



## 7<sup>th</sup> GFRAS Annual Meeting

### The Role of Rural Advisory Services for Inclusive Agripreneurship

3 - 6 October 2016, Limbe, Cameroon

## Executive Summary

### Background and objectives

The Annual Meeting is the central instrument of the [Global Forum for Rural Advisory Services](#). It seeks to foster exchange on rural advisory services (RAS) between stakeholders and across regions, and to discuss the strategic directions and functioning of GFRAS and its regional and national fora. The GFRAS Annual Meeting provides a space for learnings and exchanges around topics relevant to RAS and contributes to providing a voice for RAS in global policy dialogues.

The 7<sup>th</sup> GFRAS Annual Meeting took place from **3 - 6 October 2016** in **Limbe, Cameroon** with the thematic focus on **the Role of Rural Advisory Services (RAS) for Inclusive Agripreneurship**. The meeting was preceded by an international workshop organised by RESCAR-AOC (Réseau des Services de Conseil Agricole et Rural d'Afrique de l'Ouest et du Centre, or the West and Central African Network for Rural Advisory Services), a GFRAS-GIZ workshop on the *Role of RAS in Gender Mainstreaming in Value Chains*, and a number of additional side events. The meeting was organised by GFRAS in partnership with [RESCAR-AOC](#), the African Forum of Agricultural Advisory Services ([AFAAS](#)), the offices of the World Agroforestry Centre ([ICRAF](#)) based in Cameroon, and the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development of Cameroon ([MINADER](#)).

The objectives of the meeting were to:

- provide a comprehensive understanding of inclusive agripreneurship and its relevance for food security, poverty reduction, and sustainable development, and identify factors that influence inclusive agripreneurship;
- discuss the role of RAS and their capacities needed at the individual, organisational, and system level to strengthen inclusive agripreneurship, and provide recommendations on how those capacities can be strengthened;
- discuss capacity needs and define ways forward needed to strengthen RAS networks and fora for them to become successful players in agricultural innovation systems in their regions.

### Key issues addressed

Fostering entrepreneurship in agriculture is now widely recognised as a central concern by most actors involved in agricultural development. However, the links between RAS and agripreneurship have not been sufficiently explored to date.

Participants agreed that RAS can play key roles in supporting rural actors to become successful agripreneurs when equipped to do so. They provide access to important information, and can connect rural people to entrepreneurs, relevant markets, and financial services. They can also

provide training to farmers in relevant managerial and other functional skills (as opposed to technical skills, see also the [GFRAS New Extensionist](#)). RAS can support actors' decision making processes and influence policies and regulations to create an enabling environment conducive to agripreneurship, reduce barriers for entrepreneurs and business in the sector, or contribute to helping people reflect on areas where societal values may impede entrepreneurship. Participants identified roles that RAS can and should play, and the capacities RAS need to fulfil these roles. A set of recommendations for RAS and RAS-related stakeholders to strengthen inclusive agripreneurship were developed.

In order to strengthen RAS networks and fora, the 2016 Annual Meeting focused on capacity assessments of regional and sub-regional networks. In 2016, GFRAS developed an approach and related tools to assess the capacities of the networks. During the Annual Meeting, not only were network representatives trained to apply the methodology and tools in their own networks without external support, but they also had the opportunity to exchange on capacity needs. As a result, each network defined a [set of goals](#) that they agreed to work on and to report back on achievements by the 2017 GFRAS Annual Meeting. One key element of these goals was to strengthen the peer exchange amongst regional networks and country fora.

The 7<sup>th</sup> GFRAS Annual Meeting was also the occasion to officially acknowledge the new GFRAS Executive Secretary, Karim Hussein, and to thank the former Executive Secretary, Kristin Davis for her commitment and effective tenure as Executive Secretary since the establishment of GFRAS. The handover was celebrated during a cultural evening with all participants, during which Kristin thanked the GFRAS community for the great collaboration since its inception and promised to stay involved in GFRAS' activities. Karim highlighted his intention to take the great work onwards and bring GFRAS to a new level.

### Participants and presentations

More than 140 participants from over 45 countries and various sectors gathered and discussed in Limbe for the 7<sup>th</sup> GFRAS Annual Meeting. Over a third of the participants were women, and about a third of the participants were under 40 years old.

