



Rural
Advisory
Service

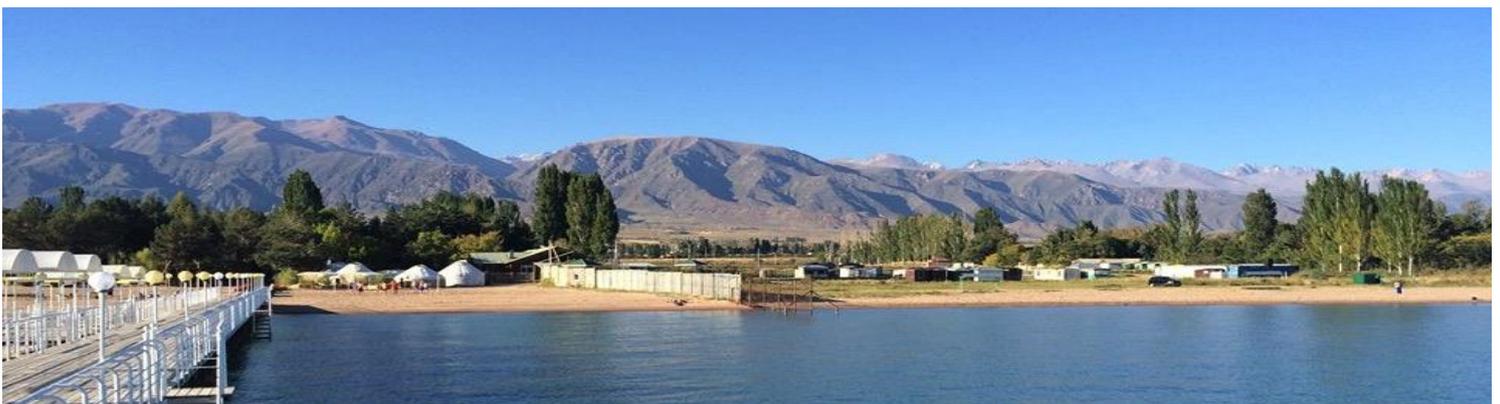


Report of the 6th GFRAS Annual Meeting

**Global Good Practices in
Rural Advisory Services**

14 - 17 September 2015

Issyk Kul, Kyrgyzstan



Executive summary and main recommendations of the meeting

The 6th GFRAS Annual Meeting took place from 14 to 17 September 2015, with side events on 14 and 18 September. Organised around the topic of Global Good Practices, this year's annual meeting challenged participants to reflect on the process of generating, documenting, sharing, testing, and adapting knowledge and good practices.

In three days of constructive, in-depth discussions, participants acknowledged that learning and exchange in rural advisory services (RAS) are a critical driver for innovation and therewith significantly contribute to addressing the challenges of today's agriculture and rural development.

Participants recommended the following to enhance efficient learning in RAS:

- Promote the idea of learning as a dynamic and circular process that includes many different actors of the agricultural innovation system who share, discuss, test, and adapt experiences and knowledge.
- Define good practices as demand-driven and end-user oriented, which include honest and tangible information and consider best-fit considerations within the wider RAS contexts. They should challenge stakeholders to reflect on their own practices.
- Recognise and assume each and every stakeholder's responsibility to act as a catalyst in the agricultural innovation system (AIS) to ensure that good practices are shared, tested, used, and refined in the field.
- Develop individual capacities of RAS providers that go beyond technical skills and enhance career development in RAS to ensure a sustainable, well facilitated, and effective process of experience and knowledge exchange within the AIS.
- Enhance capacities of RAS networks, fora, and champions to allow for them to fully use their potential as knowledge and experience brokers within the AIS.
- Promote community-based approaches and enhance synergies with producers and their organisations, as they are the ones providing the ultimate reality check and feedback regarding workability, sustainability, effectiveness, efficiency, and inclusiveness of any good practice or approach.
- Prominently include all relevant actors of the AIS, especially women and youth, in learning cycles and create spaces for open and honest dialogues amongst the different stakeholders.
- Use and promote ICTs as prominent tools to disseminate, share, and discuss experiences and good practices to reach a wide audience, especially end-users.
- Advocate and work towards an enabling policy environment for RAS that allows for testing, using, and adapting new approaches and experiences.

A. Background

The Global Forum for Rural Advisory Services (GFRAS) Annual Meeting is the biggest gathering of GFRAS affiliates, members, funders, and other interested stakeholders to plan activities, network, exchange experiences, and learn from each other. The rationale of the 2015 meeting was based on the premises of the GFRAS Global Good Practices Initiative, which in turn derives its rationale from the following two observations:

1. Worldwide, many different types and approaches of rural advisory services (RAS) have been elaborated and applied, with many promising innovations emerging. Programme implementers and policy makers often wonder which RAS approach is best, and would like a kind of recipe for RAS components and approaches for their programme. However, evidence shows that such formulaic approaches are not possible and that approaches are highly context dependant.
2. With these many different approaches on RAS emerging, much knowledge and practical know-how on extension are indeed available today, ranging from new concepts on roles and responsibilities in extension to new methodologies for implementation. However, this information is scattered and often presented in different formats using complex academic language. Hence practitioners and users often find it very difficult to make use of this information and/or to compare different approaches and assess their usefulness for their own context.

There is thus a big gap between vast documentation on what works, and the easy-accessible, understandable documentation on what works *only under given circumstances*. RAS implementation therefore shall move from an approach of "best practice" to one of "best fit", where the methods, structures, and governance fit local conditions (Birner et al. 2009).

The 2015 GFRAS Annual Meeting, running under the overall heading of Global Good Practices, aimed to challenge participants to actively and consciously reflect on the use of exchanging and networking, and to reflect on not only on what the take-home messages are, but also on how they will be adopted and adapted to the local context, thus creating tangible changes, innovations, and learnings.

