

The Global Forum for Rural Advisory Services

The first five years 2010–2015



GFRAS vision statement

Our vision in the first five years 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.

Functions

GFRAS has three functions:

1. **Providing a voice** for advisory services within global policy dialogues and promoting improved investment in rural advisory services;
2. Supporting the development and synthesis of **evidence-based approaches and policies** for improving the effectiveness of rural advisory services; and
3. **Strengthening actors and fora** in rural advisory services through facilitating interaction and networking.

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Introduction

In these times of increasingly complex environmental and economic challenges, rural advisory services – often shorthanded as RAS – are more critical than ever to reducing poverty, improving the livelihoods of rural actors, addressing food security, and meeting other global challenges, while ensuring

that farmers' needs are at the centre of rural development. Although this has increased the visibility of RAS in global development fora, until recently there was no platform to provide RAS stakeholders a say in decisions that could affect their lives deeply. Now in its fifth year, the Global Forum for Rural Advisory Services

(GFRAS) ensures that advocates and practitioners of rural advisory services – wherever they are – have a voice in global development dialogues.

Rural advisory service providers work with rural people, helping them to develop the skills and knowledge they

need to improve their livelihoods and wellbeing. RAS facilitate interactions among farmers and the private sector, research institutes, education centres, and government. They help farmers to improve their market access, deal with changing climates, and protect the environment.

The modern practice of offering RAS – also known as agricultural extension – is credited to 19th Century Britain, where the government, joined by universities and learning societies, sent lecturers around the country to tell poor farmers how to improve their production. However, official clay tablets with advice on how to water crops and get rid of rats have been found dating back to ancient Mesopotamia – echoed by findings from Imperial China and elsewhere – implying that governments have promoted the agricultural education of rural people for millennia.

Today, when more than 2.5 billion people in developing countries derive their livelihoods from agriculture, RAS can help rural farmers find practical solutions to the challenges that make it so difficult for them to find their way out of poverty. Yet a major emphasis by governments and donors on agricultural research in recent decades – spurred by growing demands for sustainable intensification – coupled with criticism of traditionally public extension services, have tended to

move RAS out of the government arena. Thus many developing countries have chosen to reduce funding for extension, leading to the establishment of alternative advisory services operated by agribusiness companies, non-government organisations (NGOs), producer associations, and others.

The emergence of so many new actors in RAS has mainly been a positive development, as has the transition from an extension paradigm based on technology transfer to one based on uptake, participation, and empowerment. Nevertheless, RAS have continued to be under-resourced while their contributions to rural knowledge, skills, and incomes receives less recognition than they deserve: analyses of the rates of return of RAS to agricultural research and development hover around 85%, according to research by the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI). As the last century drew to a close, the growing economic, social, and environmental hurdles faced by farmers called for a radical rethinking of extension approaches. At that time, there was little capacity to ensure that RAS could reach and assist large numbers of poor farmers and livestock producers, including women and young people. Nor did agricultural extension have a coherent and credible voice in global policy dialogues on agriculture and development.

Initiated in 1995, the Neuchâtel Initiative was prompted by donor concerns that their agricultural extension programmes lacked coordination and were sometimes based on conflicting philosophies, which confused staff and clients alike and tended to create competition among programmes. The Neuchâtel group – mostly donor representatives – met informally for more than a decade, over time developing joint guidelines for RAS and agreeing to collaborate and share experiences. In 2005, the group began to involve the African Forum for Agricultural Advisory Services (AFAAS) and some African regional farmer organisations in their discussions. Opening the group to additional stakeholders shone a light on the need for a voice for RAS in global policy dialogues, a major gap at the time. The Global Forum for Rural Advisory Services was launched by the Neuchâtel Initiative in 2010 to provide that voice. GFRAS also supports the development, exchange, and diffusion of tried and tested extension approaches and policies and stimulates institutional and individual capacity development. From the start, GFRAS focused on the role that RAS could play in helping rural actors to improve their livelihoods, increase productivity, and strengthen their position in value chains.



GFRAS: The first five years (2010–2015)

The fifth anniversary of GFRAS provides an opportunity to celebrate the past as well as look to the future. With that in mind, we offer you this snapshot of our accomplishments over the past half-decade and a taste of what lies ahead for us as the international community defines the global sustainable development agenda that will succeed the Millennium Development Goals in 2015.

GFRAS derives its power and its purpose from the RAS community, which includes a wide range of public, private, and civil society actors. With the support of this community, we have helped to establish

and nurture 12 regional RAS networks as well as sub-regional networks and national extension platforms in 35 countries. Notable achievements have included a number of thought pieces on topics such as extension evaluation, the 'New Extensionist,' gender, policy, education, and the role of producer organisations in RAS. These papers, which are paving the way to the future of extension, draw on needs identified by the RAS members, usually in the context of the annual GFRAS meetings. In each case, the papers, developed with the RAS community, have been handed over to the

regional networks and country platforms, which are using them to tailor guidelines and training materials for their own constituents.

