



GFRAS – Providing advocacy and leadership in rural advisory services (RAS) for sustainable development



The Global Forum for Rural Advisory Services (GFRAS) seeks to strengthen rural advisory services (RAS) by providing a platform for learning and exchange for stakeholders in agricultural innovation systems.

GFRAS provides advocacy and evidence on the relevance and contributions of RAS to achieving sustainable development, and particularly to ending poverty and hunger. This is at the heart of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, reflected specifically in SDGs 1 and 2 (see Box 2).

Based on its Strategic Framework 2016–2025, GFRAS focuses on three strategic fields of action:

- facilitation and enhancement of effective and continuous knowledge generation and exchange;
- advocacy and support for an enabling policy environment and appropriate investment in RAS; and
- professionalisation of RAS.

All strategic fields contribute towards strengthening RAS capacities at the enabling environment, organisational and individual levels.

What makes GFRAS unique?

GFRAS promotes evidence-based approaches to agricultural extension and rural advisory services that are demand-driven, support partnerships and foster synergies to enhance learning and exchange. GFRAS derives its vitality, power and purpose from the RAS community, which includes a wide range of public, private and civil society stakeholders across the

Box 1: How is GFRAS organised ?

GFRAS is a network and a platform, open to members (organisations) and affiliates (individuals) in all countries that have an interest in strengthening rural advisory services. GFRAS is guided by a Steering Committee drawn from RAS networks across the world and international development institutions, including donors, who delegate operational tasks to its Secretariat. The Swiss Association for the Development of Agriculture and Rural Areas (AGRIDEA) hosts the GFRAS Secretariat in Lausanne, Switzerland.

The vision of GFRAS is for rural advisory services to effectively contribute to agricultural innovation systems for sustainable development. Its mission is to provide advocacy and leadership on pluralistic and demand-driven RAS for sustainable development.

world. The work of GFRAS is based on the principle of subsidiarity: processes and initiatives are led by regional networks (currently 16) and country fora (currently 35). GFRAS fosters linkages and knowledge sharing between them and provides support and advice where needed. The RAS community and networks provide GFRAS with a direct, on-going link to the field.

By working at different levels, GFRAS helps bridge the gap between regional actors and the global development arena, ensuring that local actors are represented at the global level. GFRAS also provides a mechanism for international development priorities to be tailored to RAS and realities at the regional and country levels, and to be debated by stakeholders at all levels.

Box 2: Effectiveness and relevance of RAS for sustainable development

Extension and rural advisory services (RAS), help farmers and rural populations develop technical, organisational and management skills to better identify practical solutions to challenges in agriculture and rural development. Furthermore, RAS play critical brokering roles between actors in agricultural innovation systems and provide feedback mechanisms between farmers, agribusiness, research institutes, education centres, governments and civil society.

The role of RAS has been recognised as critical by the international community, including the G20 and G8, which has called for increased investment in extension and advisory services (see, e.g. SDG 2, target 2a). Evidence shows that investments in RAS result in higher income levels, better uptake of technology by end users, increased productivity and better management of on-farm resources.

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What does GFRAS do?

Below are some examples of activities led by GFRAS and implemented together with its members and affiliates. To see the full scope of activities, please visit the GFRAS website (www.g-fras.org).

Facilitates access to emerging knowledge on RAS	Knowledge and information on RAS may exist, but it can be scattered or presented in language that is not accessible to all. The GFRAS Global Good Practices Initiative provides 4-page overviews of proven RAS approaches and methods, collating information from more extensive knowledge products for quick reference and to enable the comparisons of approaches for practitioners.	The GFRAS Annual Meetings (see Box 3) are the central instrument to foster exchange and build ties between the regional networks, members and affiliates of GFRAS. Each meeting focuses on a critical topic relevant to RAS, and on a functional component, providing a space for exchange within and between the networks to strengthen their organisational capacities, encourage peer-to-peer exchanges, plan their activities and foster policy dialogues.	Creates learning events
Supports thematic exchanges	Based on demand, affiliates can form thematic Working Groups to develop discussions and activities. Currently, there are four GFRAS Working Groups: the Consortium on Education and Training; the Policy Working Group; the ICT4RAS Working Group; and the Nutrition Working Group. In the past, Working Groups also addressed issues related to producer organisations, gender equality in RAS and evaluation in RAS.	GFRAS has produced, commissioned, and collated a number of publications on key topics, such as: extension evaluation; the "New Extensionist"; gender; policy; education; and the role of producer organisations in RAS. For a full list of publications, visit www.g-fras.org	Addresses evidence gaps
Strengthens capacities at the individual, organisational, and system levels	The GFRAS Consortium on Education and Training focuses its efforts on supporting the professionalisation of RAS, including talent development. One key example has been the development of the "New Extensionist Learning Kit", consisting of 13 modules covering topics such as professional ethics or community mobilisation to the role of extension in value chains or risk management and adaptation in RAS.	GFRAS has been invited to represent advisory services in numerous global fora, for example: Global Conferences on Agricultural Research for Development; Rio+20; the United Nations Committee on World Food Security; the Global Donor Platform for Rural Development; and the meetings of the CGIAR Consortium and other relevant development partners.	Engages with international actors
Supports regional networks and country fora	With the support of the RAS community and based on demand, GFRAS has helped establish and build 16 regional and sub-regional RAS networks and RAS country fora in 35 countries.		

Box 3: The 7th GFRAS Annual Meeting

The 2016 Annual Meeting was held in Limbe, Cameroon, hosted by the regional networks RESCAR-AOC and AFAAS. More than 140 participants from over 45 countries discussed the role of RAS for inclusive agripreneurship. The key conclusions that participants developed during the workshops related to the need for RAS to adapt to a changing environment, and to encourage the adoption of a new mind-set in rural development - one that moves beyond project-oriented activities and towards more financially sustainable, business-oriented models. Furthermore, network representatives were trained to use the capacity assessment methods and tools developed by GFRAS, which they will be able to employ to establish baselines and future activities for their organisational development. The full report of the Annual Meeting can be found on the GFRAS website.