The meeting was structured in a very interactive way, with the main aim of allowing participants from all around the world to take home individual learnings, contacts, and ideas, in order to improve RAS in their own context. A second aim was for GFRAS to receive a reality check from people closer to the field-level on its initiatives and core working topics, including gender, professionalisation of RAS, ICT4RAS, community-based RAS, and the role of RAS in the agricultural innovation system.



Picture 1: Dancing as a metaphor for good practice: Every region and country has its' own unique dance, yet the basic movements resemble each other in one region

B. The 6th GFRAS Annual Meeting: venue, agenda, objectives, participants

The 6th GFRAS Annual Meeting took place from 14 to 17 September 2015, with side events on 14 and 18 September. It was held in Karven Resort and Raduga Resort, two neighbouring conference hotels at the shore of Lake Issyk Kul, in Kyrgyzstan. The Kyrgyz Republic, the local RAS organisation RAS Chui Talas, as well as the Central Asian and the Caucasus Association of Agricultural Research Institutions (CACAARI) officially hosted the event.

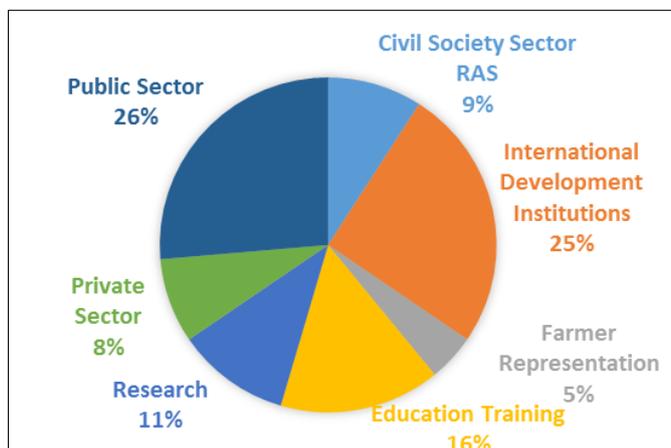


Figure 1: Represented sectors at the 6th GFRAS Annual Meeting

The main overall objectives of the meeting were:

- Participants gain new ideas and learn how to apply a wide range of approaches, methods, and instruments to improve rural advisory services.
- Participants have a common understanding of salient features that render their work within rural advisory services more effective, inclusive, and sustainable.
- RAS fora learn and know how to adapt best fit methods and approaches to improve and strengthen their functioning.

130 people from 54 different countries and most relevant sectors (see Figure 1) attended the event. Over a third of the participants were women (total 45). For the first time, representatives of all 12 GFRAS regional and sub-regional networks were present.

Key agenda points of the meeting included:

- Plenary introduction and panel discussion on learning and good practices (see chapter C)
- Five parallel workshops on good practices in ICT4RAS, gender, professionalisation, community-based RAS, and agricultural innovation systems (see chapter D)
- Exchanges on strengthening networks to enhance learning within networks (see chapter E and F)
- Field trips, short presentations, share fair and role play (see chapter G)
- Creative competition on youth in RAS (see chapter H)
- Wrap-up and outlook (See chapter I)

See the full agenda on the [meeting website](#)¹ and more information in the [meeting guide](#).

Side Events

Reports of side events can be found at [GFRAS - Programme and Presentations](#)

Monday, 14 September:

- Social Media for Agricultural Extension and Advisory Services
- Integrating Gender and Nutrition into Rural Advisory Services – Learning from Good Practices
- Strategic Planning Meeting for the GFRAS Consortium for Extension Education and Training

Friday, 18 September

- Innovation and Advisory Service Systems Development in the Central Asia and South Caucasus Region
- Strengthening RAS Actors for Advocacy and Dialogue on Policy Reform and Action
- Experience Capitalisation in Pastoralism – Approach, Intermediate Results ...And What About Your Experience?
- How to Harness the Power of Extension to Improve Household and Community Nutrition Outcomes?
- Debriefing Social Media for Agricultural Extension and Advisory Services

Box 1: Side Events at the 6th GFRAS Annual Meeting

¹ <http://www.g-fras.org/en/events/gfras-events/annual-meeting-kyrgyzstan-2015.html>

Defining good practices

During the event, following definitions of good practices were mentioned.

- An approach that contributes to the use of agricultural innovations to improve livelihoods and educate farmers (Swanson 2008)
- Practices that reached limited-resource men and women farmers and entrepreneurs, adapted to fit local conditions (MEAS)
- A mechanism, method, process or strategy that allows extension functions to be more effective or efficient (Central America, Preissing 2011)
- A good practice is not only a practice that is good, but a practice that has been proven to work well and produce good results, and is therefore recommended as a model. It is a successful experience, which has been repeated and deserves to be shared so that a greater number of people can adopt it (FAO)
- Techniques, principles, or approaches used in RAS in a “best-fit” manner that allow programmes to be effective, efficient, and meet goals (GFRAS)

Box 2: Definition of Good Practices

C. Plenary introduction and panel discussion on learning and good practices in RAS

An introduction to global good practices (GGPs) was given by two of the founders of the GFRAS Global Good Practices Initiative: Kristin Davis, Executive Secretary GFRAS and Frederik Oberthuer, Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit, GIZ. Find the [full presentation](#) and the [video](#) the meeting website.

Kristin and Frederik highlighted that the main strength of GFRAS – its wide affiliates base with stakeholders from all around the world – is also one of its biggest challenges, and one of the biggest challenges in the AIS in general: How can the enormous amount of knowledge and experiences that is available worldwide be captured and shared meaningfully? The GGP initiative came to life mainly based on this challenge and with the aim to make knowledge and experiences available for practitioners in a straightforward, easily accessible, and easily understandable way.

