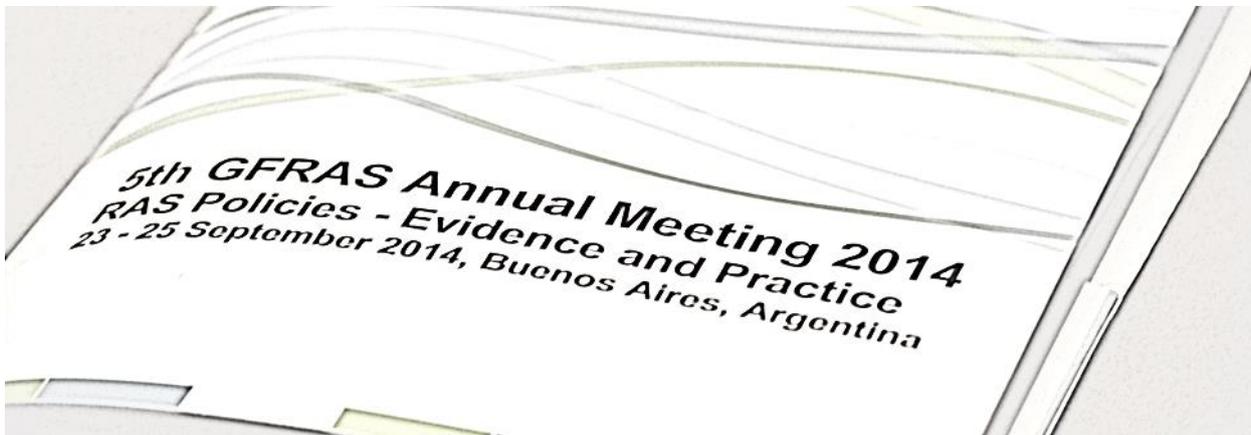


5th GFRAS Annual Meeting
RAS Policies – Evidence and Practice
23-25 September 2014, Buenos Aires, Argentina

Meeting Report



Abbreviations

AESA	Agricultural Extension in South Asia
AFAAS	African Forum for Agricultural Advisory Services
AIS	Agricultural Innovation System
APIRAS	Asia Pacific Island Rural Advisory Services
CAEPNet	Caribbean Agricultural Extension Providers Network
CaFAN	Caribbean Farmers Network
CGIAR	Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research
CTA	The Technical Centre for Agricultural and Rural Cooperation
EUFRAS	European Forum for Farm and Rural Advisory Services
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
GFRAS	Global Forum for Rural Advisory Services
GIZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für International Zusammenarbeit (German Development Cooperation)
ICT	Information and Communication Technologies
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
IFPRI	International Food Policy Research Institut
INTA	Instituto Nacional de Tecnología Agropecuaria (Argentine National Institute for Agricultural Technology)
M&E	Monitoring and evaluation
MEAS	Modernizing Extension and Advisory Services
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
PIRAS	Pacific Islands Rural Advisory Services Network
PO	Producer Organisations
RAS	Rural Advisory Services
RELASER	Red Latinoamericana de Servicios de Extensión Rural (Latin American Network for Agricultural Extension Services)
TAP	Tropical Agriculture Platform

Introduction

The 5th GFRAS Annual Meeting was held from 23 to 25 September 2014 in Buenos Aires, Argentina. It was co-hosted by the National Agricultural Technology Institute of Argentina (INTA) and the Latin American Extension Network (RELASER). The topic was "RAS Policies – Evidence and Practice" in the thematic session and the role of partnerships for networks in the network strengthening session. Field trips provided the participants with an insight into RAS in Argentina. A total of 156 participants from 44 countries actively engaged in lively discussions and networking activities and reaffirmed the importance and "raison d'être" of the Annual Meeting. Participants stated that they left the meeting re-energized and with a deepened understanding that policies are not given and static. They are based on complex underlying processes that can and should be influenced and shaped by all concerned stakeholders. Factors that contribute to successful policy influencing lay within type and way of communication, the timing of the intervention, as well as the understanding and consideration of the context and the psychology of policy makers acting within this context. With regard to partnerships, while doing quite well between and amongst regions, the different (sub-) networks have identified space for improvement financial partnerships and partnerships with other actors in the agricultural innovation system (AIS), especially with the private sector and policy makers.

All presentations, live-streaming of plenary sessions and further conference documentation can be found at <http://g-fras.org/en/events/gfras-events/annual-meeting-2014-argentina/videos-photos.html>.

GFRAS – the Global Forum for Rural Advisory Services – was initiated in January 2010 to provide advocacy and leadership on pluralistic, demand-driven rural advisory services within the global development agenda. The GFRAS Annual Meeting is the central GFRAS event for exchange of experiences on RAS across regions and for discussing GFRAS strategic directions and functioning.