GFRAS is a network and a platform, open to members (organisations) and affiliates (individuals) with an interest in strengthening rural advisory services. GFRAS is guided by a steering committee drawn from the RAS networks and international development institutions, including donors. The Swiss Association for the Development of Agriculture and Rural Areas (AGRIDEA) hosts the GFRAS secretariat in Lindau, Switzerland.



Laying the groundwork

During its first 18 months, GFRAS concentrated on setting up the organisation, establishing its identity, and building relationships. The development of a strategy, roadmap, and activity plan drew on extensive discussions with stakeholders as well as on studies of issues and actors in RAS around the world. The GFRAS Long-term Strategic Framework (2010–2016) identified two stakeholder groups: the rural advisory service community working directly on RAS and international development institutions involved in rural development. The Strategy prioritised specific target organisations within these groups: RAS networks in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, the Global Forum on Agricultural Research (GFAR, including the CGIAR Consortium), the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), and the World Bank. GFRAS proposed to achieve its vision – a world where rural advisory services effectively contribute to the sustainable reduction of hunger and poverty – by:

- ▶ providing a voice within global policy dialogues and promoting improved investment in RAS;
- ▶ supporting the development and synthesis of evidence-based

“GFRAS started its work on evaluation early because there was a strong need to identify and document the value of rural advisory services in order to fulfil its advocacy function. It was also important for learning from good and bad experiences. The work on evaluation has met obstacles in understanding how evaluation can be done credibly and the purposes it can serve. In the future, GFRAS must strengthen its efforts to build stakeholder capacity to develop and implement relevant monitoring and learning systems, manage and conduct credible evaluations, and use evaluation for management as well as investment decisions.”

*Sanne Chipeta, Senior International Advisor,
Green Development Advice, Denmark*

- approaches and policies for improving the effectiveness of RAS; and
- ▶ strengthening actors and fora in RAS by facilitating interactions and networking.

Concrete activities got underway while GFRAS was setting up shop. At its 1st Annual Meeting in Chile in 2010, two new extension networks were established for Latin America and the Asia-Pacific region. The meeting – attended by 90 participants from 30 countries – validated the GFRAS strategy and raised the need for guidance in conducting rigorous and comprehensive extension evaluations. Participants called for the establishment of GFRAS working groups on the role of rural advisory services, extension evaluation, and

capacity strengthening. Since that time, GFRAS has developed methodologies and indicators for evaluating extension reforms. A major output in this area has been the *Guide to Evaluating Rural Extension*, a tool that helps RAS actors to gather evidence on the impact of extension services and learn how to improve them (see Box 1). GFRAS has been particularly interested in learning about the effects of reforms in agricultural extension over the past 15 to 20 years to understand whether these efforts have been successful.

In 2011, GFRAS brought together people, organisations, and networks at the 2nd Annual Meeting in Nairobi to exchange experiences and further define our work on networking, evaluation,

Box 1. Guide to Evaluating Rural Extension



Monitoring and evaluation validate the outcomes and impacts of RAS. This is how we learn from our experiences. Evaluation also ensures that RAS providers are accountable to their clients – the farmers – and to the governments, farmer organisations, and other funders that pay for the services. GFRAS recognised the importance of collecting and sharing extension lessons very early on. To start, GFRAS reviewed extension evaluation methods and case studies, concluding that current approaches are not contributing enough to learning and capacity development, two of evaluation's key objectives. The studies also revealed a strong need for guidance in the selection of evaluation approaches to suit complex circumstances. The *Guide to Evaluating Rural Extension* was produced in 2011 following extensive consultation with stakeholders. It offers a range of ideas

and approaches that extension evaluators can use to conduct thorough, reliable, and appropriate evaluations. Above all, the Guide emphasises that evaluations should be useful. This means getting the right people – the people that will have to act on the evaluation findings – involved in their design. Extension evaluation needs to take into account the whole range of stakeholders that provide information, knowledge, and counsel to farmers in rural production systems. It must recognise that extension today involves a wide array of interests – aid agencies, agriculture and environment ministries, NGOs, farmers' organisations, and the private sector – advising farmers about appropriate technologies, market access, and services such as credit, insurance, and public subsidy programmes.

The *Guide to Evaluating Rural Extension* promotes approaches to evaluations that emphasise the relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, and impact of RAS. While there is no single approach that meets all circumstances, at a minimum effective evaluations will obey five key principles:

- In choosing an evaluation approach, RAS providers and stakeholders should work together to identify the best fit with their context and organisational culture.