To understand the idea of global good practices, it is indispensable to understand the idea of best practice versus best-fit practice. Best-practice refers to something

that is standardised, incorporating the idea of ‘one size fits all’. Best-fit is an approach that considers and is adapted to local conditions. There are two components of best-fit considerations:

- The general local context (e.g. policy environment; production system; socio-economic and cultural community aspects such as gender roles, land tenure, literacy rates, availability and use of ICTs, etc.)
- The RAS characteristics (RAS providers (public, private, civil society); governance issues including degree of centralisation, financing of RAS, link between different actors; management issues including availability and capacity of human resources, salary structures and others; prevailing RAS approaches, techniques and tools used in RAS; cross-cutting issues (e.g. women and youth in RAS))

Following this overview on the Global Good Practices Initiative, Maria Isabel Paredes, RELASER, Frederique Matras, FAO, Ernst Bolliger, independent senior advisor, and Adolphus Johnson, AFAAS, held a panel discussion on the wider integration and role of good practices in learning processes, the relevance but also constraints of documenting good practices, and the importance of actions before and after the documentation. See the [video](#) of the full discussion on the meeting website.

Learning is a complex, circular process, which happens at different stages

The panel highlighted 4 key moments in the circular process of learning (see Figure 2).

1. We learn while we make an experience, while we work, while we are involved in a programme. This is often implicit learning, and includes concepts like trial and error and learning by doing. Most of the time, this is not systematically recorded or assessed.
2. We learn in the process of actively and systematically assessing the experiences made during an activity or programme, when we take time to reflect, draw lessons, write a report, debrief in the team. It is important to note that we learn not only from the results, but also from the reflections and analysis themselves.
3. We learn while we seek and use knowledge and experiences provided by others and/or through earlier experiences. Thinking of future actions or future projects, we usually seek helpful and useful information in our own repertoire of experiences and knowledge, our colleagues' repertoire, and in physical or virtual libraries, platforms, etc.
4. Finally, we learn when we adapt the collated information to local conditions, to inform a project design, and start making new experiences.

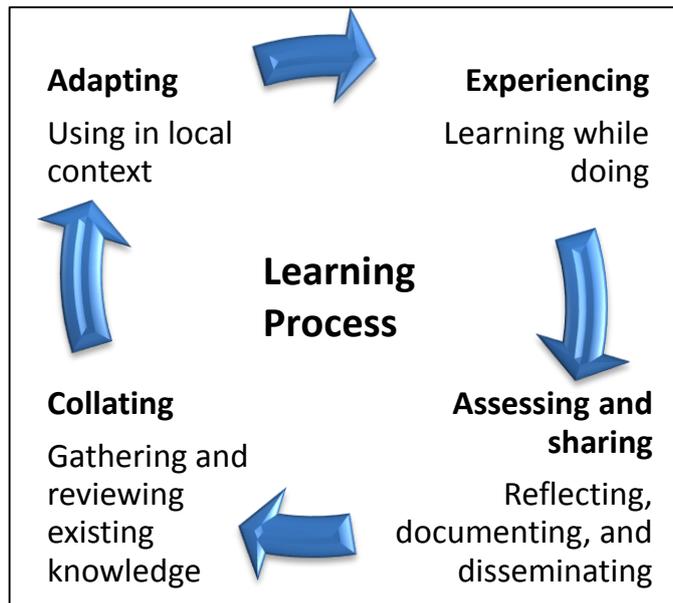


Figure 2: Four moments of learning in a circular process

Despite these four key moments, panellists highlighted that learning should be seen as a complex, circular process, where actors, experiences, and knowledge are heavily interlinked, and where learning can happen everywhere and at any time. Moving to the particular topic of good practice, the question is how experiences and lessons can be shared in an efficient way to make personal learnings available to others and continue feeding the learning cycle.

In order for good practices to be useful for the end-users, we need to strategically decide what, when, and how we share

The panellists agreed that stakeholders working in extension are usually very eager to share what they are doing and, in turn, to learn what others are doing. This is the main raison d'être of RAS fora. However, stakeholders tend to forget some steps that are needed to share and exchange experiences and knowledge effectively. Especially for good practices, those reflections are crucial if the exchange is to bring about change. There are several things we need to consider.

1. **What:** We need to reflect on what we want to share. This includes the analysis of whether it is really a good practice, meaning a practice which has been repeatedly tested with success, is supported by solid evidence, and also includes best-fit considerations.
2. **Intention of sharing, for what and for whom:** We need to reflect on the purpose of sharing our knowledge and experience. We need to consider whether there is a demand and an audience that is interested in learning from that practice at all, and what they will use this knowledge and experience for.
3. **Shape:** Once decided what we should and would like to share with whom, we need to reflect on what shape the content shall take, meaning how it shall be documented and packaged in a way that it is attractive and serves the end-users.
4. **Exchange:** Sharing doesn't end, but rather starts with the documentation. There is a need for a strategic exchange, for discussion, and feedback from different stakeholders, creating

the space for the practices and the actors to evolve. Country fora and regional networks play a crucial role for this, as they are the brokers between these different stakeholders. Strategic dissemination of the documented knowledge is key for mutual learning and discussions.

5. Roadmap: There are several moments when experiences and good practices can be shared, but it has to serve the purpose and the audience. Continuous reflection and regular documentation of lessons and progress during a project (as opposed to only at the end of a project) can help adapt to challenges and adjust the practice while it is still ongoing. But then the risk prevails of documenting something as a good practice which is in fact rather a case study or a promising practice, lacking considerations on why, how, and in what context something worked, and thus being of only limited usefulness to other stakeholders. It's about finding a balance, considering the end-users, the targeted audience, and the complex process, before documenting.