See www.g-fras.org

Participants' profile

Regions Total	156
Latin America	78
International organisations	21
Africa	23
Asia	14
Europe and Northern America	14
Pacific	3
Caribbean	3

Sectors Total	156
Public advisory sector	62
Research and education	41
Development agency	28
Civil society	13
Other	6
Producer organisations	4
Private Sector	2

Gender Total	156
Men	113
Women	43

Side Events

Before and after the meeting, the following side-events took place on 22 and 26 September. The GFRAS website links to the results and reports of the side events <http://gfras.org/en/events/gfras-events/annual-meeting-2014-argentina.html>

- ICTs: Enabling of Capacity in Agricultural Extension and Advisory Services for better impact, *organised by CTA and GFRAS*
- Capacity Development for Agricultural Innovation Systems, *organised by TAP, FAO and AGREENIUM*
- Asia-Pacific Islands Rural Advisory Services, *organised by APIRAS*
- Global Good Practices Initiative, *organised by GIZ and GFRAS*
- Rural Advisory Services for Family Farming, *organised by FAO*
- Role of Producer Organisations in RAS, *organised by the GFRAS working group on PO*
- Policy Compendium Validation and Future Opportunities, *organised by MEAS and GFRAS*
- GFRAS Consortium on Extension Education and Training, *organised by the GFRAS Consortium*



Context and objectives

Having policy as a topic of the GFRAS Annual Meeting was a timely result of past years efforts to strengthen RAS and the capacities of RAS providers. In 2011, at the [International Conference on Innovations in Extension and Advisory Services in Nairobi](#), policy was recognised as a crucial and significant factor that influences the environment in which RAS providers act. The consequent [Nairobi Declaration](#) affirmed the need for a participative and coordinated development of clear extension policies, including quality assurance mechanisms. In reaction to that, the GFRAS policy working group was established and started its activities, which resulted in this meeting in Buenos Aires.

The meeting objectives were to:

- Elaborate a shared understanding of purposes, contents, and effects of RAS policies and their relation to other parts of the enabling environment
- Raise awareness on the importance of evidence for policy influencing
- Strengthen RAS fora's capacity to engage in partnerships between and amongst regions, with policy makers, financial partners, and other actors in agricultural innovation system

Participants on the first day of the meeting stated that they were looking forward to network and share experience on this relevant topic. They also hoped to receive new knowledge and skills on how to influence policy processes. In addition to that, they expressed the need to receive a clear definition of policy and what it consists of.

Opening and setting the stage

After warm welcomes from the representatives of the co-hosts – the Vice President of RELASER **Maria Lujan Mongelos** and the Vice President of INTA **Jose Catalano** – as well as from the Executive Secretary of GFRAS **Kristin Davis**, Ing. **Carlos Casamiquela**, the Minister of Agriculture of Argentina, held his opening speech. Aside from acknowledging the progress Argentina has made with regard to RAS, he paved the way to the later discussions in highlighting that the way to efficient, effective, and coherent RAS policies has two sides. On the one hand, he recognised that it is crucial that the government knows what the producers' needs really are. On the other hand, he stated that RAS providers and clientele also need to be clear about what they want to achieve when influencing policy processes.

Francisco Aguirre, Executive Secretary of RELASER, embedded this meeting in the functions of GFRAS. He acknowledges that after important progress with regard to its function 1, providing voice for RAS, and function 3, strengthening actors and fora, GFRAS is now also prominently addressing its function 2, providing evidence.

Keynotes on RAS policies – evidence and practice

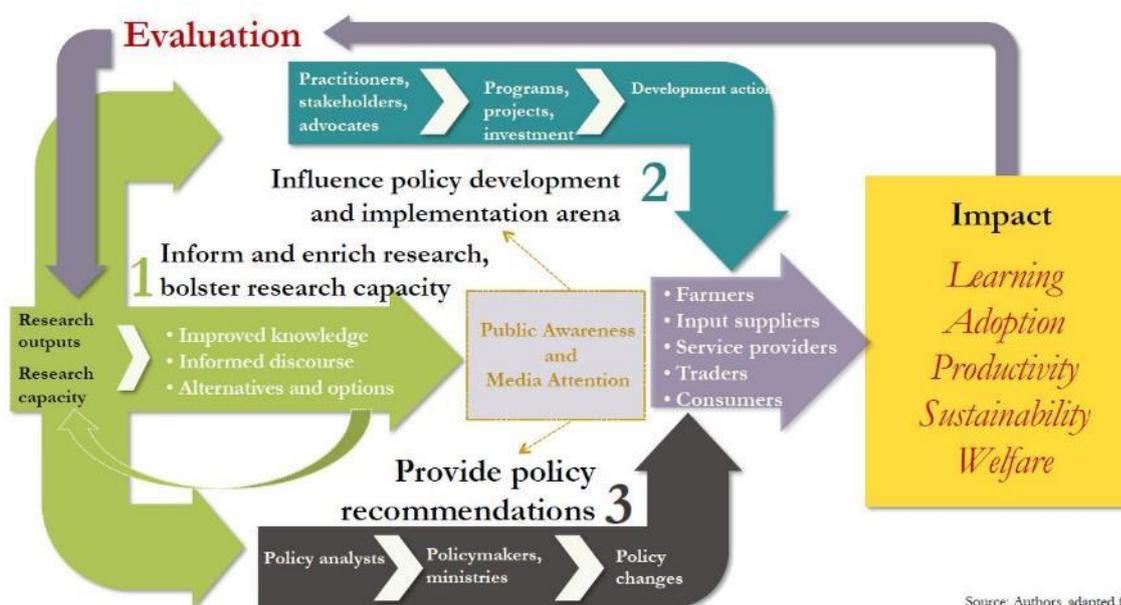
David Spielman, International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), opened the thematic session of the meeting and focused his keynote on the challenges of finding the right evidence for RAS policies. Monitoring and evaluation (M&E) results are crucial contributors to the evidence base that can be used to shape the content and influence policy processes on various levels: He stressed that well conducted and presented evaluation results can help build evidence on what works and what not, can be used for accountability and transparency, as well as feedback to