- Evaluations should recognise the pluralistic nature of extension systems, which involve a range of actors providing services to different target groups.
- Evaluations should ensure that extension services meet the demands and needs of the RAS clients.
- Evaluations should assess the extent to which extension activities have built the capacity of clients to meet their agricultural needs and challenges.
- Evaluations should judge whether extension interventions are sustainable.

The Guide concludes with the observation that the most effective extension evaluations are based on an analysis of user priorities and needs. Being open to the various perspectives of stakeholders helps to ensure an evaluation process that is credible and evaluation results that will be used to improve extension performance.

The Guide can be downloaded from the GFRAS website at <http://www.g-fras.org/en/knowledge/gfras-publications/file/78-guide-to-extension-evaluation.html>.

advocacy, and capacity development. In particular, participants emphasised the important role that GFRAS should play in representing RAS interests at relevant high-level meetings. The Nairobi meeting was held in conjunction with an international conference on innovations in extension and advisory services, a topic close to the hearts of RAS practitioners. An important output of the innovation conference, which attracted 400 participants from 75 countries, was the Nairobi Declaration. Recognising the indispensable role that extension can play in strengthening smallholder capacities in dynamic innovation systems, participants

called on GFRAS and partners to promote capacity development and learning, taking culture and gender into account, with the goal of helping millions of smallholder farmers to move up the value chain. The Nairobi Declaration can be downloaded from the GFRAS website at: <http://www.g-fras.org/en/knowledge/file/65-nairobi-declaration-agricultural-extension-and-advisory-services.html>.

A new RAS network was established for South Asia. GFRAS support for RAS networking opened the door for the establishment of country fora, which provide the space to discuss and promote

new approaches, innovations, and best-fit practices in advisory services at the national level. In 2011 alone, seven new country fora were established under the umbrella of AFAAS. The networks and country fora are seen as providing an opportunity to change and improve rural circumstances by influencing behaviour and promoting exchanges among producers, extension providers, educators, and researchers. Nonetheless, the challenges are well recognised; these include the need for strong leadership and credibility, fundraising, visibility, and clear objectives.



Advocacy and innovation



In 2012, a global electronic survey began the conversation on extending RAS capacity development as called for in the Nairobi Declaration. The conclusion: extension continues to have a crucial role to play in rural settings but, as agricultural systems evolve to meet social and environmental challenges and the changing needs of producers and consumers, RAS will have to adopt new strategies and develop new capacities. The results of the survey were discussed and refined at the 3rd GRAS Annual Meeting in the Philippines and the topic – dubbed the ‘New Extensionist’ – was presented at the Global Conference on Agricultural Research for Development (GCARD) in Uruguay (see Box 2).

An historic advocacy opportunity for GFRAS was the 2012 United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, also known as Rio+20. The conference, which marked the 20th anniversary of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development and the 10th anniversary of the World Summit on Sustainable Development, brought together world leaders, the private sector, NGOs, and others to debate how to reduce poverty while protecting the environment and promoting social equity on an increasingly crowded planet. Shaping the future we want – the goal of the Rio+20 conference

Stakeholders have started to appreciate the role of RAS as an enabler of innovation processes rather than merely an agency for technology delivery. The New Extensionist concept articulates such a role for RAS and the ensuing need to develop new capacities among RAS providers. The Consortium on Extension Education and Training is taking the New Extensionist forward by developing learning materials on core functional competencies at the individual level.

Rasheed Sulaiman V, Director, Centre for Research on Innovation and Science Policy, India

– means putting farmers’ needs at the centre of rural development and our task at Rio was to talk about the need for extension services that focus on local solutions, embrace a range of participatory approaches, develop capacity, and have long-term institutional support. The G20 countries identified improving extension as a key practical action for advancing agricultural productivity, especially on small family farms. As G20 President in 2012, Mexico invited GFRAS to help strengthen the links between research and advisory services and to ensure that RAS receive due attention in policy debates at the G20 Meeting of Agricultural Chief Scientists in Guadalajara late in 2012.

Understanding the status of extension services worldwide – including who is involved and the types of services they offer – is a necessary first step in assessing

gaps in the RAS offered to small-scale farmers. In 2012, GFRAS, together with FAO, IFPRI, the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA), and the US Agency for International Development (USAID), published a global study of agricultural extension advisory services, including information on service providers, target groups, the allocation of human and financial resources, the use of communication technologies, and performance assessment. The global study – the first in 20 years and the most extensive extension survey to date – also contains contact information and profiles of regional, sub-regional, and country extension and advisory services. It is available as a searchable, interactive database at www.g-fras.org/worldwide_extension_study, where it joins the GFRAS Roster of Extension Experts and the GFRAS Directory of Extension Providers.

