

Annual Report 2014



**GFRAS is the Global Forum for Rural Advisory Services (RAS).
Our vision is to see rural advisory services effectively contributing to
the sustainable reduction of hunger and poverty worldwide.
Our mission is to provide advocacy and leadership on rural advisory
services within the global development agenda.**

Impressum

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CAC-FRAS, page 12

AESA; Martin Garcia, LEISA Magazine; Esoko; AESA; Eric Mcgaw;

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Foreword



2014 was an exciting year at GFRAS. We focused on several different endeavours. The first of these was the position paper on the role of producer organisations in rural advisory services (RAS). This was linked to the International Year of Family Farming. GFRAS believes that producer organisations (including farmers and other rural entrepreneurs) play a critical role in advisory services. As follow up to the 2013 annual meeting, which focused on the role of producer organisations in RAS, in 2014, GFRAS engaged in a series of online dialogues, face-to-face discussions, literature review, and gathering of experiences on this topic, which culminated in the position paper.

The Global Good Practices Initiative was launched in 2014 with the production of three Good Practice Notes. This initiative fills a gap in knowledge about which approaches and methods best suit different country RAS situations.

These activities have led to the recognition that we need strengthened capacities within RAS actors: To undertake policy dialogue, to take up the challenges encapsulated in the new extensionist, and to undertake assessments and evaluations of RAS at national level. Thus in 2014 GFRAS began efforts to develop learning materials for our networks and their country fora to better serve small-scale women and men producers.

The year also saw the consolidation of several new regional networks and country fora. Agricultural Extension in South Asia held their first face-to-face meeting, with country-level follow up meetings in Bangladesh and India. In Central Asia and the Caucasus, the RAS actors met in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, to assess the status of rural advisory services in those eight countries. Country fora also were active – see the article on the Ugandan forum on page 8.

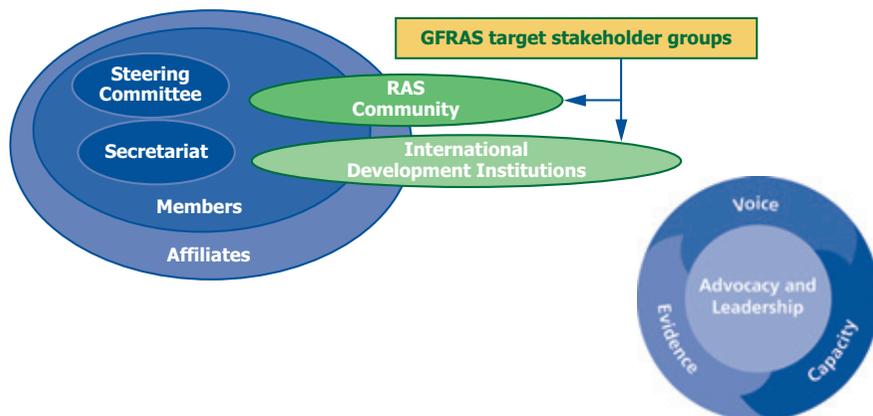
We held our 2014 annual meeting in Buenos Aires, Argentina, on RAS policies. We shared experiences and evidence on RAS policies, and concluded that they should be anchored in the national government, be free from political populism, and choose a holistic, multidisciplinary, and participatory approach. In line with this topic, GFRAS has been working on a Policy Compendium, a tool that contributes to fill the gap between the RAS policy environment and RAS efforts in the field.

Rasheed Sulaiman V
Chair

Kristin Davis
Executive Secretary

GFRAS – Making a Difference by Improving Rural Advisory Services

International development institutions and investors increasingly recognise the essential role played by rural advisory services (RAS) in reducing hunger and poverty. Yet, until recently, the services have not presented a coherent and credible voice, with limited representation in global or regional rural development fora. The highly diverse set of RAS providers have limited access to information and advice regarding funding options and means to influence policymaking.



RAS actors and fora therefore benefit from increased interaction through knowledge sharing and peer-to-peer experience exchange. The Global Forum for Rural Advisory Services (GFRAS) provides a formal structure to proactively promote the strengthening of rural advisory services.

GFRAS' mission is to provide advocacy and leadership on pluralistic, demand-driven rural advisory services within the global development agenda. Our vision is to see rural advisory services effectively contributing to the sustainable reduction of hunger and poverty worldwide.

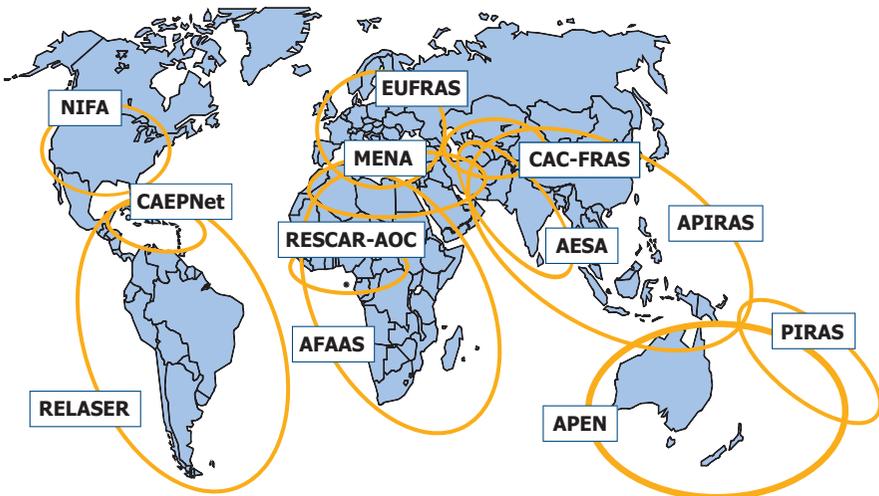
By working at different levels, GFRAS helps regional actors to present their perspectives in the global development arena, and provides a mechanism for global perspectives to engage at the regional and national level. This engagement mechanism strengthens the role of advisory services in agricultural development. GFRAS allows RAS providers and other organisations with an interest in RAS to have a voice, to engage in dialogue, and to promote a supportive environment for investment in RAS. GFRAS supports studies and evidence on effective RAS approaches and policies. It also strengthens the capacity of RAS practitioners through networking and interaction.

How to Engage

The GFRAS community is made up of affiliates and members. Affiliates are individuals from all regions and sectors that are interested in RAS. Affiliation with GFRAS is open, informal, free of cost, and on an individual basis. Affiliates receive information and regular communication from the GFRAS secretariat and can attend the annual meeting. You can become an affiliate by registering on the GFRAS website at www.g-fras.org. Those who do so receive special updates and communications.