management, governments and/or donors and therewith significantly influence policy designs and processes. However, while the methods of M&E have improved a lot, they are not yet widely used in agriculture and their application often presents a big challenge for RAS providers.

David: We have to start talking frankly about failure and limitations of learning approaches and methods – not only about those of technologies.

David stated that there is still a tremendous lack of psychological and social knowledge of adoption and adult learning within the AIS. Evaluation results are difficult to interpret if these factors are unknown. He mentioned that in order to gain an insight into the relation between behaviour dimensions of learning and technology adoption

in agriculture, issues regarding economics, education, sociology, and psychology need to be combined. When evaluating RAS systems and approaches we therefore need to ask how different extension approaches affect the learning outcomes. Figure 1 shows how and where evidence and evaluation data can influence the process of policy development and policy recommendations and have an impact on the learning, adoption, productivity, sustainability, and welfare of the affected stakeholders.



Source: Authors, adapted from IFPRI (2011)

Figure 1: Evidence and Policy Influencing

Following the keynote of David, **Krishan Bheenick**, from the Technical Centre for Agricultural and Rural Cooperation (CTA), presented CTA's experiences in influencing RAS policies.

Krishan highlighted that policy processes need to be owned on the national level. The capacities of regional organisations (research, extension, farmer's organisations, regional economic actors, etc.) should therefore be strengthened in all domains – including policy influencing.

Krishan stressed the following points that need to be considered when influencing policies to have a positive impact on RAS.

1. For strengthening RAS, specific RAS policies are only part of the solution. General development and agricultural policies provide opportunities to prominently include RAS and may have a greater impact on the ground.

2. Linkages between RAS policies and other policies relevant to agriculture need to be adapted to the context and to each other.
3. Coherence and coordination among RAS providers within a pluralistic RAS landscape need to be ensured.
4. As shown in figure 1, there should be a positive feedback loop between policy influencers and policy makers.

Krishan: General development and agricultural policies also provide opportunities to include RAS issues

Krishan reminded the participants that RAS are only an instrument for farmers, and RAS policies just show a way where to go. Using the metaphor of a road, he stated that when agriculture is the highway, RAS can be seen as one lane of the road, and policies as the signs on the road. However, in line with David's presentation, Krishan stated that signs are only helpful, if people know how to use and interpret them. We thus need to know how the users of RAS services think and behave in order to provide signs that are understandable to them. This requires the inclusion of all concerned stakeholders into the policy making process. The road metaphor also shows that it is probably more efficient to use an existing road rather than building a new one, meaning that we should try to work with what we already have and build bridges. Finally, we shouldn't forget that RAS is just one actor on the highway of agriculture, so we should try to find a way to go peacefully in the same direction. Figure 2 illustrates this metaphor in a slightly adapted way.