Box 2. The New Extensionist

Today's agriculture confronts major challenges – food security, climate change, environmental sustainability, and uncertain markets – that require RAS to provide a wider range of services than ever before. At the same time, extension has increasingly been taken up by actors from the private sector, civil society, and farmer associations. Traditionally seen as production facilitators, extensionists are now called upon to support processes within agricultural innovation systems. The innovation systems view focuses on interactions among multiple agricultural actors and the institutions and policies that influence them. As such, extensionists need to work with farmers to find suitable and sustainable solutions to the challenges they face. RAS providers may need to develop networks, organise producers, facilitate access to credit and productive resources, convene innovation platforms, teach nutrition and health, promote gender equality, and disseminate knowledge through training and demonstrations.

The New Extensionist calls for the reinvention of RAS within this new rural context. It recognises that the wide range of skills needed for agricultural innovation and the growing number of actors involved necessitates building new capacities at the individual, organisational,

and system levels. The development of the New Extensionist approach involved expert interventions, an online survey, and electronic and face-to-face discussions. A position paper on the topic was reviewed at the 2nd meeting of the GCARD in 2012. An activity of the Global Forum on Agricultural Research, GCARD brings together the people and organisations with the power to shape the future of farming. GCARD promotes effective partnerships and investments in agricultural research that meet the needs of poor farmers. Reflecting inputs from these high-level interactions, the New Extensionist provides the roadmap for GFRAS' priority actions in RAS going forward.

At the individual level, extension staff need technical knowledge and the functional skills to manage social processes. At the organisational level, extension services need the capacities and systems to manage human and financial resources; the mechanisms to facilitate partnerships and learning; and the procedures to deal with institutional, legal, and regulatory issues. At the system level, capacities are needed for collaboration, learning, and adaptation. All three levels require the means to ensure equal access to services by women, young people, and other vulnerable groups and the opportunities

to apply information and communications technologies to enhance the performance of RAS. In its position paper on the New Extensionist, GFRAS proposed a number of recommendations – at all levels – for improving RAS through diagnosis and reforms, partnerships and networks, institutional development, training, financing, and policy advocacy. In 2013, GFRAS established a Consortium for Extension Education and Training for actors in the field of extension; this is discussed in detail below.

The New Extensionist position paper can be downloaded from the GFRAS website at <http://www.g-fras.org/en/activities/the-new-extensionist>.





The regional networks

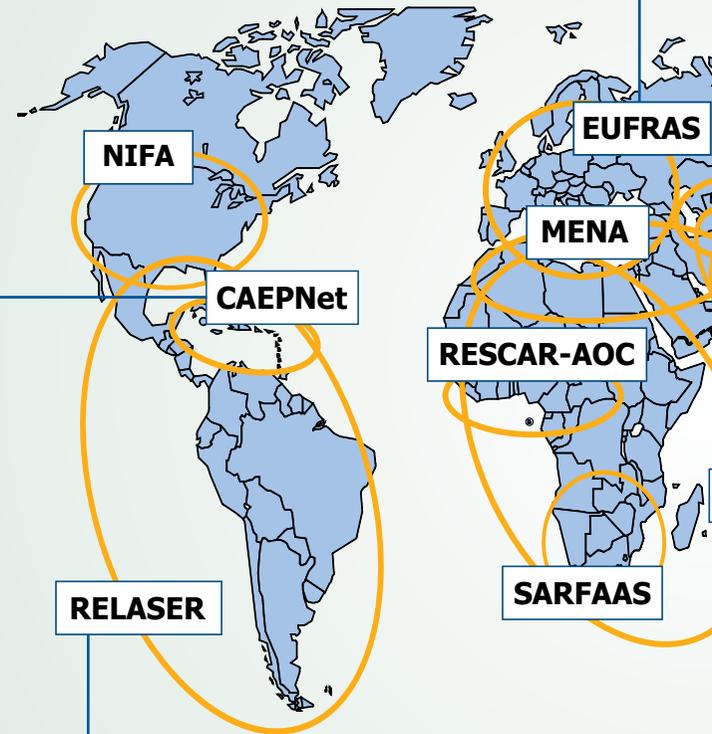
The regional RAS networks are GFRAS' most important members. They play an active role in promoting our principles on user demand and accountability, pluralism and partnership, harmonisation, subsidiarity, information, alignment, and a focus on results. The regional networks monitor and evaluate our activities in the regions and support the establishment of sub-regional networks and national fora. In return, GFRAS provides support for network building and organisational development. Importantly, GFRAS also serves as a voice for the networks at the global level through its working groups, annual meetings, and other events.