Members are organisations or institutions drawn from the affiliates at the invitation of the GFRAS steering committee. Members commit to actively promoting GFRAS and its principles. They attend the annual meeting, support the forum in their region or sector, or participate in working groups.

Another way to get involved with GFRAS is by joining a working group. Working groups are composed of GFRAS affiliates or members actively working around a thematic topic across regions and organisations. Working groups are formed on a demand-driven basis with the direction of the GFRAS steering committee. Working group members show a keen interest to regularly participate in the implementation and development of the GFRAS strategy and organisational development around their topic.



Regional and sub-regional networks of GFRAS:

Find more informations and contents on pages 9 to 19 and 32.

The first function of GFRAS is to provide a voice for rural advisory services (RAS) within global policy dialogues and through it promote enhanced investment in RAS. In 2014 GFRAS concentrated on the role of producer and farmer organisations.

Producer Organisations in Rural Advisory Services: Evidence and Experiences

The delivery of services to farmers in developing countries has changed dramatically over the last forty years. In the mid-1970s, agricultural extension services were largely delivered by the public sector, with networks of extension agents providing skills and information to individual farmers. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, there was widespread privatisation and decentralisation of rural service delivery, a reduction in investment in public services, and a growing emphasis on the commercialisation of small-scale agriculture. In this development the producer organisations gain an increasingly important role within the agricultural innovation system (AIS).

As the agricultural system has become increasingly complex with many different actors, the way that resource-poor farmers access and use information and knowledge has changed considerably. Conventional assumptions about the linear movement of new agricultural knowledge – from scientists via extension agents to farmers – are no longer valid. Instead, the concept of agricultural innovation systems has been developed to acknowledge the complexity of relationships between multiple heterogenous actors, and the importance of non-linear learning processes, feedback loops, and



other complex interactions that occur between them. It also serves to highlight the possibility that agricultural innovation can occur at any point in the system, and does not always originate with researchers.

One important actor in the AIS are producer organisations. The past few decades have witnessed the emergence of a wide range of producer organisations, and an increase in their number. This has been partly in response to the space created by the gradual decline of public investment, management, and support to the agricultural sector. Producer organisations are increasingly asked to play a central role in driving agricultural transformation processes. They are a vital node in agricultural innovation systems, whether they link their members with agribusinesses, research organisations, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), government, or other providers of rural advisory services. Many are involved in the delivery of rural advisory services.

The Role of Producer Organisations

Producer organisations contribute to rural advisory services in many different ways. See the following examples from different countries:

- Knowledge sharing through information and communication technologies (ICTs) in Accra, Ghana
- Enabling members' access to credit in Antananarivo, Madagascar
- Assisting producers with transparent processes of land distribution in Harare, Zimbabwe
- Enabling access to fodder production licenses in Hyderabad, India
- Providing linkages with city institutions and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in Phnom Penh, Cambodia.



The exact mix of services any producer organisation is involved in depends on their objectives, activities, scale of operation, the commodities they deal with, and their position in and influence over value chains.

Many producer organisations have strengths that give them advantages in providing demand-oriented rural advisory services. The set of qualities and attributes that enables them to perform successfully includes:

- Knowledge about producers' needs, demands, and contexts
- The trust of their members, which gives them legitimacy
- Capacity and space to encourage farmers' learning and testing of innovations
- Scope for linking producers to other actors in agricultural systems
- Experience in activities that complement rural advisory services, especially in financial services
- Advocacy on rural issues.

In the position paper – Producer Organisations in Rural Advisory Services: Evidence and Experiences, GFRAS highlights the many ways that producer organisations with these attributes make a positive contribution to articulating the demands and needs of their members, and discusses the challenges these organisations face. The paper concludes with a series of recommendations on how they can build effectively on their advantages to strengthen the role they play in rural advisory services.

The paper was published in early 2015 and is freely available at www.g-fras.org/pos-in-ras/



"I credit GFRAS for highlighting two important issues. First is the importance of rural advisory services. Most of the talk and the money goes to research but this is useless if we are not able to deliver the knowledge to farmers and help them use this knowledge to improve their welfare. Second is the important role that farmer organisations can play and are in fact already playing in many parts of the world. Researchers and RAS providers have everything to gain by partnering with organised groups of farmers."

*Raul Q. Montemayor, National Programme Manager
Federation of Free Farmers, Philippines*



Regional RAS Networks

GFRAS is a global network made up of various regional and sub-regional RAS networks. To a large extent, their activities define what GFRAS is and how it functions. Below these regional networks are introduced and some of their activities presented.

AFAAS – African Forum for Agricultural Advisory Services

Founding year	2004
Member	36 countries
Contact	AFAAS Secretariat Plot 22A, Nakasero Road P. O. Box 34624, Kampala, Uganda Phone +256-31-2-313400 secretariat@afaas-africa.org www.afaas-africa.org



UFAAS – The Uganda Forum for Agricultural Advisory Services



The Uganda Forum for Agricultural Advisory Services (UFAAS) is a country chapter of the African Forum for Agricultural Advisory Services (AFAAS). It brings together a wide range of actors from all sectors involved in agricultural extension and advisory services (AEAS) in Uganda. The sectors include the public, private, academia, civil society including NGOs, farmer organisations, the donor community, media, and agriculture-related professional bodies. Beatrice Luzobe, the focal person of UFAAS, explains the importance and tasks of UFAAS.

How did the formation of country forum change the AEAS/agriculture landscape in Uganda?

The formation of the country forum created the first umbrella institution that brings all AEAS actors from all the relevant sectors together. This brought out and is still bringing out the importance of extension in Uganda. Within a country without a clear agricultural policy, no extension standards and ethics, limited networking and information sharing, and no joint voice for the actors, UFAAS was initiated just at the right time.

What is the most pressing issue in AEAS in Uganda and how is UFAAS engaging?

The most pressing issue in Uganda was the extension policy reforms. From April 2014, extension reforms were proposed that by the end of the year had resulted in the disbandment of the National Agricultural Advisory Services (NAADS) programme, with the national extension mandate given over to inputs distribution monitored by the army.

UFAAS was involved from the advocacy side, gathering the various actors to collect their views and communicate/discuss with the policy makers the issues raised. The position papers have also been published in the media and posted on the UFAAS website www.ufaas-ugandacf.org. To mark this engagement, a declaration was made by over 100 actors from all sectors, and currently the Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Industry and Fisheries (MAAIF) has recognized UFAAS as a formidable force and partner in extension.