Diverse perspectives on the topic for the meeting were shared by the different actors:

- **Cameroon's Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development** highlighted that the rural sector is key in offering employment for youths in Cameroon and this is why the government has opted for the promotion of agriculture of the second generation, which includes support for agripreneurship
- **Merida Roets** (from Scientific Roets- a private sector company engaged in advisory services) in her keynote speech, shared her practical insights into the needs of different actors in the rural space with regard to business development;
- In a lively [panel discussion](#), **Tessa Barry**, from the Caribbean Network CAEPNet, **Brian Tairea** from the Pacific Network [PIRAS](#), **Maria Briones** from the Latin American Network [RELASER](#), and **Yves Bitama** from the West and Central African Network RESCAR-AOC shared regional experiences of the role of RAS for agripreneurship and business development from their regions.
- **Shaun Ferris**, from Catholic Relief Services, provided his insights and conclusions from his own experience and also from his work with the GFRAS network in facilitating an [e-discussion](#) that preceded the GFRAS Annual Meeting.

- In the [\*parallel workshops\*](#), that followed, participants discussed the role and capacity needs of RAS to strengthen inclusive agripreneurship at three levels: (i) the individual extensionist; (ii) RAS organisations; and (iii) the enabling environment.
- [\*Short presentations\*](#) and [\*share fair stands\*](#) complemented the above approaches to sharing diverse insights from various actors and perspectives on the topic.
- Several [field trips](#) allowed participants to discuss issues further with RAS professionals, agripreneurs, businesses and farmers in a number of locations in the region in Cameroon.

The third day of the meeting was dedicated the networks capacity assessments. This part of the meeting was facilitated by LR Brand, the experts working with GFRAS to develop the [capacity assessment](#) process.

### Key recommendations

An overarching conclusion from the debates at the Annual Meeting is that actors in the rural landscape need to adapt to a new context in which private sector operators and agripreneurs are important players in agricultural development. RAS thus needs to adapt, and encourage the adaption, of a new mind-set, which shifts the perception from project-oriented approaches towards more business-oriented approaches to agriculture, in which the role and importance of profit is recognised (profit being conceived as income minus expenses, or transaction costs).

Participants identified key recommendations for all actors and stakeholders involved in agriculture, rural development, and RAS to strive towards to better support agripreneurship.

These included the following:

- Key aspects of policy frameworks and the enabling environment need to be adapted, including:
  - education systems, to include agripreneurship, commodity knowledge, value chain knowledge, and participation of value chain role-players;
  - financial insurance systems, to include incentives, grants, and risk mitigation measures; and
  - agripreneurship-oriented governance, to include more appropriate business-friendly infrastructure, trade, business and fiscal policies
- Principles of action need to be developed, including for example:
  - promoting both pro-active and reactive approaches to service provision;
  - recognising and endorsing the very different needs of diverse rural actors, particularly the different needs of women, men, youth, smallholders, and vulnerable people;
  - encouraging innovation and creativeness, among rural actors and RAS; and
  - supporting sustainable and inclusive business models that (i) support sustainable production systems; (ii) live up to equitable social standards; and (iii) are profitable
- Efforts to support linkages and coordination are needed, including for example:
  - working towards a better coordination and complementarity (as opposed to competition and duplication of efforts) between different RAS providers;
  - enhancing knowledge exchange and coordination amongst all actors along value chains, including support for new forms of public-private partnerships;

- ensuring unconditional access to information and knowledge by all actors, using new forms of communication and learning, and strengthening knowledge exchange and sharing; and
- building stronger awareness of RAS networks and fora and strengthening their supportive roles to agripreneurship.
- Continued efforts to strengthen capacities of RAS actors are needed, particularly in the following areas:
  - strengthened internal capacities of organisations and institutions to be better equipped to respond to changing situations and emerging needs;
  - appropriate structures, approaches, and methods for the provision of services, potentially also comprising the development of fee-based RAS services;
  - strengthened functional skills and competencies of RAS providers, particularly with regard to value chain and business knowledge, management, facilitation, mobilisation, negotiating with partners and buyers, and ability to broker business relationships

### Follow-up activities

As a follow-up to the GFRAS Annual Meeting, the GFRAS Secretariat will:

- work with GFRAS affiliates to finalise and share a knowledge product on agripreneurship;
- establish and maintain a community of practice that includes representatives from GFRAS networks, to regularly exchange on network capacities and how they can be strengthened; and
- continue to prepare the [8<sup>th</sup> GFRAS Annual Meeting](#) which will be overlapping with the APEN meeting and is set to take place from 9-15 September 2017 in Ingham, Australia with the thematic focus: ***"Facilitating Balanced Change for Rural and Urban communities"***.

### Further information

Find a more comprehensive report as well as all relevant documentation on the Annual Meeting at <http://www.g-fras.org/en/annual-meeting-2016.html>, or contact the GFRAS Secretariat for any further information ([info@g-fras.org](mailto:info@g-fras.org)).