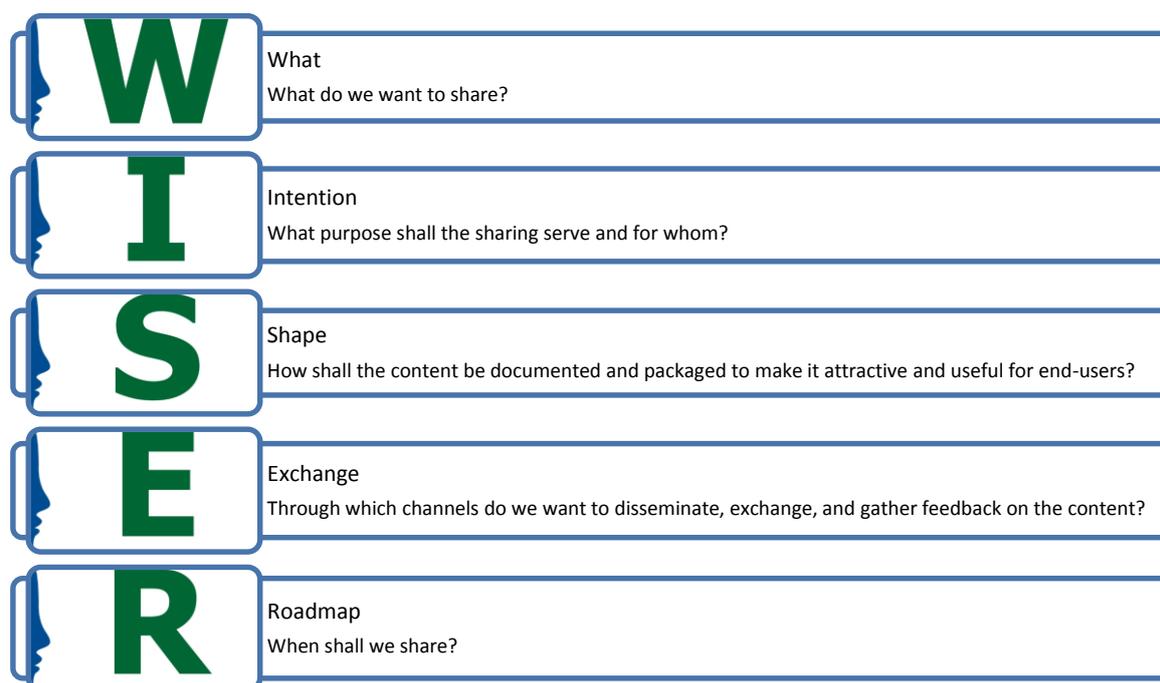


Figure 3: WISER - How to share knowledge and experiences

A good practice is only a good practice if it benefits the end-user

Panellists highlighted the fact, that good practices have to be measured according to their benefit to the end-user. A global perspective in documenting practices is good, but one should not forget to make them available and have them validated by the end-users. A practice can be good if it benefits a certain target farmer group in one country, even if it might not be relevant for other contexts around the world. The ultimate goal is to bring change and to have an effect for the end-user. But the panel also highlighted that end-users, on their side, are tired of the imposed experimentation with so called best practices from different organisations that assume a one-size-fits-all use. End-users in the field need to have ownership of new practices, and have the freedom to choose and implement approaches in a way that suits their political, economic, ecologic, and socio-cultural context.

Receiving ideas and seeing other practices is always useful

Even though the success or failure of a practice is heavily context-related, the panel highlighted that there is nevertheless a use in generalising practices and making them available and applicable to different contexts, as you can always learn from different experiences. While it is not possible to copy-paste approaches in RAS, approaches, ideas, and tools that might at first seem unusual or not applicable to a certain context challenge stakeholders to reflect on their own activities and maybe think outside their comfort zone. Further, documenting good practices globally allows for comparison

and clearer distillation of best-fit considerations, providing more evidence and more varieties of implementation to end-users. This all leads to more creative and more varied exchanges and thus fosters learning.

Conclusions and recommendations by participants

As a reaction to the panel discussions, participants drew the following conclusions and recommendations:

- Tools and approaches have to be put in the whole RAS context.
- There is no one-size-fits-all solution, good practices are constantly refined and adapted.
- There are several steps that need to be considered before and after sharing good practices in order to make them an effective tool that benefits the end-users.
- Learning takes place at different stages and for all stakeholders involved in the process.
- Learning is teamwork, and we all have our share in ensuring learning for and amongst ourselves.
- There is no such thing as a bad practice if you learn from it and reinject the learning into another practice.
- Challenges, constraints, and best-fit considerations need to be documented.
- Country fora need to play an important role in filling the gap between the high-level stakeholders discussing at conferences, and the people that put recommendations into practice.
- GGPs need to be translated and made available in different languages.
- GGPs need to incorporate opinions and validations from the field.

Box 3: Conclusions and recommendations by participants for learning with good practices

D. Parallel workshops

In the afternoon of Tuesday, 15 September, participants split into five different workshops. The workshops were guided by the GFRAS approach to global good practices, where approaches, including strengths and weaknesses, were discussed under the umbrella of best-fit considerations and context-related opportunities and constraints. The focus was on the practical implementation and challenges encountered and/or success stories from the everyday life of the participants resulting in concrete and practical recommendations to address these challenges. The paragraphs below show the short summaries provided by the workshop moderators. All presentations, reports, as well as videos of the elevator speeches can be found on the [meeting website](#).

Challenges and ways forward for RAS to enhance effective agricultural innovation systems (AIS)

Elevator speech, Edgars Linde

AIS is much more than just research, farmers, and advisors, there are much more people and institutions involved. There is a need for developing the capacities of all actors involved in the system, and motivation is key in order to encourage advisors to move ahead, together with all the other actors.