Currently, UFAAS has been requested to assist MAAIF to draft an ethics and standards document for extension. UFAAS is also part of the current on-going process of formulating the next 5-year agriculture sector Development Strategy Investment Plan (DSIP).

Where do you see fields of activities for UFAAS in the future?

There are a couple of topics where UFAAS needs to engage. As the most important I would list

- Continued mobilisation of AEAS actors, networking, and information sharing
- Capacity development in issues of the New Extensionist, cross-cutting, and other emerging issues.
- Support to innovative AEAS approaches (identify and profile, assessment, documentation, dissemination, and upscaling)
- Research related to identified and pertinent AEAS issues
- Advocacy for effective and efficient extension system for the farmers

■ AESA – Agricultural Extension in South Asia

Founding year	2011
Member countries	8
Members	10000 members in the AESA Facebook group aesanetwork@gmail.com www.aesa-gffras.net



Focal Points

- Dr. Rasheed Sulaiman V.
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-



“With more than 10,000 members currently and expanding further, AESA Facebook group has become one of the most popular knowledge sharing platforms for RAS stakeholders in South Asia. AESA has facilitated the establishment of country forum of RAS providers in India and Bangladesh so far and I hope to see similar developments in other countries in the region. The interesting blogs and good practices on RAS regularly published by AESA are currently read by a large number of extension professionals and students and I am sure all these efforts would contribute to reforms in extension curricula, research, policy and practice”

Dr Mahesh Chander, AESA Country Focal Point, India

Publications in 2014

- AESA Blogs: 18
- AESA Good Practices: 3
- AESA Meeting Notes: 8
- AESA Face to Face Interviews: 3

- Mahesh Chander and Rasheed Sulaiman V (2014) Strengthening Extension and Advisory Services through Producer Organisations: A Case of Milk Producer Cooperatives in India, Proceedings and Recommendations of the Consultations on the role of Producer Organisations in Strengthening Extension and Advisory Provision in the Dairy/Livestock Sector in India, IVRI, AESA, CRISP and GFRAS, November 2014.

Events in 2014

- First Face to Face Meeting of AESA, 14-15 January 2014, Kathmandu, Nepal – 29 participants from 7 countries
- E-discussion on Producer Organisations in the Dairy Sector, 18 August to 30 September 2014 – 23 participants
- First meeting of the India Extension Network (IEN), 26 August 2014 – 19 participants
- First meeting of the Bangladesh Extension Network (BEN), 1 September 2014 – 76 participants

APIRAS – Asia-Pacific Islands Rural Advisory Services Network

Founding year	2011
Members	27 institutions, 35 individual members
Contact	Dr. Virginia R. Cardenas, GFRAS Coordinator for Asia-Pacific Islands, Deputy Director-Administration Southeast Asian Regional Center for Graduate Study and Research in Agriculture (SEARCA) College 4031 Laguna, Philippines apirasnetwork@hotmail.com www.apirasnetwork.org



CAC-FRAS – Central Asia and Caucasus Forum for Rural Advisory Services

Founding Year	2014
Contact	Elisabeth Katz Training Advisory and Innovation Centre (TAIS) 43/1, Grajdanskaya Street, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan Phone 996 312 36 55 66 eka.rdconsulting@gmail.com

■ Regional Conference on Rural Advisory Services (RAS) in Central Asia and the Caucasus

17-21 November 2014, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan

Poor linkages between researchers, advisory services systems, farmers (especially women farmers), private sector stakeholders, and policy makers are a common issue in the countries in the Central Asia and the Caucasus (CAC) region. The unsystematic level of interaction undermines the ability of farmers to access and introduce innovative technologies and practices on their farms, and thus deprives them of innovation-based opportunities to improve their productivity, profitability, and livelihoods. In view of this challenge, CACAARI (Central Asia and the Caucasus Association of Agricultural Research Institutes) and CAC-FRAS (Central Asia and the Caucasus Forum for Rural Advisory Services), an informal regional platform of GFRAS, decided to join efforts and undertake joint actions towards strengthening rural advisory service systems in the region. The goals are to learn from each other, develop common approaches, and coordinate efforts to strengthen agricultural innovation systems in the region.

As a first joint action, CACAARI and CAC-FRAS, in collaboration with GFAR (Global Forum on Agricultural Research), MEAS (Modernising Extension and Advisory Services), ICARDA (International Centre for Agricultural Research in Dry Areas), IFPRI (International Food Policy Research Institute), GFRAS, and other partners, organised a Regional Conference on Rural Advisory Services in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan.

One of the main purposes was to establish a common understanding on status, strengths, and weaknesses of the rural advisory services systems in



the CAC region by sharing and discussing the results of an overview study of the RAS systems in the different countries, and prepare the ground for a comprehensive assessment of the rural advisory service systems in the CAC region. Each country made an assessment of its RAS system and presented it at the conference.

The subsequent discussions led to the following summaries:

1. In Kyrgyzstan RAS are specialised non-profit organisations and the government provides support to them through donor projects.
2. In Armenia, Georgia, and Kazakhstan the government finances a full RAS system that is in the first two countries complemented with non-governmental service providers.
3. In Azerbaijan when donors left, the situation with RAS deteriorated quickly. No sustainability mechanisms were in place.
4. In Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, the principle of working of RAS is varied. In Uzbekistan the government pays a large part of the services. In Tajikistan the government provides and pays for services on a very limited scale and donors take the role of the government.
5. Following these assessments, the conference participants discussed models of government policies and support for rural advisory service systems and their advantages and disadvantages in different frame conditions, leading to recommendations to the governments in the region.

The full report of the event can be found at www.g-fras.org/. The assessment methods used in the CAC region are also applicable in other regions. GFRAS supports all interested groups and organisations in using them. For more information please contact info@g-fras.org/.

The second function of GFRAS is to support the development and synthesis of evidence-based approaches and policies for improving the effectiveness of RAS. The Global Good Practice Initiative is a good example for this kind of capacity building in 2014.

Global Good Practice Note 1: Innovation Platforms

Farmers, agri-business, and service providers have to innovate continuously to adapt to an ever-changing environment (including markets, climate and resources). Innovation is about putting ideas that are new to a certain location into practice, and in this way changing the situation of those living in this area for the better. These “ideas” can be a new way of irrigating a field (i.e. a technology), a new way of organising women farmers to bulk their produce (i.e. an organisational innovation), or a new policy that supports smallholders in getting bank loans (i.e. an institutional innovation). In agriculture, innovation often involves a combination of these different types of changes.