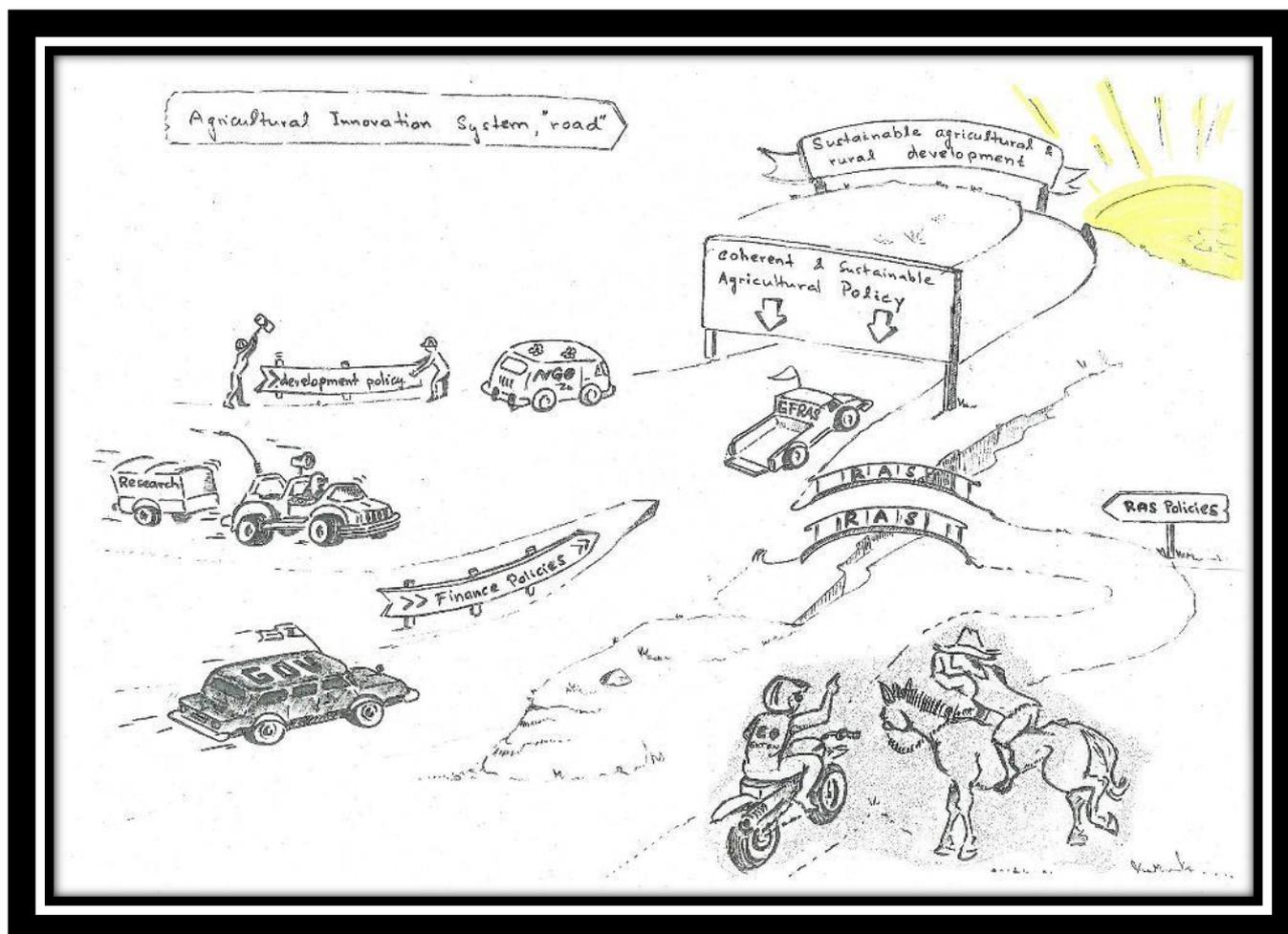


Figure 2: The Agricultural Innovation System Road, drawn by Gaudenz Pfranger, December 2014

Panel on evidence for influencing RAS policies

After these keynotes, a panel followed with

- David Spielman, Senior Research Fellow, International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI)
- Krishan J Bheenick, Senior Programme Coordinator, Technical Centre for Agricultural and Rural Cooperation (CTA)
- Paul McNamara, Project Director, Modernizing Extension and Advisory Services (MEAS)
- Tom Anyonge, Senior Technical Advisor, International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD)
- Pamela Thomas, Regional Director, Caribbean Farmers Network (CaFAN)

The panel discussed various aspects of policy influencing. Recognising the need for clear and concise evidence, the panel highlighted the importance of how evidence is communicated, and to whom. This includes considering the context, psychology, and language of the concerned stakeholders. It also requires considering power relationships and therewith trying to address the most influencing actors, which are, sometimes, not even the most involved in agriculture.

Pamella explained how a farmer organisation, such as CaFAN, can support building of effective RAS institutions that can have a voice in policy influencing. She stated that because farmer organisations understand the issues and speak the same language as the concerned rural actors, they are an important actor in policy processes. On the one hand, they are well placed to provide trainings for farmers at project level and to put topics like advocacy, networking, and lobbying high on the agenda. On the other hand, they are also very important in transporting the farmers' voice into policy processes.

Pamella: Farmer organisations need to be better recognised as important advocacy and lobby actor both on the supply and demand side of RAS.

Adding to that, Paul McNamara from MEAS stressed the fact that knowing which language to speak is also crucial when presenting evidence to policy makers. He said that it is crucial to consider that policy makers are not monolithic. A policy maker based at the World bank's headquarter or at FAO in Rome thinks and acts differently than local or regional policy makers. He identified three different levels where policy makers act and can be influenced:

Paul: We need to look at power relationships in politics. Knowledge is power. Information is power. So evidence is part of that power

- The international level. At this level evidence must be used to convince policy makers of the relevance of RAS services for their overall development goals and objectives. In order to convince these well-educated, often rather theoretically oriented office workers, this must include honest data on which RAS approaches work and which not, and why.
- The national level. At this level we need to think first of whom exactly we need to influence and convince in order to strengthen RAS. Maybe the main power is within the minister of finance rather than the minister of agriculture. Evidence thus has to be chosen and presented accordingly.

- The local level. At this level, it is most important to talk to the local government, because they control the funds. Local decision makers are often not convinced of RAS. Evidence has to be presented in their language to convince them.

Given the different languages that different actors use, we need a variety of forms of evidence. We need hard facts such as increase in yield, poverty reduction rates, or soil carbon content, as they provide powerful evidence which usually has a strong effect on policy makers. But depending on the situation, we also need “softer” data, such as case studies and success stories or lessons learned from the field. Tom Anyonge added that especially on local level, communication doesn't only have to go through reports and/or lengthy talks and email exchanges. Sometimes it may be better to see evidence once than to hear it a hundred times.