The basis for this workshop was the [Global Good Practice note on Agricultural Innovation Systems](#), and the [Hanoi Statement](#) – a bundle of learnings that were elaborated during the “Reaching the Millions” learning event. Moderated by Stefanie Kaegi and Peter Schmidt by HELVETAS, and with an input from Rasheed V Sulaiman, GFRAS, participants identified that the major challenges RAS faces with regard to their role within the AIS are the limited mandate of RAS actors to facilitate the AIS, limited skills of extensionists to do so (especially functional skills such as multi-stakeholder facilitation, networking, and others), and the variety of interests of different actors in AIS.

Based on these challenges, the participants agreed that multi-stakeholder platforms and dialogues need to be fostered. For that, capacities need to be developed on the individual, organisational, and systemic level. Participants recommended the following:

- On the individual level: Foster capacities to facilitate the AIS by adapted education and training in RAS. Particularly, that includes embedding functional skills in curricula, and consider models for lifelong learning.
- On the organisational level: Strengthen organisational capacities by broadening the mandate and role of RAS organisations.
- On the systemic level: Promote an enabling environment that supports the idea of an agricultural innovation system, a climate of a readiness to fail, and provides the space to test and disseminate innovations.

Participants agreed that a special focus on end-users and their demands (and therefore the reality) needs to be actively promoted during all processes.

Challenges and ways forward in community-based rural advisory services

Elevator speech, Beate Quilitzsch-Schuchmann

15 people from all over the world learned how farmers can promote and train other farmers, and then become community leaders, for the most part doing this voluntarily. A big argument in favor is the lack of government investment and interest. The approach is very relevant, because they come from the communities, they know them and their problems and can best convince other farmers of solutions. The approach is forming human and social capital, it increases sustainability, and reduces a community's dependence on others.

Based on inputs by Marcelo Collao Grandi, RELASER, and Lani Eugenia, Puantani, and moderated by Mona Dhamankar, KIT, and Kristin Davis, GFRAS, participants in this workshop discussed the role and relevance of community-based rural advisory services. They highlighted that community-based RAS services are crucial to fill the gap in countries where RAS is low on the agenda of governments and investors. Their unique proposition and main advantage over other types of RAS services is that they are closest to the end-users, and therewith know their needs, experience trust, and reach a wide audience. Based on the strengths and weaknesses, participants recommended the following:

- Promote community-based rural advisory services as critical element to achieve sustainable impacts of RAS.
- Promote and use synergies with different approaches, and use synergies in a complementary rather than a competitive way.
- Ensure and promote technical backstopping of community-based RAS providers.
- Ensure and promote that best-fit considerations are incorporated, as there is no "magic bullet" solution.

Challenges and ways forward in using ICTs for RAS

Elevator speech, Andrianjafy Rasoanindrainy

You don't know what ICT for RAS is? It's a way to improve farmers' livelihoods. Every second, there are 45'000 tweets, 750'000 Facebook-posts, and thousands of online-searches. You need ICT's to improve farmers' knowledge and make sure they are well informed. Policy makers have to ensure that people are using the available tools properly, and accessing the right information, as there is much information available online that isn't necessarily good.

This workshop was moderated by Sophie Treinen, FAO, and Andrianjafy Rasoanindrainy, AFAAS, with inputs from Jeffrey Bentley, Agro-Insight, Nestor Ngouambe, RESCAR-AOC, and Fatima Mohamed, AFAAS. Participants agreed that ICT for RAS has many strengths and opportunities. Amongst others, ICTs can improve the delivery of RAS by reaching a wide audience, including rural youth and women at a low cost and with low time investment, and it can improve participation, exchanges, and networking while being both entertaining and informative. However, often ICTs are not yet used at their full potential, due to lack of awareness and understanding by policy makers, investors, and end-users alike, technical and literacy barriers for certain devices and approaches, as

well as the confusion of ICT being an end in itself, rather than just a strong tool for RAS. Participants recommended the following:

- Implement awareness-raising measures and enter new partnerships for different audiences to learn about the use, strengths, and weaknesses of ICTs for RAS.
- Promote the inclusion of ICTs in RAS curricula.
- Ensure participatory processes, including women and youth, and ensure that the use and adoption of ICTs are always demand driven.

Challenges and ways forward in the professionalisation of RAS

Elevator speech, Elena Kan

The development of extension as a profession has yet to be established on every level. Starting with the ministries, as they decide what should go into the education system, at the level of universities, and of course among the professionals themselves. We saw examples from South Africa, Chile and Europe, where they are making efforts to check the quality of extension services provided. At some universities, instruction on technical skills are comparable, but the development of other skills, such as management or soft skills, varies.

The workshop on professionalisation was moderated by Hlamalani Ngwenya, GFRAS, and David Dolly, CAEPNet, with inputs given by Isabel Martinez Castillo, RELASER, Stephanus Terblanche, University of Pretoria, and Tom Kelly, EUFRAS. Participants identified challenges on the individual, the organisational, and the systemic level which prevent the development of RAS as a profession in many countries. These include the lack of skills, competencies, and interest, lack of education programs and qualifications, and the lack of supportive and well defined legislative and policies. Considering that best-fit approaches need to apply, participants recommend the following:

- Promote and advocate for extension as a well perceived profession with high standards, including career development opportunities and life-long learning.
- Influence university curriculum, using new means such as ICTs and including technical and functional skills.
- Enter partnerships and use synergies with local, regional, and global partners, and use opportunities to promote and enhance professionalisation in RAS.