Innovation is stimulated when multiple actors (farmers, NGOs, service providers, traders, agro-dealers, researchers, policy makers) interact and share their ideas, knowledge and opinions to come up with new solutions. Innovation platforms can be used by advisory services and other actors as a means to bring different actors together to discuss and negotiate collective or coordinated action.



Philosophy and Principles

Innovation platforms are made up of various actors who communicate, cooperate and share tasks to carry out activities needed for innovation to take place.

There are a few principles that are important:

- Diverse composition of stakeholders.
- Address a shared problem or opportunity, not the agenda of one or two members only.
- Facilitation by a neutral person/organisation with convening authority.
- Initial success motivates the members to commit to the platform.
- Change resulting from the innovation should benefit multiple members.
- Exchange and learning should remain central.
- Platform members must show respect to each other despite of diverging opinions and knowledge.
- Systems for ensuring transparency and accountability must be in place.

Platforms can exist at multiple levels. Local platforms, for example, tend to address specific problems or opportunities such as improving the efficiency of a specific value chain. Local platforms are well placed to test new ideas and generate action on the ground. Platforms at national or regional levels often set the agenda for agricultural development, and allow stakeholders, including farmers through their representatives, to influence policies. Linking platforms at different levels offer several benefits such as: sharing successful ideas, empowering local actors to influence policy, fostering dialogue in policy making, developing value chains, and increasing legitimacy and learning.



Implementation

How to implement an innovation platforms is as diverse as the platforms themselves. However as a guidance it can be simplified into the following steps:

1. Ask yourself: is an innovation platform the best tool?
2. Look at what is already in place
3. Identify potential platform members
4. Jointly develop an action plan
5. Define roles and responsibilities
6. Keep partners engaged
7. Revisit, and e-plan((
8. Plan for the long term

Capacities Required of Providers and Participants

A key factor of success for innovation platform is that of good facilitation. The facilitator (sometimes called “innovation broker”) needs to have some degree of neutrality. The facilitator can be an individual or an organisation; from either a research organisation, an NGO, an advisory service provider, a farmer. S/he should be knowledgeable of the concerned topic or theme addressed, and should have convening power to bring stakeholders together. The facilitator also needs to have the right attitude: being patient and culturally sensitive, open-minded, and empathic.

Potential Impact

Innovation platforms will not lead to immediate and direct impact as such, as their contribution is supporting people to talk to each other and to act togeth-



er towards putting new ideas and solutions into practice. Often, the benefits from working with innovation platforms are found else-where than originally planned, because of their dynamic nature. The main potential of innovation platforms is to achieve changes in the behaviour of the platform members, which has the potential of achieving large tangible impacts in the long term. Innovation platforms are not an appropriate mechanism to disseminate new technologies or practices at scale.

This is an abbreviated version of the Global Good Practice Note 1: Innovation Platforms. The full version looks more in detail at many of the above mentioned points as well as contains additional information on governance, cost, strength and challenges of innovation platforms. Pointers to further reading and training materials are included too. In 2014 tow additional Good Practice Notes were published on “Farmer Field Schools” and “Mobile Agri-Finance”.

There is plenty of information available in the public domain that covers various aspects of extension and know-how about new methodologies for implementation. However this information is often scattered and presented in complex academic language. Hence practitioners, who often have very limited time and/or may only have basic formal education, find it difficult to make use of this information.

The Global Good Practices Initiative aims to bridge this gap by providing information about extension approaches and methods in easy-to-understand formats. As part of this effort, it makes “Good Practice Notes” available to all on the website www.betterextension.org. More Notes are under development.



Founding year	2013
Members	35
Contact	David Dolly University of the West Indies Faculty of Food and Agriculture University of the West Indies, Saint Augustine, Trinidad and Tobago Phone +1 (868) 662 2002 external 3206 caepnet@gmail.com farmdavid42@gmail.com



“It was truly encouraging to see the interest and motivation which core members are beginning to develop. For instance some members thought of branding CAEPNet through a polo shirt with the new logo we had agreed upon. This demonstrated that members are becoming proud of their association with the organisation. Consequently as CAEPNet expands there will be a noticeable cohesion among those who are already part of the network. Core members also felt the need to promote the network among a wider cross section of the extension fraternity in the Caribbean. We therefore eagerly await a face-to-face meeting which will once more (as was initially done) bring members together to discuss strategies and design tools which would ensure that the network expands accordingly.”

David Dolly, University of the West Indies, Trinidad and Tobago

Events in 2014

- At the Caribbean Food Crops Society (CFCS) conference, a presentation was made at the farmers’ forum by members of the organisation highlighting what CAEPNet is all about
- Caribbean Week of Agriculture held, Suriname, 6-12 October 2014
- Agrihack Talents Caribbean initiative, Jamaica, 22-23 July 2014
- Draft Diploma Proposal in Extension completed to be presented to the University of the West Indies
- Through its active membership networking the organisation has contributed in facilitating ease of coordination of a study tour to Guyana for final year students from the University of the West Indies

Founding year	2013
Members	25 organisations
Contact	Edgars Linde European Forum for Farm and Rural Advisory Services Rigas street 34, Ozolnieki, Ozolnieki Parish, Ozolnieki County, 3018 Latvia Phone +371 63050220 edgars.linde@llkc.lv



EUROPEAN FORUM FOR
AGRICULTURAL AND RURAL
ADVISORY SERVICES



“The year 2014 was the first year of action for EUFRAS when the association had to position and represent itself internationally. Since the foundation the number of EUFRAS members has doubled. Currently there are 25 member organisations represented who form a network of organisations with an influence directly or indirectly on an estimated 15,000 advisers. The great emphases in the year 2014 were put on the establishment of new thematic networks and multi-actor projects as well as on participation in EU-Commission working groups. Now EUFRAS acts as a partner both directly and indirectly in several EU-Horizon 2020 as well as other project calls and keeps looking forward to further initiatives.”