CAEPNet – The Caribbean Agricultural Extension Providers Network – was launched in 2013. With 35 members, CAEPNet is currently concentrating on raising the profile of the network and attracting the participation of additional extension leaders across the region.

GFRAS has strengthened the conviction of the founding members of The West and Central Africa Network of Agricultural and Rural Advisory Services (RESCAR-AOC) in the value of networking and increased synergism in Central and West Africa in order to overcome challenges facing RAS in the sub-region. Backstopping provided by GFRAS has enabled RESCAR-AOC to become a key actor in the implementation of sub-regional agricultural policies on sustainable development.

Patrice Djamen, Coordinator, The West and Central Network Africa Network of Agricultural and Rural Advisory Services (RESCAR-AOC)

The European Forum for Farm and Rural Advisory Services (EUFRAS), established in 2013, has 35 member organisations representing 15,000 extension service providers across Europe. EUFRAS emphasises the establishment of thematic networks and multi-actor projects as well as participation in EU-Commission working groups.



The Latin American Network on Rural Extension Services (RELASER), which dates to 2010, includes 17 countries and over 400 registered members. From 2013 to 2014, RELASER carried out a study with FAO and the Inter-American Development Bank on extension reforms in 14 countries in Latin America. The study resulted in a number of recommendations concerning the relevance, effectiveness, and sustainability of the reforms.

Dating to 2011, **Agricultural Extension in South Asia (AESA)** has focused on the use of social media to reach its constituents. In a relatively short time it has amassed an astonishing 11,300 followers on its Facebook site. The network produces regular blogs and meeting notes on extension topics and provides daily updates on training, conferences, new publications, and news related to RAS. AESA also makes available extensive resources on RAS practices, including those related to gender.

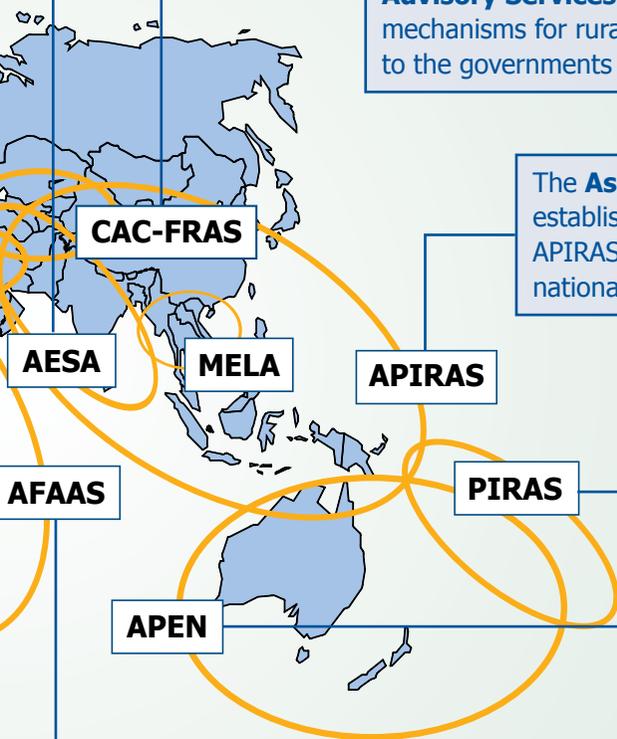
Established in 2014, the **Central Asia and the Caucasus Forum for Regional Advisory Services (CAC-FRAS)** is studying various models for policies and support mechanisms for rural advisory service systems to inform eventual recommendations to the governments in the region.

The **Asia-Pacific Islands Rural Advisory Services Network (APIRAS)**, established in 2010, today comprises 25 institutions and 36 individual members. APIRAS is exploring the possibilities for funding the establishment of up to three national RAS fora in the region.

The **Pacific Islands Rural Advisory Services Network (PIRAS)**, established in 2005, includes all 22 Pacific Island and member countries of the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC). PIRAS is working with the SPC to train communities throughout the region to assess and respond to climate change vulnerability.

The **Australasia-Pacific Extension Network – APEN** – has been active in extension since 1993. APEN is a professional organisation for extension providers and comprises about 500 people involved in community and rural development, adult education, communication, and other related fields across the region.

Established in 2004, **The African Forum for Agricultural Advisory Services (AFAAS)** operates under the umbrella of the Comprehensive African Agricultural Productivity Programme (CAADP). AFAAS includes 36 countries and 23 country fora. The network collaborates with the World Farmers' Organisation and has produced a communications strategy and a virtual networking platform. In 2010, AFAAS helped to launch a sub-regional network, **The West and Central Africa Network of Agricultural and Rural Advisory Services (RESCAR-AOC)**.