Tom: Having evidence is not enough. We need to strengthen skills to influence policy makers and to act within the political economy of a country. First of all we need patience – policy development and policy influencing are processes.

Tom also added that the decision whom to influence and with what type of evidence strongly depends on the context, especially power relations and the farmers' actual needs, values and realities. Skills on how to act within the political economy therefore need to be strengthened on all ends of RAS.



Parallel sessions

Following the introductory panel, participants of the meeting split into parallel sessions to discuss three related topics in detail:

- Importance, design, and adaption to context of **evidence-based RAS policies**
- Requests with regard to design, content, and access to convincing **evidence for policy makers**
- Processes, roles, and responsibilities with regard to **policy influencing**

Within these parallel session many topics were discussed that can be clustered along the following questions:

- Why are inclusive and context-related RAS policies needed?
- How should RAS policies look to be effective and useful for RAS providers and RAS clientele?
- Why is evidence needed for RAS policies?
- How should evidence look and be presented?
- How can policy processes be influenced?
- What are the consequences for RAS networks of all this?
- What are external factors that need to be considered?

Why are inclusive, context-related and evidence-based RAS policies needed?

- **To guide actions and decisions of RAS providers and clientele**

Not many countries worldwide have RAS policies. However, the demand for RAS policies increased since many regions have similar experiences to what Julio Catullo presented. He stated that agricultural policies in Latin America are often fragmented and rarely respond to comprehensive development strategies. They are often isolated bulks of papers that usually have little, or – worse even – negative impacts on RAS providers and clientele. RAS policies can help guide actions and decisions in a way that support RAS providers and have positive impact on RAS clientele.

- **To avoid gaps between the institutional level and the field**

Participants from all parallel sessions stated that extension reforms or adaption often lack institutional coordination and participatory processes. This results in the fact that involved and/or affected stakeholders are often disconnected from policies and guidelines and therewith not complying with, adapting, or internalising them. Strong, inclusive and evidence-based policies help to structure such processes and therewith avoid conflictive gaps between the desired and actual RAS situation in a country.

Definitions

Participants of the meeting defined policy and evidence as follows:

Policy: A course, principle, rule, statement of intent or framework to guide actions, practices, or decisions and achieve rational outcomes.

Evidence: Facts, figures, and knowledge collected through a systematic process.

- **To coordinate between sectors, topics, and institutions for more effective efforts towards development goals**

Context-related and inclusive RAS policies can harmonise efforts and therewith play a coordinating role between different institutions, sectors and topics, with the overall aim to reduce poverty and inequality and to increase production, food security and the sustainability of livelihoods.

- **To regulate the AIS**

RAS policies help regulate the AIS and therewith reduce the risk of a domination of one sector or actor group in the AIS (market-led AIS, where an outsourcing or privatisation of markets would directly lead to critical challenges in the social and environmental dimension, for instance).

- **To guide financing**

Polices are also a powerful tool to guide financing towards meaningful and effective, high-quality RAS.

How should RAS policies look to be effective and useful for RAS providers and RAS clientele?

- **Have governmental anchorage and complete other policies and strategies**

Andreas Oswald, Maria Lujan, and Julio Catullo as well as many participants highlighted that a RAS policy needs to be anchored in the local, national, and/or regional government system. This ensures a certain legitimacy and thus increases its scope of influence. It also renders the policy complementary with other policies and coherent with local, national, regional, and international development strategies.

- **Integrate all concerned stakeholders**

Participants repeatedly mentioned that RAS policies need to address all concerned stakeholders within the AIS. This also means that they have to consider and find overlaying guidance aspects that accommodate the various values, needs and aims of all different actors (including representatives from markets, research, farmer organisations, women and youth organisations, minorities, etc.).

- **Chose a holistic approach and integrate the context**

Participants stressed the importance of RAS policies to embrace ecological, economic, social, cultural, and political aspects of the AIS. This signifies a challenge in various regions, where the paradigm shift of RAS from technology transfer to complex advisory service is still underway. It is thus compulsory that the context with its particularities and characteristics is prominently reflected in a policy. "Copy-paste" policies are not possible, they need to be endogenous for people to comply with them.

- **Consider the psychology and profile of RAS providers**

As Fernando Landini stated, in line with the above paragraph, RAS policies need to consider that extensionists are not everywhere perceived in the sense of the "new extensionist", but often still seen as intermediaries between (technical) research and farmers. RAS policies therefore need to address the expected role and duties of RAS providers.

- **Be free from political populism**

RAS policies should not include popular grandstanding and points for political consumption or opinions. This should not only be respected by policy makers, but also by those trying to influence policies: Statements and evidence for RAS policies should be free from ideology and personal opinions.

- **Elaborated in participatory processes**

In order to fulfil all points mentioned, participatory processes are inevitable. There are successful participatory methods such as rural promoters, farmer to farmer field schools, zigzag, learning groups, networks, UMATAS (municipal credit and technical assistance agencies in Latin America), and so forth.

Why is evidence needed for RAS policies?