Edgars Linde, Board member of EUFRAS, Latvian Rural Advisory and Training Centre

Events in 2014:

- 1st EUFRAS Meeting, Terme Tuhelj, Croatia, 18 June 2014 – 52 participants
- International Workshop “Agricultural and rural advisory services in Europe: Best practice experiences”; Terme Tuhelj, Croatia, 19 June 2014 – 52 participants
- International conference “Advisory service networking promotion towards Eastern Europe for Agriculture and Rural Development”, Jūrmala, Latvia, 14-16 September 14-16, 2014 – 39 participants

■ PIRAS – Pacific Islands Rural Advisory Services Network

Founding year	2005
Members/participants	All 22 Pacific island member countries of Secretariat of the Pacific Community
Contact	Gibson Susumu Land Resources Division Secretariat of the Pacific Community SPC Private Mail Bag, FIJI Phone +679 3370 733 Fax +679 3370 021 Gibsons@spc.int www.spc.int



“In most Pacific Island Countries and Territories (PICTs), agricultural advisory services (AAS) have been given low priority despite the increasing demands for effective and coordinated AAS. As a consequence, limited budgets and staff are allocated to extension services. On average ratio, 1 extension officer serves 10,000 farmers with budget allocations representing less than 0.5 % of the national budget in most countries. These challenges are compounded by limited institutional and human capacity, absence of favourable policies and climate change impacts. In some countries, many farmer groups and farmers associations have been formed to achieve economies of scale to access demand driven AAS. However there is still weak coordination among both public and private service providers to meet these diverse demands.”

*Gibson Susumu, Food Security Technical Officer/
Interim PIRAS Contact Point*

The Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC) is a regional intergovernmental organisation owned by the 22 PICTs. SPC provides policy and technical advice to its member countries in order to enable them to make informed decision about their future development and well-being. In 2005, SPC convened the first ever Pacific Extension Summit in the Kingdom of Tonga which resulted in the formation of the Pacific Islands Extension Network (PIEN), now called Pacific Islands Rural Advisory Services (PIRAS). The Heads of Agriculture and Forestry Services (HOAFS) and Ministers of Agriculture and Forestry (MOAF) of the 22 PICTs endorsed and supported the establishment of PIRAS. The ulti-

mate purpose of PIRAS is to provide a platform for networking, professional development and representation of members. A second Extension Summit held in Fiji in 2009 recommended strengthening PIRAS through a “corporate governance’ model and greater accountability to the membership through a board structure with representation from the three Sub-Regional Groups (Melanesian, Polynesian and Micronesian) and SPC.

The Land Resources Division (LRD) of SPC is serving as the Secretariat for PIRAS however with funding constraints has dragged its operations. As the Secretariat for PIRAS and with support from various development partners (such as USAID, Australian Government, New Zealand Government, European Union and others), the SPC LRD has been supporting its member countries to strengthen extension services through capacity building and policy advocacy. SPC also promotes Participatory Rural Approach (PRA) to assess climate change vulnerability of Pacific Island communities. In 2014, SPC conducted PRA training in 6 Pacific Island Countries (PICS) including, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, Fiji, Samoa, Tonga and Kiribati. The PRA focused on a set of participatory tools to assess climate change vulnerability of the 15 rural communities in the participating countries. These trainings were targeted to Ministry of Agriculture Extension Research Officers who were then further the training in 15 communities. Over 20 Extension and Research Officers participated in these trainings and over 200 community members benefited from these trainings. Using PRA was well accepted by both extension officers as an approach to empower communities to study and analyse their circumstances, identify the problems, and prepare, implement and monitor the plans. In addition, various farmer field schools have been supported to provide a platform for farmers and service providers for networking and information and knowledge exchange.

Founding year	2010
Members	17 countries
Registered Members	416
Contact	RELASER c/o Rimisp – Centro Latinoamericano para el Desarrollo Rural, Oficina Central, Huelén 10, Piso 6, Providencia, Santiago, Chile Phone +56-22-364557 secretariared@relaser.org www.relaser.org



“The Latin American Network for Rural Extension Services (RELASER) started in 2010 to address a common challenge in the region, to reposition the role of extension in the context of innovation. Along the way, many people and institutions have joined the initiative, seeking to share and learn from different experiences. Based on these partnerships, RELASER has been able to generate several products and initiatives such as: studies, policy briefs, regional discussions, meetings, thematic groups, country forums and a capacity building course. The role of RELASER country forums, aimed at influencing public policies, are highlighted because they encourage the governance and institutions of each country to promote actions towards strengthening extension. In this sense we see a renaissance of extension in Latin America.

After 5 years of existence of the network, we find that RELASER has established itself as the regional mechanism for debate and discussion of the ‘new’ rural extension systems that aim at general rural transformation for welfare. However, the task is just beginning. RELASER has a number of challenges and tasks ahead. Our conviction in our mission and the trust in our allies will remain as the motor of the work.”

Luján Mongelos, Co-Chair of RELASER, Project Manager / Federation of Production Cooperatives of Paraguay – FECOPROD

Publications in 2014

- Strategies of institutional reforms and investments in Technology Transfer Extension Systems (SETTA) and in Central America and the Dominican Republic, FAO, Panama 2014
- Policy Brief SETTA Costa Rica, FAO, 2014
- Policy Brief SETTA Dominican Republic, FAO, 2014
- Policy Brief SETTA Panama, FAO, 2014

- Policy Brief SETTA Nicaragua, FAO, 2014
- Policy Brief SETTA Honduras, FAO, 2014
- Policy Brief SETTA Guatemala, FAO, 2014
- Policy Brief SETTA El Salvador , FAO, 2014

These publications are the result of a joint effort of FAO, Interamerican Development Bank (IADB), and RELASER. SETTA is the Spanish abbreviation for Extension and Technology Transfer System.

■ Reforming the Extension Systems in Latin America

In 2013 and 2014, the Inter-American Development Bank IADB, the United Nation’s Food and Agriculture Organisation FAO, and the Latin American Network for Rural Advisory Services RELASER undertook a study into the extension and technology transfer system (SETTA in Spanish) reforms in Latin America over the past 15 to 20 years. The aim was to provide better policy and investment recommendations.

The study focused on 14 countries: Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Panama, the Dominican Republic, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Chile, Paraguay, Uruguay, and Argentina. These countries represent a great diversity of programmes, experiences, and partnerships. The study comprised a variety of extension services and models in the countries, long term public and national systems, and newer models of public-private-partnerships in extension delivery.

In addition to the three lead partners, ministries of agriculture and rural development, international partners (IICA, GIZ), civil society, and academic institutions from the region participated in the study. The analysis drew from the framework and indicators developed by the International Reference Group for Extension Evaluation and the Guide to Evaluation of Rural Extension of GFRAS.

Three key variables were examined: the relevance, effectiveness, and sustainability of SETTAs.