A focus on best-fit practices

In 2013, GFRAS established the Consortium for Extension Education and Training, a global professional network. The Consortium grew out of stakeholder discussions on how to empower universities and training institutions to champion the New Extensionist principles. The Consortium uses the New Extensionist framework to analyse current gaps in extension training, with an eye towards identifying new approaches and curricula for students and mid-career professionals. The goal of the Consortium is to create a generation

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To promote dialogue and learning on how extension service providers can effectively overcome gender barriers, we must dare to use gender transformative approaches and to ascertain whether this leads to improved livelihoods for rural families and communities.

Andrea Bohn, Associate Director, Integrating Gender and Nutrition within Agricultural Extension Services, United States of America

of extension professionals who can respond to new demands for RAS, a challenging proposition at a time when enrolment in extension programmes is

shrinking and programmes struggle to stay current on issues such as climate change, productivity, and gender equality. The Consortium advocates needs-

based RAS training through regional network and country forum activities, scientific conferences, and joint research projects and publications. It develops and promotes norms and standards for extension training that facilitate innovative agricultural systems and enlists mentors and role models to stimulate the interest of young people in agricultural extension careers. The Consortium is spearheading the development of an Extension Education and Training Directory, an ongoing project that contains up to date information about RAS training opportunities.

An interesting study – conducted jointly with the World Bank’s Secure Nutrition Knowledge Platform – looked at how RAS can contribute to better nutrition among smallholder families by advocating the production and consumption of the foods needed for healthy and active lives. The study, which examined links between nutrition and agricultural extension in Africa, South Asia, Latin America, and the Caribbean, found that the effectiveness – and even the existence – of such links are not well documented. It appears that countries vary in the extent to which nutrition education and RAS are integrated. This variation often relates to the type of organisation involved in a country’s RAS, with public and private sector services and NGOs often having markedly different objectives for their extension activities. The study

identified some of the challenges involved in getting extension agents more invested in promoting nutrition; these include knowledge and capacity. Another significant gap is the common disconnect between the two sectors – agriculture and nutrition – that are most concerned with food and food consumption. Tackling undernutrition – a major scourge in poor countries and a barrier to overcoming poverty – requires validating the role that agriculture can play in improving nutritional status. GFRAS’ work on the New Extensionist emphasises using RAS to facilitate physical and economic access to adequate, affordable, and nutritious food. The study – *The Integration of Nutrition within Extension and Advisory Services (EAS)* – can be downloaded from the GFRAS website at: <http://www.g-fras.org/en/knowledge/gfras-publications/file/160-nutrition-report.html>

Increasing the access of women and other disadvantaged groups to RAS ensures that they can equally benefit from economic opportunities in the agricultural sector. A lack of results in this area led GFRAS to establish a working group on gender equality and RAS in 2013. The working group brings together gender experts from national and international organisations to identify key research needs related to gender and RAS; provide policy guidance and advocacy; and help the regional networks and country fora

apply a gender lens to the development of their own activities (see Box 3).

In 2013, the GFRAS steering committee asked for a mid-term review to assess the continued relevance of our strategic directions and our effectiveness in meeting the needs of stakeholders (see Box 4).

2013 saw the establishment of regional networks for the Caribbean (CAEPNet – Caribbean Agricultural Extension Providers Network) and Europe (EUFRAS – European Forum for Farm and Rural Advisory Services). The GFRAS Annual Meeting for that year – held in Berlin, Germany – gathered stakeholders from all over the world, including governmental and non-governmental organisations, development agencies, private enterprises, farmers’ groups, and producers’ organisations, to discuss the role that private enterprise and producer organisations play in rural advisory services. As a follow up to the meeting, GFRAS held a series of online dialogues on this topic in 2014, which culminated in a position paper, *Producer Organisations in Rural Advisory Services: Evidence and Experiences* (see Box 5).

Thanks to the efforts of RAS organisations around the world, a great deal of valuable information is already available about effective extension services, yet it is often given a highly technical gloss and is thus not suited to the needs and time constraints of most practitioners.

Box 3. Gender equality in rural advisory services

The role of women in agriculture is important all over the world, but particularly so in developing countries, where they comprise about 44% of the agricultural labour force. Women are most often responsible for household food security and, as men increasingly migrate to the cities in search of better opportunities, are also shouldering traditional male tasks such as land preparation and the production of cash crops.