Although participants claimed that they have limited experiences with evidence-based RAS policies, they agreed on some general advantages that evidence-based RAS policies have over opinion-driven policies.

- **Help to ensure that policies are systematic, rational, free from ideology, and serve a common interest**

As Oladele Oladimeji stated, evidence make policies more informative, less ideology driven, and less biased against actors or sectors. Evidence renders policies more rational, rigorous, and systematic. It helps to structure policies in a way that they reflect a common understanding or need, and not only serve the interest of a few. It also helps to structure policies along other strategies and intended outcomes of a policy.

- **Ease the assessment of impact of policies**

Policies that are based on evidence can be more easily monitored and evaluated, and thus their effective impact better assessed. This makes decisions and choices on policies more informative and legitimate.

How should evidence look and be presented?

Despite the opportunities that evidence provides, participant agreed that evidence alone doesn't necessarily render a policy more comprehensive, fair or inclusive. In order to do so, the evidence used in RAS policies, and the way how it is gathered and presented, must feature some important elements:

- **Evidence needs to be accurate, objective and credible**

Evidence, be it based on qualitative or quantitative research, needs to follow common research guidelines and be of the best quality, accuracy, and objective possible. It should be credible and rely on a strong and clear line of argument.

- **Evidence needs to be relevant and practical**

Evidence needs to be timely, topical, and clearly show the link with the policy in which it is used. It must also be easily accessible and understandable by the ones using it.

- **Evidence needs to be gathered in systematic, participative and inclusive way**

How evidence is gathered directly influences the content and scope of the policy. If evidence is gathered in a transparent and participative process, chances are higher that a broad range of people will support and own it. Besides, respecting international research standards provides evidence with legitimacy and credibility.

- **Evidence needs to be interdisciplinary**

Evidence for RAS policies should not only feature agronomic arguments but embrace broad knowledge from various sciences. Research for this evidence therefore has to be done in an interdisciplinary way. Social sciences need to be especially considered.

How can policy processes be influenced?

Based on the discussion on why evidence-based RAS policies are important and how they should best look, participants discussed how RAS providers can play their role in policy processes.

- **Strategic, long-term alliances and regular presence in policy processes**

Policy makers tend to listen more to organisations which they already know and have a relation of trust with. Strategic alliances should be built with partners that have a broad range of experience and acknowledge the organisation's work. Ensuring a regular presence in the whole policy process and with various partners across ministries and across sectors also increases visibility and influence. If partners have success stories of cooperation, they will more likely work together again. Participants also highlighted that cooperation is not only about the quality of the work, but also inter-relational soft skills.

- **Use of windows of opportunities**

Policy influencing is a constant process that can happen anywhere and at any time. One should always be ready to present opinions and evidence, and talk to policy makers. Sometimes it may be worthwhile to take risks and engage with actors which are not among usual allies.

- **Recognising policy influencing as one step in policy making only**

It is important to realise and accept the moments when it is time to step back and let the policy makers take ownership of the process. The content and form of policies need to be transported by policy makers to the higher institutional level where policies are made.

- **Content with political significance**

To develop and implement a policy, support from the higher institutional/governmental level is needed. To gain this support, the content needs to be embedded in a wider context that shows policy makers that RAS is relevant for their other concerns and topics of interest.

- **Think of the consequences**

Implementing a policy often takes careful attention, management, and financing. Depending on the policy, it may significantly change the working environment of RAS actors. Before trying to influence policies, one should consider what the policy would really mean for all involved stakeholders (not only the RAS providers, but also the RAS clientele).

- **Effective communication of evidence**

Aside the above mentioned points, one important topic repeatedly discussed was the question how evidence should be presented and communicated in order for policy makers to take it into consideration. Participants found the following solutions:

Seeing is believing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Evidence should be shown to policy makers, as sometimes it is a lot easier to understand when something is seen, felt, or tasted, rather than just read.
Dissemination on the right level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •It has to be well reflected to whom what type of evidence is communicated, when, and why.
Training of communication capabilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •This can be easily done with exercises, for example with the "elevator speech": Are you really as much familiar with your message-packed evidence that you can tell the most important points in one minute?
Influencing permanent technical staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •They are used to translate complex information to a language that is understood in political contexts. Besides, they often carry information in political systems where high staff fluctuation is normal.
Condensing data and sticking to most important messages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Politicians usually don't need a bulk of information; they need easy accessible, clearly understandable and condensed data.
Direct conversation with policy makers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Sometimes informal communication is a lot more effective than formal exchanges.
Pack your evidence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Crisp statements and nicely presented and laid out statistics and reports catch a policy maker's attention more likely.
Open the box	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Evidence should be communicated to people up and down the chain of a policy process and also outside the Ministry of Agriculture. Maybe the Ministry of Finance is more powerful.

What are external factors that need to be considered?

The participants discussed external factors that influence the whole policy process in a positive or negative way- They can't be changed by RAS actors and thus just have to be accepted and considered and can be resumed as follows:

- Political economy: Party politics and periods of governance
- Political and economic stability (vs. conflict and instability)
- Relation between government/politicians and other people
- National capacities in the policy formulation process
- Control and management of funding and other financial resources
- Recognition of and experience with participatory processes in a society (vs. top down approaches)
- Existing information and knowledge management

What does all this mean for RAS networks?