Relevance

Programmes with greater emphasis on social inclusion, pro-poor, rural innovation, markets, and rural territorial development have developed in the region, moving SETTAs from vertical, exclusive technical-productive themes to broader and more participatory roles with positive impacts. Especially programmes with a gender focus or with participatory approaches produce valuable results and lessons. On the other side, lags in incorporating innovation as a central approach in SETTAs leads to less response for smaller producers and their demands to the market.

Effectiveness

Coverage ranges from 100 to 831 farmers per extensionist in public services and between 42 and 642 small producers per extensionist in private sector programmes. The costs per farmer vary from 44 USD to a high of 2,400 USD per year. Differences are based on the use of individual versus group methods and on varying operational costs between countries. The width and depth of participatory extension methodologies is increasing throughout the region and more social scientists and natural resource specialists complement the existing teams of agronomy and veterinary scientists.

Sustainability

There is a great mix of public and private extension providers: local municipalities, NGOs, and universities. Each has different funding sources, which potentially creates more stability across country systems. In many countries co-financing schemes have been introduced to increase small farmer ownership in the outcomes and to allow for increased coverage. But still, most SETTAs have unstable year-by-year funding and insufficient operational support. The lack of indicators of extension performance is a critical gap – what cannot be measured cannot be monitored or evaluated.

Policy and Investment Recommendations

These and other findings lead to the following recommendations:

- Longer time frames for production-related activities and even longer for territorial, organisational, marketing, and natural resource/climate change adaptation are needed for sustainable SETTA actions.
- Rural development policies should integrate all the relevant social and economic actors, demanding greater inter-institutional cooperation in rural development.
- It is important to recognise that rural extension services are just one instrument in agrarian development policies but should be explicitly named to ensure greater outreach to small farmers.
- Investing more for reaching female producers, an increased number of female extensionists, male extensionists with better gender training, more female extension leaders, and better designed programmes and monitoring of programmes will all lead to more equal SETTAs and more productive small farms and rural communities.
- The use of ICTs must go beyond the pilot stages. Cooperation with telecommunication providers can lead to wider access to technology resources and produce more sustainable models.

This is an abbreviated version of the preliminary findings of the study. The final report will be published in 2015.

■ RESCAR-AOC – Réseau des Services de Conseil Agricole et Rural des Pays Francophones d’Afrique de l’Ouest et du Centre

Founding year	2011
Members	22 countries, 243 individuals
Contact	Patrice Djamen Nana Interim Executive Secretary 7, Av Bourguiba – BP 48 Dakar, CP 18 523, Senegal Phone +221 78 152 88 85/+226 75 55 66 96 p.djamen@gmail.com, djamenana@yahoo.fr



A diagnosis study was conducted on the transformation, challenges, and prospects of agricultural and rural advisory services in West and Central Africa (WCA). The objective of this study was to generate updated and further knowledge necessary for the development and implementation of relevant strategic operations for the mobilisation of the full potential of RAS. The results were used to refine the vision and mission of RESCAR-AOC and draft its strategic framework. The governance system and operational manual were elaborated. All these planning, institutional and operational documents were validated in a workshop in early 2015 to provide RESCAR with adequate tools to fully play its role of supporting the transformation of the agricultural and rural sector in WCA.

In this context special attention was given to the Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) in WCA. Focused consultations together with the Technical Centre for Agricultural and Rural Cooperation (CTA) identified five key actions in this area:

- Conducting a review of past and ongoing experiences on the utilization of ICTs in RAS;
- Developing a regional agricultural extension policy;
- Identifying and piloting pathways/policy for the institutionalisation of the use of ICTs in agriculture;
- Training of top managers of agricultural extension officers on the potential and pathway to better mobilize ICTs in RAS and;
- Fostering the scaling of the utilisation of ICT tools.

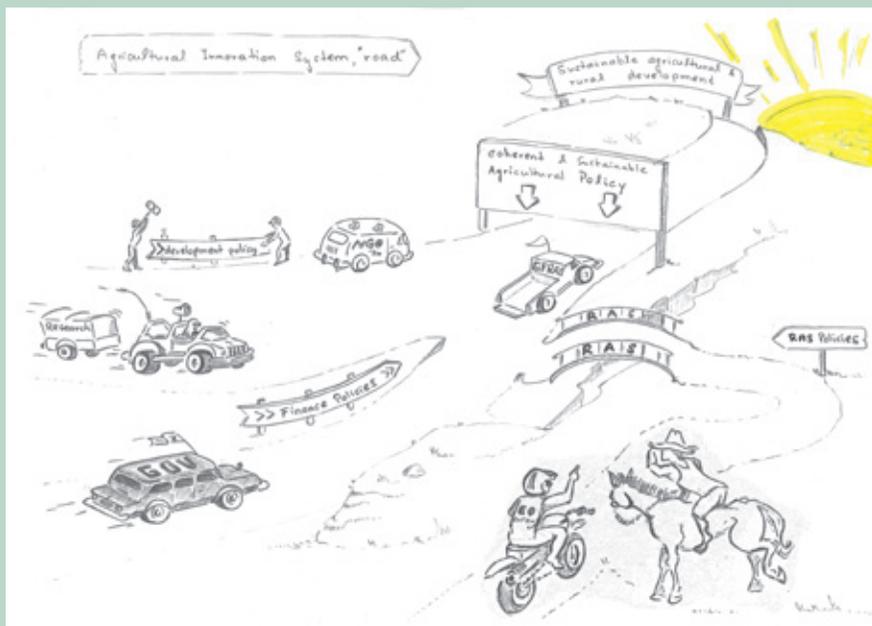
Patrice Djamen, Coordinator RESCAR-AOC, Burkina Faso

The third function of GFRAS is to strengthen actors and fora in RAS through facilitating interaction and networking. The main activity in this area is the GFRAS Annual Meeting.

5th GFRAS Annual Meeting 2014: RAS Policies – Evidence and Practice

The 5th GFRAS Annual Meeting was held from 23-25 September 2014 in Buenos Aires, Argentina. It was co-hosted by the National Agricultural Technology Institute of Argentina (INTA) and the Latin America Network for Rural Extension (RELASER). 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.