Challenges and ways forward in the inclusion of gender in RAS

Elevator speech, Ernst Bolliger

We started our discussion with the definition of gender: Men and women have different roles, but the understanding of gender can be broadened to include different roles of young, old, rich, or poor populations. We then focused on questions such as where men speak with each other, where do women speak with each other and where can this border be crossed. Change (i.e. economic) often leads to a new organisation of gender patterns and a development of gender roles.

The workshop was moderated by Andrea Bohn, MEAS, and Nargiza Ludgate, INGENAES, with inputs from Lola Gaparova and Malika Abdulvasieva, USAID. Participants noted that while there is a general agreement on what gender means, and why it shall be integrated into RAS practices, most RAS service providers are still not good at doing it. In urban areas rather than rural, in the realm of education (policies supporting girls and young women; interest in the part of girls to do well in school and at university), and when men are finding employment away from home, a change in gender roles moving towards more equity is more visible. Based on lively discussions of examples from the field, participants recommended the following:

- Develop capacity of RAS staff in gender-equitable RAS design and provision and promote extension that goes beyond providing technical production information but entails entrepreneurship, farm management, and other off- and on-farm career trails for women.
- Work at policy level and promote a conducive environment that enables extension to empower women, and that can respond to the (new) needs (newly) articulated by the empowered women.
- Create “spaces” for open and honest dialogue with women and men, and engage more female extension workers in dialogues, programmes, projects, and in the field.

E. Functional component: enhancing learning within networks

At every GFRAS Annual Meeting, networks use the opportunity to exchange amongst themselves but also amongst each other how they function, where they experience challenges, and how they can improve. At this year’s annual meeting, all 12 existing regional networks were present and took one day to reflect on the strengthening of the networks’ functioning in specific areas. The leading question of the morning session on Thursday, 18 September, was how learning happens in networks. Three topics that emerged from a preparatory survey with the regional networks were discussed in different world cafés: Country fora; thematic working groups; and how to engage and attract active and diverse members to the networks. The afternoon was dedicated to discussions within the networks, leading them to reflect on the individual learnings from the morning and how these could be useful to the network.

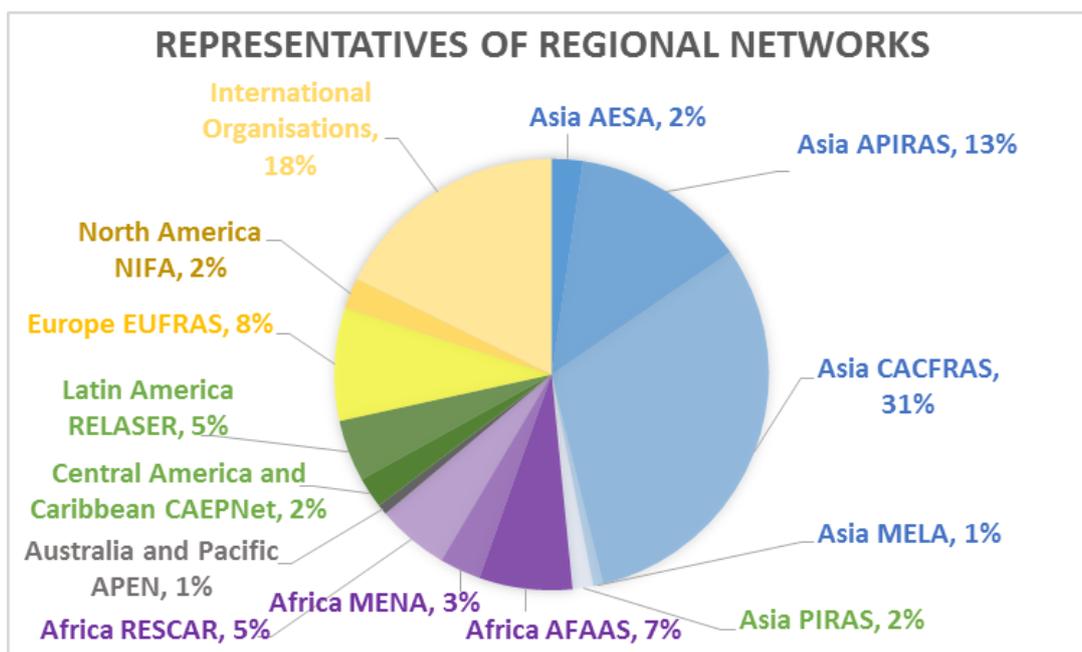


Figure 4: Participants according to regions and networks at the 6th GFRAS Annual Meeting

Where do individual network stakeholders see the role of networks and fora to strengthen learning in RAS?

World café: country fora

Participants were asked to discuss the role of country fora, their personal experiences with country fora, as well as opportunities and challenges. Participants see the main role of country fora in identifying and linking key stakeholders for RAS (farmers, trainers, public and private sectors, donors etc.), creating a platform for knowledge sharing and supporting capacity building, coordinating and facilitating RAS activities at a national, provincial, or district level, and contributing to the policy

formulation process. They were often referred to as catalysts to the development of RAS structures in a region, leading to a higher recognition of the impact of RAS.

Some challenges that were mentioned include the difficulty of developing viable strategies and laws, as, among other reasons, structures are often young, lack government support, and encounter difficulties to involve public and private stakeholders. This is closely linked with the weak recognition and credibility of the role of extension at the country level. While the existence of different groups within the countries could be an opportunity, in reality these groups often remain fragmented and may even pursue conflicting approaches to strengthening RAS.

Nevertheless, there are numerous country fora and assessments thereof which have led to different learnings. Participants agreed that there is not one pathway that leads to the creation of a country fora as this is a dynamic process, neither is there a given structure that ensures its success. Important factors that could contribute hereto include:

- Stakeholders and partners need to be sensitised to the role and benefits of a country fora in order to create strategies for joint approaches. This also strengthens buy-in from different actors.
- Country fora should have a clear strategy, purpose, and goals leading to tangible outcomes.
- A strong leadership and champions are necessary.
- A policy framework and supporting policy for the establishment of a country fora is recommended.