It has been estimated that if women had equal access to productive resources they could raise farm yields by 20 to 30%, reducing the number of undernourished people in the world by up to 17%. Yet, women's access to agricultural services, credit, inputs, and technologies is highly constrained. Women work harder for lower wages and on smaller farms than do men. They are much less likely to purchase inputs like fertilisers and improved seeds. They have weaker property rights and are rarely represented in the leadership of farmers' organisations. Many barriers that women face in agriculture today are due to the fact that RAS are often biased towards



men. Agricultural development policies have tended to assume that farmers are male, designing their extension services accordingly. The result is that RAS may not respond to – or even reach – women farmers.

The GFRAS gender equality working group includes researchers, educators, development specialists, and RAS practitioners with expertise in gender equality and extension. The group is strongly linked to many existing national and international initiatives tasked with strengthening the empowerment of women in agriculture. Its purpose is to help women participate and benefit more equally from RAS.

GFRAS strongly believes that RAS can deepen the knowledge, skills, and innovative capacity of women, increase their participation in rural organisations, and strengthen their property rights and land tenure security. Access by women to extension services that address nutrition can help to improve the nutritional status of families. A GFRAS brief produced in 2014 explains the concept of gender equality in RAS and describes the opportunities that such equality can create for food production, women's economic empowerment, household food security, and nutrition. The paper draws on experiences of applying gender equality in RAS and provides some practical guidelines.

Gender Equality in Rural Advisory Services can be downloaded from the GFRAS website at: <http://www.g-fras.org/en/knowledge/gfras-publications/file/179-gender-equality-in-rural-advisory-services.html>.

Box 4. How are we doing?

The 2013 mid-term review of GFRAS considered whether the organisation's vision, activities, and functions continue to be relevant and evaluated our governance, sustainability, and impact. While the review panel found that GFRAS has been very successful in shining a light on RAS, there is an ongoing need for RAS advocacy, particularly directed to international development institutions, which tend to pay significantly more attention to research. The panel noted that RAS are often seen – even by the extension community itself – as a dissemination mechanism for research rather than as means for offering demand-driven services in support of local

development. The review cited GFRAS' work on the New Extensionist as having the potential to change such perspectives over time.

The review recognised the importance of the regional RAS networks and the role that GFRAS has played in establishing and supporting them. Over time, it will be important for the networks to become more self-sufficient; however in the short term, GFRAS will need to continue to help build network capacity, including by providing financial support, promoting cross-regional links, and encouraging networks to engage with the full range of extension stakeholders.

The review report concludes: "We strongly believe GFRAS is here to stay. It has helped to put rural advisory services back on the agenda. This is not to say its work is without challenges, and there remains a lot of work to be done: at international level, in convincing international development institutions; at regional level, in supporting debate around how to train a new generation of extension service providers and their organisations, and in gathering the support of local governments for this process. This is a long process, and one that GFRAS is well positioned to lead."

Box 5. Producer organisations in rural advisory services

Once the exclusive province of the public sector, extension services now involve researchers, NGOs, and the private sector, the latter attracted by the growing commercialisation of small-scale agriculture. Producer organisations, which help farmers to access inputs, like seeds and fertilisers, as well as information about production, marketing, and finance, have grown in number and scope, as has the role they play in agricultural innovation. Such organisations are remarkably diverse. They include cooperatives, farm business advisors, and public–private partnerships. Producer organisations have different objectives, activities, scales of operation, and degrees of influence. The challenge is to ensure that they can play the most effective role in supporting improved livelihoods and poverty reduction, given the increased complexity and multi-disciplinarity of today's agricultural systems.

In 2013, RAS stakeholders met in Berlin to talk about the challenges of producer organisations in supporting RAS. These discussions fed into electronic dialogues, a literature review, and consultations with producer organisations in Antigua and

Barbuda, India, and Indonesia. Some initial conclusions were presented at a meeting of the Farmers' Forum in Rome in early 2014 as part of GFRAS' contribution to the International Year of Family Farming.

A rich and comprehensive position paper, *Producer Organisations in Rural Advisory Services: Evidence and Experiences*, was the outcome of these interactions. The paper describes the advantages that producer organisations have in meeting farmers' demands for RAS: they understand their clients' circumstances and they are known and trusted, which gives them a great deal of legitimacy. As a result, they are able to readily respond to farmers' needs, proposing solutions that are likely to be accepted.

To play an effective role in RAS, producer organisations must be sustainable in terms of governance and management. This requires investments in capacity strengthening and financial sustainability and in strengthening monitoring and evaluation. Producer organisations also need to develop new ways of communicating and fostering participatory

learning by farmers. Partnerships with other agricultural actors are key as is the inclusion of people – women, very poor farmers, and young people – that are often overlooked by extension. It will be important to continue raising awareness of the value of such services by producer organisations and to ensure that policies are in place to support them. A critical action will be to reflect environmental concerns in the design of all activities.