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 with CTA, 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 participatory and coordinated development of clear extension policies, including quality assur-



ance mechanisms. In reaction to this, 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

Conclusions: A Road Analogy

- A good and clearly signalled road with adequate services alongside is needed to reach the common travel destination: Inclusive, context-related and evidence-based RAS policies help guide actions and decisions of RAS providers, RAS clientele, and donors. They regulate the agricultural innovation system and coordinate between sectors, topics, and institutions, and thus help to avoid gaps between the institutional level and the field.
- The road has to be open for everyone with a fair highway code that applies to all travellers, and road users must have a say in where and how roads are constructed: In order to be effective and useful for RAS providers and RAS clientele, RAS policies need to be anchored in the national government, be free from political populism, and choose a holistic, multidisciplinary and participatory approach. They need to integrate the context and all concerned stakeholders, including their psychology and profile.
- The road building has to take into account the given topographic situation and the needs and interests of the adjacent residents: Evidence helps to make sure that RAS policies are systematic, rational, free from ideology, and serve a common interest. Evidence also makes it easier to assess the impact of policies.
- Land surveys and the resulting construction plans have to be publicly available: Evidence for RAS policies needs to be based on common research guidelines and be of the best quality, accuracy, and objectivity. It should be credible and rely on a strong and clear line of arguments. It must also be easily accessible and understandable by the ones using it.
- Travellers and tax payers should take part in the planning and the in-kind services that are provided alongside the road: RAS providers and clientele can influence policy processes. Strategic, long-term alliances, and regular presence in policy processes are important. Similarly, the way, how, when, and to whom evidence and experiences from the field are communicated are important.

- The road building takes place in a bigger setting of transport policy, financial constraints, and international relations: There are external factors which shape and influence the scope of action that have to be considered and accepted. These include the political economy, the political and economic stability of the region, the relation between government/politicians and other people, national capacities in the policy formulation process, existing information and knowledge management, and so forth.

In addition to the thematic section, the participants of the meeting discussed the role of partnerships for strengthening networks and hosted various side events. The full report of the event can be found at www.g-fras.org/.



“The GFRAS Annual Meeting in Buenos Aires was a wonderful platform through which various stakeholders in RAS (such as farmers, practitioners of agricultural extension, the private sector, policy makers, and researchers) were able to communicate and discuss over a variety of important issues regarding rural advisory services. It was a veritable feast for the mind as it provided people of different backgrounds an opportunity to contend, to debate, and to collaborate. I personally enjoy the learning experience that a) many countries share great similarities in policy failure; and b) nearly every successful experience is embedded with local contextualities. Thus, there is no ‘best designed’ mode for RAS.”

*Xiangping Jia, China
Professor in agricultural economics,
Northwest Agriculture & Forest University, China*

Where is GFRAS heading in 2015 and beyond?

To achieve its mission and vision, GFRAS will give emphasis in 2015-2016 to evidence sharing through the global good practices initiative, and capacity strengthening through the Policy Working Group, Evaluation Initiative, and the Consortium on Extension Education and Training. As 2015 marks the full fifth year of GFRAS, the forum will also renew its strategic framework.

Global Good Practices Initiative – for Better Extension

The Global Good Practices Initiative aims to provide information about extension approaches and methods in easy-to-understand, standardised formats. The initiative was started with a planning grant from Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. In 2014 GIZ provided funds to pilot some good practices examples: Farmer field schools, innovation platforms (see page 14), and mobile-based bundled services.

In 2015, potential topics include:

- When and how to use ICTs in RAS
- Using RAS to deliver nutrition messages
- Role of producer organisations in RAS
- Extension paradigms and approaches
- Increasing the role of women extension agents

Policy Compendium and Working Group Activities

As a result of a survey in 2013 regarding the needs of RAS for policy, the “Policy Compendium” was launched in collaboration with Modernising Extension and Advisory Services MEAS. The first articles were discussed at a side event of the 5th GFRAS Annual Meeting in Argentina. Articles will continue to be developed. In addition, the policy working group will initiate and/or support regional and national policy dialogues in collaboration with partners. They will also work with the Consortium on Extension Education and Training to conduct training for policy advocacy at regional and national level.

The “New Extensionist” and Consortium on Extension Education and Training

The “New Extensionist” position paper clarifies roles, actors, and modes of working of extension and advisory services at the individual, organisational, and system level, focusing on the capacities needed to play an effective role in agricultural innovation systems. In 2015 the Consortium will work on learning materials to introduce the New Extensionist and related core competencies.



Evaluation Initiative – Outcomes of Extension Reform

In 2015 the evaluation team will complete an evaluation of Brazil's extension reforms. GFRAS, FAO, RELASER, MEAS, and other partners will develop learning materials for regional and national level actors to conduct evaluations and assessments, and trainings will commence.

Renewal of GFRAS Strategic Framework (2016-2020)

GFRAS has completed its first five years of operation. The GFRAS steering committee has mandated the secretariat to lead the process to renew the 5-year strategic framework in 2015. In the past five years, the external environment in which GFRAS acts, as well as its stakeholders and their needs have evolved. This process coincides with the end of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and global dialogue on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Thus the time is ripe to review, rethink, and potentially adapt the strategic framework for the coming five years. The elaboration and consultation process for the new strategic framework was taken up in November 2014 and will run through December 2015, with the validation of the new framework in September 2015 at the 6th GFRAS Annual Meeting in Kyrgyzstan.



“The Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) has a special interest in the Consortium’s activities. The reason is that SDC would like to invest more in agricultural technical and vocational education and training (ATVET) to help to professionalise agriculture and rural advisory services. The world’s farming population is getting older, lacking well-educated and skilled young professionals to replace their parents on the farms and to increase productivity and income for their young families. Agriculture worldwide will undergo massive structural change and highly motivated well-skilled young farmers are urgently needed. That is why SDC is now launching a study on ATVET and is supporting in several countries such as Laos and Honduras.”

*Felix Fellmann, GFRAS Steering Committee Member and
Focal Point for Global Programme Food Security SDC, Switzerland*

Social Media and Website

As GFRAS is a global platform, much of the experience and knowledge sharing takes place using social media and on the internet. The following statistics demonstrate the usefulness of those online tools.

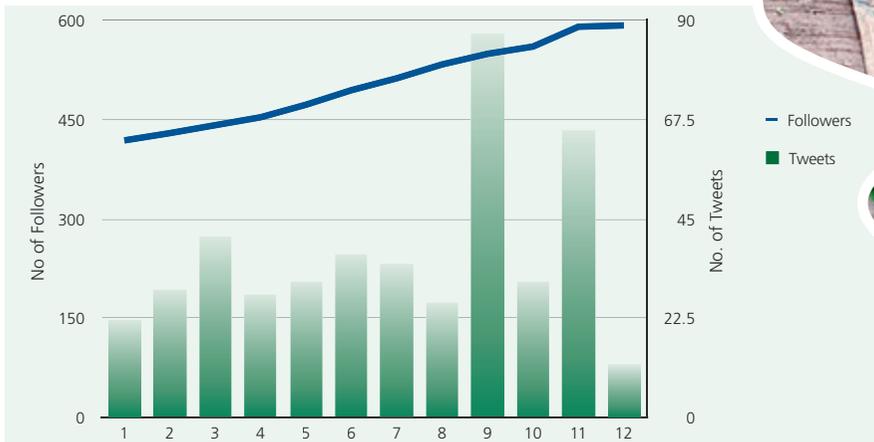
GFRAS Webpage Statistics in 2014 by Month

The green bar shows how many visits the GFRAS webpage received in the respective month, while the blue line indicates how many webpages those visitors requested. On average each visitor watched seven pages during his/her visit.