World café: thematic working groups

The discussions at the tables focussed around the questions of exchanges on specific themes, how topics are chosen, in what form exchanges are organised, and what the purpose and advantages of these are.

Most regions have approached specific topics and facilitated discussions on them. For many, the identification of new topics is often informal or based on country surveys, and include technical and political aspects of agriculture and RAS such as soil salinization, use of inputs, climate change, RAS policy, price volatility and others.

To foster exchange and learning in the networks, online exchange and communication is a very important factor. However, it needs maintenance, and participants recognised that face-to-face meetings are just as important for cohesion, even though funding is often a challenge. Based on this, following realisations and recommendations were formulated:



Picture 2: Participants during the world cafés

- The topics must be interesting and relevant enough for people to be invested in them. Champions are essential.
- Working groups are a coordinated effort, based on participation of interested stakeholders. Therefore coordination, trust, and cooperation is key. This requires time and funding.
- Working groups need a clearly defined topic they wish to work on and a strong structure resting on the division of roles and responsibilities (lead, coordinator, and mandates), the elaboration of a work plan with detailed tasks, and a budget.
- Ideally, thematic working groups create relevant evidence which informs and influences policy and keeps topics in discussion throughout changing governments or priorities.

World café: mobilising active and diverse members

Participants in this session discussed why people engage in networks, and how they can be mobilised. Participants agreed that there are different reasons why people engage in networks. Networks provide a voice for a group of people with similar interests, and allow them to advocate at different levels. Networks also provide, transfer, and create knowledge through sharing and comparing experiences. This can facilitate capacity building for individuals and institutions, but also help researchers identify research questions relevant to end-users and create stronger links between actors. However, working together is not only about coordinating efforts, but also resources. Complementing actions can lead to greater impacts and avoids inefficient practices or experiences being repeated.

For most actors present at the meeting, the benefits of networks are apparent. However it is important to also reach those that are not yet familiar with networks and create incentives for them to get engaged. Following are some recommendations made during the world café in order to engage more people.

- Networks are driven by purpose and interest. Although we can help promote interest through communication and media, networks remain demand driven. So activities and products need to be demand-driven to attract the relevant people.
- Follow-up is extremely important: Networks enable people to meet, discuss, exchange, and document experiences. However, existing network members and affiliates do have the responsibility to carry these learnings back to the regions and therewith raise awareness and implement the recommendations at the same time.
- Trust and confidence is crucial for people to engage in networks. This can only be built through actions and presence at different levels (field-level, institutional, and policy).
- It needs to be ensured that there are flat hierarchies and that all stakeholders involved in networks are simultaneously sharing and receiving information.

F. Elaboration of recommendations for ways forward to strengthen the functionality within networks and fora

In the afternoon, all members of a network joined to discuss their learnings from the morning, to identify possible applications for them within the networks, and to envision where they want their networks to stand at the GFRAS Annual Meeting 2016. The networks were asked to write their recommendations on different postcards to their networks, which can be found on the GFRAS website. The table bellows shows the summary of recommendations:

Network	Achievements by GFRAS Annual Meeting 2016
AESA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • established a process of capacity needs assessment of RAS in 4 countries • strengthened 3 country fora • has an enriched web portal with more diverse and relevant content
AFAAS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • has successfully integrated ICT in RAS in the region
APIRAS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • established their country fora, starting with existing ones, assessed country context for planning of new ones. • learning exchange: actively addressed fora / national / sub-regions, has a lively APIRAS Facebook group • identify / manage hot topics within countries and across region • organisational matters: worked on the charter, with representation in the core group of sub-networks as members • established the APIRAS Knowledge Bank • translated the above discussions into a work plan

CAC-FRAS, China, and Mongolia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • created a common policy / frameworks for sharing and learning among different RAS Stakeholders • designed the RAS legal framework to be adopted by countries
CAEPNet	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • has country fora and is using social media for recruitment and retention of active membership
EUFRAS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • improved the EUFRAS secretariat capacity • integrated the Balkan sub-network into its activities • implemented 15 cross-visits on agricultural innovation systems • reviewed its statutes • implemented 3 CECRA TOT sessions • 10 countries have applied for regional certification • discussed with the EU commission and parliament for assistance / funding for GFRAS in our common work
MELA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • has a charter where a clear vision is developed and agreed by members • has a second MELA meeting in Myanmar and an action plan for sharing experiences and information is developed • members are sharing information through different means
MENA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • has a successful kick-off meeting
RELASER	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • identified and communicated the benefits the network and country fora offer to their members • identified and strengthened workers and champions that mobilise country fora (training in policy and advocacy) • the existing country fora are consolidated
RESCAR-AOC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • is a fully functional and established organisation with all bodies in place • has a well-built website • stimulates and consolidates country fora • collects and disseminates training materials to over 10'000'000 farmers
SARFAAS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • established a clear elected leadership structure • doubled the membership on the group from 70 to 140 • established two additional country forums • each country forum has a Facebook page

Table 1: Networks' own recommendations for 2016

Launch of the GFRAS strategic framework 2016 - 2025

Felix Fellmann and Kristin Davis presented how GFRAS intends to continue providing advocacy and leadership in rural advisory services. The first five years of GFRAS have built its foundation, with 12 networks and over 30 country fora actively promoting and improving RAS. The GFRAS principles will continue to guide GFRAS in its main activities, which will be related to the three main fields of advocacy, professionalisation of RAS, and information sharing and exchange. While aligning the forums' activities to the sustainable development goals, the next years will see a focus on strengthening capacities for RAS on three levels, namely on the individual, the organisational, and the policy environment level. The complete strategic framework with GFRAS' vision, mission, and strategic fields of action can be found at <http://www.g-fras.org/en/about-us/governance.html>.