Having outlined these different aspects of RAS policies and evidence for RAS policies, the question what this implies for RAS networks was addressed. Participants have identified the following recommendations for RAS networks to strengthen the role of RAS actors in policy processes. RAS networks should:

- support RAS actors in strengthening institutions and strengthening their organisations and cooperation, in order to enable them to increase their influence on policies
- support RAS actors in building capacities on issues of communication and advocacy
- support RAS actors in building capacities with regard to the implementation of policies
- provide support in formulating a common strategy for lobbying and advocacy work
- help systematise evidence for policy makers in order to make them internationally and regionally comparable. This would underscore the credibility and impact of evidence.



Field Trips

On day 2 of the meeting, participants had the chance to go on a field trip to see INTA's engagement in the field and share experiences with the people involved in INTA's project.

Field Trip 1, San Vicente-Cañuelas: INTA's role as articulator of the strengthening of family farming organisations.

Participants visited producers of the Cooperative of Family Producers of Cañuelas Ltda. (APF) and family producers of the Agro-ecological Movement. Among the things discussed were microcredit access, cooperative operation, and organic production. The President of the Cañuelas Family Farmers Cooperative, a convinced agro-ecological farmer, also talked about how he transfers this concept to other members of the cooperative. Participants also learned how the cooperative organises itself to provide advocacy at local and regional level.

Field Trip 2, La Plata – Florencio Varela: The integration between research and extension for the development of territorial innovation

Participants on this field trip gained an insight into how La Plata Extension Agency develops extension and research activities which serve to implement sustainable practices to obtain healthier foods and reduce pollution. On the one hand, this is achieved by the participative design of alternative production models linked to the agro-ecological transition. On the other hand, the agency also tries to strengthen organisations and networks to produce fairer and more equitable trading schemes, stronger territorial management skills, and greater impact of public policies.

Field Trip 3: Lujan: INTA's role in the promotion of associations

This field trip focused on the framework of an inter-institutional strategy that promotes the producers' socio-organisational aspects. The strategy includes the establishment of associations and cooperatives which provide training, experimentation, demonstrations, exchange visits, and outreach material. During lunch and on a farmer's field discussed questions related to the role of INTA in this promotion of cooperatives as well as issues related to food prices, food security, land use and land division, youth and farming as well as family farming issues. Participants also debated about the desired capabilities of extensionists, their ideal background, training, and their relationship with the university and education in Argentina.

Field Trip 4: San Antonio de Areco: INTA's role in the business sector of producers and agricultural science professionals

On this field trip participants visited an Agricultural Demonstration Unit located on a producer's field and focused on requirements to create sustainable innovation. It was illustrated that joint efforts of public and private actors are needed in order to enhance local systemic competitiveness. The particularity of limited leasing contracts of land (maximum one year) in order to create an incentive of soil conservation for the land owner was also discussed.

Lessons learnt

On the four field trips, together with many personal agronomic insights, participants took with them some lessons that can be clustered and summarised as follows:

- **Communication and cooperation between farmers and other actors of the AIS:** Farmers need to be included in all discussions and processes related to RAS activities (including research, markets, and policy making). Their interests need to be understood in order to be able to address them. The communication between the farmers and the extensionists needs to work in both ways.
- **Institutional partnerships are important** to strengthen capacities, knowledge, and skills of RAS providers and their clientele.
- **Strong farmer organisations** are crucial for the development of the region, and bottom-up group formation can be very successful. Besides, experienced farmers working with young farmers can be a very simple but highly effective knowledge transfer method.
- Improvements with regard to the **measuring of impact** of farmers' involvement in policy making are needed.



The role of partnerships for strengthening networks

The capacity building session's focus was on the role of partnerships: On why, how and with whom partnerships can strengthen the RAS networks and help them achieve their missions.

Erika Zain El Din from INTA opened this session with an example of partnership between two ministries from Argentina, in which the Ministry of Science and Technology and the Ministry of Agriculture conducted a joint evaluation of common projects to identify good practices and weaknesses. Erika illustrated with that example the advantages of such a collaboration. Partnerships not only allow for focussing and channelling energy and funds, but can also lead to knowledge exchange and joint learning, which again can significantly improve the quality of work within the partnering institutions. Partnership is also a great way to create and institutionalise trust between different actors, which, in the long term, can only be beneficial for the whole AIS.

Following that illustrative introduction, Kristin Davis, Executive Secretary of GFRAS, presented the importance of partnerships for GFRAS and other RAS networks. She highlighted that GFRAS is depended on partnerships with the regions, with international development agencies, donors, policy makers, and many other actors in order to be able to achieve its goals and vision. The regional networks were then asked to discuss their performance, challenges, and opportunities with regard to the following four types of partnerships: First within their regions, and then in exchange with other regions.

Types of partnerships that were discussed:

- Between and among regions
- With policy makers
- With financial actors
- Other actors (farmers, private sector, research, civil society)

Most networks assessed their performance in all four dimensions as being good or at least being on a good way. In general, the following issues and ideas for improvement were raised.