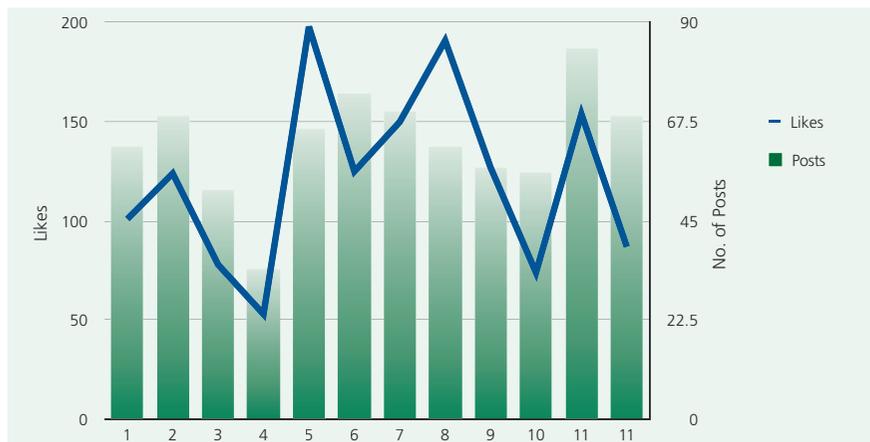
Tweets and Followers in 2014 by Month @infogfras

The green bars show how many tweets came from GFRAS, including retweets. The blue line shows the number of people that follow GFRAS on Twitter (@infogfras).



Facebook Likes and Posts in 2014 by Month

The GFRAS Facebook Community is steadily growing. To date, the GFRAS Facebook Group comprises 1,972 total members with 595 active members (members who have contributed with content).



The five most popular downloaded documents on www.g-fras.org (2011-2014)

Guide to Evaluating Rural Extension (2012)	4,600
The New Extensionist Position Paper (2012)	2,600
Rural Advisory Services Worldwide: A Synthesis of Actors and Issues (2011)	2,100
Brief No. 1: Five Key Areas for Mobilising the Potential of Rural Advisory Services (2011)	2,100
Review of Literature on Evaluation Methods Relevant to Extension	1,900

The five most requested pages on www.g-fras.org (2011-2014)

GFRAS Directory of Extension Providers	250,000
GFRAS Directory of Extension Education and Training	118,000
Chile (country portrait within the World Wide Extension Study)	60,000
Country Forum of Madagascar Founded	48,000
Iran (country portrait within the World Wide Extension Study)	42,000

Financial Report

GFRAS was supported in 2014 by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), and the Global Forum for Agricultural Research (GFAR) with funding from the European Union (EU). Table 1 shows the income in 2014 by contributor.

Table 1. Financial contributions realised in 2014

Contributor	Amount in USD
SDC	558 586
USAID	467 254
EU/FGFAR	64 189
Rollover from 2013	- 17 117
Total	1 072 912

Because the contributions are not necessarily in sync with the calendar year, the financial contributions in Table 1 do not always reflect the total contracts with funders. Rather, the table shows the actual income in 2013. Also, some 2013 expenses will be accounted for in 2014 due to the funding cycle.

Table 2. Expenditures in 2014

Line Item	Amount in USD
Staff time	296 190
Meetings, conferences and events	154 262
Support to regional networks	31 499
Consultants and special projects	309 874
Travel	34 920
Publications, web site and communications	13 055
Management fees and overhead	171 202
Total	1 011 002
Net profit/loss	61 910

Unspent contributions were returned or rolled over into 2015.

Audit

The GFRAS accounting is integrated in the accounting of its host AGRIDEA and as such is submitted to a yearly audit. Further contributions are audited on request by some donors. The audit in 2014 was done by the Financial Administration of the Canton of Wallis, Switzerland. As the final audit report wasn't available at the printing date of this publication, the table with 2014 expenditures will be placed on the GFRAS website at www.g-fras.org when the report is released.

GFRAS Publications in 2014

Dhamankar, M. and M. Wongtschowski. 2014. *Farmer field schools (FFS)*. Note 2. GFRAS Good Practice Notes for Extension and Advisory Services. Lindau, Switzerland: Global Forum for Rural Advisory Services (GFRAS).

GFRAS. 2015. *Producer organisations in rural advisory services: Evidence and experiences*. Position Paper. Lindau, Switzerland: Global Forum for Rural Advisory Services (GFRAS).

Kakooza, C. 2014. *Mobile-based “bundled” services: Example of Agri-Fin Mobile*. Note 3. GFRAS Good Practice Notes for Extension and Advisory Services. Lindau, Switzerland: Global Forum for Rural Advisory Services (GFRAS).

Posthumus, H. and M. Wongtschowski. 2014. *Innovation platforms*. Note 1. GFRAS Good Practice Notes for Extension and Advisory Services. Lindau, Switzerland: Global Forum for Rural Advisory Services (GFRAS).

Online Products

Extension Policy Compendium

The GFRAS Policy Compendium is a tool that contributes to fill the gap between the RAS policy environment and RAS efforts in the field. It provides easily accessible and understandable resources for those working on and advocating for an enabling policy environment for RAS.

See <http://www.g-fras.org/en/policy-compendium.html>

Conferences and Meetings

Regional Conference on Rural Advisory Services (RAS) in Central Asia and the Caucasus, 17-21 November 2014, Kyrgyzstan

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

IFAD Farmers’ Forum, 21 February 2014, Italy

Linkages and Representation

Access Agriculture

www.accessagriculture.org

African Forum for Agricultural Advisory Services, AFAAS

www.afaas-africa.org

Association for International Agriculture and Extension Education, AIAEE

www.aiaee.org

Global Donor Platform for Rural Development, GDRD

www.donorplatform.org

Global Forum on Agricultural Research, GFAR

www.egfar.org

Regional Universities' Forum, RUFORUM

www.ruforum.org



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