Box 4: GFRAS new strategic framework 2016 - 2025

G. Sharing and learning: field trips, short presentations, share fair stands, and a role play on experience capitalisation

Field trips

On Wednesday, 16 September, participants could choose to visit a full-day or half-day field trip in the region around Lake Issyk Kul. Please find the impressions of participants of all field trips on the [meeting website](#).



Picture 3: Field Trip (Potato Value Chain)

Participants could see and learn from practical examples from Kyrgyzstan on how communities took the opportunity of existing systems to build upon (meat value chain; women's self-help groups), how, through participatory planning processes, communities learn effectively and efficiently manage their own resources (pasture management), and get organised (irrigation management). Participants also saw positive results of a fruitful agricultural innovation system, where actors do collaborate and exchange sustainably, for example through the collaboration between farmers and private companies (milk value chain; fruit farming), as well as private RAS providers (potato value chain).

Short presentations and share fair

On Monday, 14 September, and Tuesday, 15 September, over 15 stands were built up, 13 short presentations held, and several videos screened, all presenting potential good practices while sharing materials, information, and knowledge. Further, a short roleplay on experience capitalisation, held by FAO representatives in the traditional Kyrgyz yurt, aimed at challenging participants to reflect on the benefits of experience exchange. A list of announced share fair stands, videos, and all presentations can be downloaded on the [meeting website](#).



Picture 4: Participants' short presentations

“There were several who were intrigued by the idea of improvising an extension method and doing something ad hoc, where you weren't sure what was going to happen beforehand. But also some nervousness about improvising and being ad hoc! **The meeting reinforced my impression that extension needs more experimentation.**”

(Eric Boa on the discussions that took place after his presentation on plant health rallies)

“Is there a systematic approach to search for and include innovations? Yes, we should develop a systematic and structured approach to identify and include innovations (...). However, sometimes innovations appear randomly (e.g. during a field visit we see an interesting technology), and then we should be open and flexible. **What we call innovation now might already be common sense for others and vice versa.**”

(Caroline Wegner on the discussions that took place after her presentation on RAS Jalalabad)



Picture 5: Lively exchanges during the share fare

H. Creative competition on youth in RAS

At the shores of Lake Issyk Kul a traditional Kyrgyz yurt hosted the creative competition on youth in agriculture and RAS. The goal of the competition was to raise awareness and stimulate reflection on the different issues surrounding youth in RAS and the opportunities the profession can offer them. Participants of the Annual Meeting selected one winner of 3 poems and 4 photos each. The winners receive a partial sponsorship to attend the 7th GFRAS Annual Meeting. All contributions can be found at <http://www.g-fras.org/en/656-qfras-creative-competition-youth-in-ras.html>.



Picture 6. Winning photo of the creative competition: Kheertiraj Siddapura with "Digital women"

I. Wrap-up and outlook

The closing of the meeting was organised as a dynamic panel, inviting all participants to take the stage and share what personal lessons from the meeting they will be taking home. "Those that are going home will go home with a lot of energy and momentum gained through the meeting, it is important that this energy is transferred to the people at home", notes Kemuel Medley Jean Baptiste from CAEPNet. For the future of GFRAS, participants wish to see the documentation and sharing of success stories, concrete discussions on tools and methods, and a closer look at the methods and topics presented in the parallel workshops. Further, participants would like to see GFRAS become a major player in the implementation of the SDG goals. Participants wish for the networks to be able to achieve the goals they have set themselves in this and other meetings. During the meeting, several recommendations for GFRAS were formulated, which can be summarised as follows

- Translate and make Global Good Practice Notes available in different languages
- Global Good Practice Notes need to incorporate opinions and validations from the field
- Develop more Global Good Practice Notes, particularly on ICT and on gender

YOUTH AGRICULTURE

*Poor youth knowledgeless
Darkness and sleepiness
dream
Wake up agriculture
Still murmuring help, ask
agricultural deals.*

*My agricultural spirit
World agriculturalists ask
where are you?
Only to turn nothing,*

*Agriculture my beginning
Agriculture my ending
Feed our family and friends,
Who will feed us youth?*

*Info agriculture
G-fras, ypard
Still sleep but why?
Open mind and eyes and
Ask why leave agriculture?*

*Deep agriculture
Modification, cloning,
Artificial insemination, food
processing,
Crop production, animal
production and more.*

*Old to rest, over to youth
What to do? Still sleep enough
Say enough is enough our
agriculture
Forward with us.....*

Box 6: Winning poem of the creative competition: Maluleke Rhengu with "Youth Agriculture"

- Continue to foster regional, sub-regional, and national RAS fora
- Develop and share policy models, guidelines, strategies, and action plans to inspire existing and attract new members to the network
- Create discussion groups and consider models for sustaining working groups (on ICTs, producer organisations, gender, and others).
- Continue to develop a learning kit for education and training in RAS, and take onwards the discussion on certification
- Foster the exchange of knowledge, experiences, and good practices

Virginia Cardenas, APIRAS, and Alisher Tashmatov, CACAARI gave the closing speeches. As Virginia explains, the purpose of this meeting was to share experiences and create joint learnings, as is the main purpose of GFRAS. The participants were exposed to many different good practices during the meeting, now it is up to everybody to reflect on them, try them, and see and communicate what works.

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- The GFRAS Steering Committee
- The members of the Annual Meeting Organising Committee
- All volunteers and helpers from Kyrgyzstan
- The main moderators of the event
- All speakers, presenters, and moderators of parallel workshops

...And of course all the participants who actively and eagerly shared, presented, discussed, and elaborated experiences, ideas, and recommendations.