Partnerships between and among regions

In general, all network assessed the already existing partnerships as working well, with space for improvement and further opportunities to take in all networks. The partnership between AFAAS and RELASER is a good example on how coordination between regions can work. This type of partnership also seems the one that newer networks, such as CAEPNet and EUFRAS, struggle least with its elaboration. While a certain level of cooperation and exchange seems to be elaborated quite easily, the networks identified some challenges evolving when they grow and thus become more complex. Challenges raised included:

- Communication and exchange (who, how often, in what way, how to overcome language barriers) (AFAAS, EUFRAS, RELASER, GFRAS)
- Internalise the consideration and recognition of partnerships with other networks and south-south exchanges (all)
- Find common ground on various topic issues (APIRAS, RELASER)
- Coordination with sub regional or national networks (AFAAS, APIRAS)
- Promote learning among networks (GFRAS)

Partnerships with policy makers

This was the partnership considered as least performing by all networks. Networks face challenges when trying to include policy makers. Some of the recommendations on how to address these included:

- Strengthen capacities at national level to partner with policy makers. Often in a whole region there is a too big diversity of issues and topics to attract policy makers. It is easier to gain the attention of national policy makers with nationally relevant topics.
- Include institutions as partners rather than only persons: Policy makers regularly change their positions. When engaging with policy making institutions it is easier to ensure some continuity.
- A partnership has to work in two ways: Policy makers need to be invited to follow and participate in the RAS work, and RAS providers have to be involved in policy processes.
- Exchange on this type of partnership with other networks should be enhanced.



- **Financial partnerships**

With regard to financial partnerships, many networks claimed that there is still space for improvement. Participants discussed ways how to handle the fact that donors and private sector companies have their own interest and thus often want the networks to provide deliverables that fulfil their aims and goals. Participants found the following solutions:

- Regarding the institutional setting:
 - Seek multiple sources to stay as independent as possible, for instance partnering with various government agencies
 - Always have an updated business plan and financial plan available (for core funding and project funding)
 - Have a transparent communication strategy
- In interaction with (potential) donors/financing partners:
 - Take opportunities to make contacts with donors
 - Seek opportunities for funding
 - Seek face to face contact with donors and financial partners
 - Find the common denominator – What can be offered to the partner to achieve its goals that also provided an added value to the network
- Regarding the communication of your aims and activities
 - Make your impact visible and a permanent record of your results
 - Try to synthesise your experience and communicate added value of your network
- When writing proposals:
 - Use precise and appropriate language
 - Understand the goal of the donor and show them how your project supports their aim
 - Try to align the goals of smaller projects with bigger UN goals such as the sustainable development goals
- When considering financing options:
 - Build on existing relations and actions to find new financial partners
 - Consider the differences between financing at specific levels (regional, national, individuals)
 - Be creative when thinking of financing sources. There is are more actors than only the Ministry of Agriculture and more financing measures than only through donors (for instance membership fees, sponsorships, fees for different kind of services)

Partnerships with other actors from the AIS

These discussions were very broad and touched on many issues, including how to better include farmers into the reflection, how to deal with research and the private sector, and how to face competition in RAS provision. The two general issues raised that seem to affect all other aspects discussed are:

- Too many partners are still missing in the networks. There need to be more exchanges with the private sector, international development agencies, civil society organisations, and producer organisations.
- A higher self-reflection and self-criticism is needed from RAS actors; they have to see themselves as actor in a wider system.

Closing and outlook

To close the meeting, Kristin Davis, GFRAS Executive Secretary, presented the main activities of GFRAS in 2015. She highlighted the fact that a new strategic framework will be developed and that the network members will be approached for formulating their needs, demands, and expectations from GFRAS. Find more information on the outlook and the strategic framework on the GFRAS website.

Maria Auxiliadora from RELASER mentioned in her closing speech that she is happy to see the growth of the GFRAS network and sub-networks. The meeting proved to her the need for coherent policies for the wellbeing of family farmers and provided her with new ideas.

Magdalena Blum, Co-Chair of GFRAS, urged the participants to see themselves as policy makers. Policy making is not a policy paper. It is working together with different stakeholders. She summed up in saying that a lot has been accomplished in the last years, but RAS still needs strong advocates.

Francisco Aguirre expressed his pleasure he had hosting GFRAS in Argentina and sharing experiences with the participants.

Participants said that they left the meeting re-energised and motivated to take action in their institutions and networks. Find a selection of more voices from the closing panel here below:

- We have better understanding of what an extension policy is. Policy should be reflected by evidence or experiences.
- Although we are a global forum let's not forget that culture (regional, local) needs to play its role in achieving our goals.
- Let's find a way to attract private companies and join us in the formulation of policies.
- Beneficiaries are passive in our paradigm. Let's take them on board in all the steps of policy making.
- We can do extension with good quality. But we haven't learned to reach a large number with that same quality.
- Technology is on our side. Let's jump on that train. Let's start creating high quality messages for all farmers.
- Two key factors are important for RAS: Trust and empathy.