Producer Organisations in Rural Advisory Services: Evidence and Experiences can be downloaded from the GFRAS website at: <http://www.g-fras.org/en/activities/producer-organisations-in-ras.html>.



GFRAS launched The Global Good Practices Initiative in 2014 to provide information about extension approaches and methods in an easy-to-understand, standardised format. The initiative was started with a planning grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. In 2014, the German Federal Enterprise for International Cooperation (GIZ) provided significant funds for good practice notes on farmer field schools, innovation platforms, and mobile-based bundled services. A web platform has been established for sharing the notes and taking up comments and requests for new notes. In 2015, up to 20 notes on various topics, including information and communications technologies, gender, nutrition, and farmer-to-farmer and community-based extension will be published. An advisory committee of GFRAS affiliates guides the process and the selection, preparation, and quality control of the notes.

GFRAS' interest in policy dates back to the 2011 Nairobi Declaration, which called on RAS stakeholders – governments, extension professionals, farmer organisations, civil society, and the private sector – to develop clear policies and strategies for extension and advisory services in a participatory manner and to put coordination and quality assurance mechanisms in place. RAS policies relate to complex processes and should be influenced and shaped by all stakeholders.



The potential for producer organisations to transform RAS deserves our close attention. GFRAS can help us to move forward on this path by supporting efforts to better understand the concerns and interests of producers.

Lani Eugenia, Secretary General, Indonesian Women Farmers and Rural Women Organization (Puantani), Indonesia

A policy working group was established by GFRAS in 2012 to harmonise activities on policy-making for RAS, advocate for better inclusion of RAS in policies that affect rural people, and provide guidance and information for advocates to use for influencing policy. At its first meeting, the working group identified its priorities to include engaging training institutions to align their curricula with policy thinking about extension, and strengthening the capacities of actors to formulate extension policy. Responding to stakeholder demands, the group partnered with MEAS (Modernizing Extension and Advisory Services, a USAID-backed consortium based at the University of Illinois, USA) to develop a policy compendium providing knowledge and guidance for decision-making and the implementation of successful policies for RAS. The compendium links to the GFRAS Consortium on Extension Education and Training as well as to policy dialogues at regional and national levels. It both contributes

to and benefits from advocacy training and policy dialogues: results from these activities feed back into the compendium, enriching it with up-to-date data for practitioners.

The 2014 GFRAS Annual Meeting took place in Buenos Aires, Argentina, concentrating on RAS policies. The purpose of the meeting was to come to consensus on desirable objectives for RAS policies and their impacts on extension. Participants recognised the importance of RAS impact evidence for influencing policy as well as the need to engage in global and regional partnerships with policy-makers, donors, and other actors in agricultural innovation systems. They concluded that RAS policies should be anchored in national governments and – to the extent possible – should be multidisciplinary and apolitical. Going forward, the policy working group intends to support regional and national policy dialogues in collaboration with partners.



The road ahead

The GFRAS steering committee has requested the secretariat to lead the renewal of the 5-year strategic framework during 2015. The renewal is timely: over the past five years, there have been many changes in the external environment around development and the needs of GFRAS stakeholders have changed substantially. The 2012 Rio+20 Conference launched the process to negotiate a post-2015 development agenda: a United Nations-led effort to define a global development framework to replace the Millennium Development Goals, which expire in 2015. The new targets – known as Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) – aim to end poverty and hunger while advancing social equity, improving health and education, and ensuring environmental protection.

GFRAS has worked hard to ensure that extension is mentioned in the proposed SDG 2 on ending hunger, achieving food security and adequate nutrition, and



In 2010, GFRAS set out to give a voice to the hundreds of thousands of extension professionals whose mission is to help rural people better their lives. Today, thanks to the regional and sub-regional networks and national platforms we have stimulated and supported, the views of extension workers are being heard for the first time.

Kristin Davis, Executive Secretary, GFRAS Secretariat, Switzerland

promoting sustainable agriculture. We are also collaborating in the development of indicators on access to knowledge and extension in the context of the SDGs. The SDGs will very much drive GFRAS' priorities in future as it strives to help countries meet their obligations to implement the post-2015 development agenda. In particular, GFRAS will prioritise capacity development for extension by focusing on three areas of work. The first area concerns the professionalisation of RAS individuals, organisations, and systems based on New Extensionist principles. Work in this area will include developing a clear understanding of the core competencies needed by

extension professionals and providing guidance on learning materials to be produced by stakeholders. In this area, we will also strengthen organisational capacity of regional, sub-regional, and national platforms for RAS. Secondly, we will continue to support and improve facilitation and enhancement of effective and continuous information and knowledge flows. Finally, we will provide advocacy and backstopping for an enabling policy environment and appropriate investment in RAS. GFRAS will act at the individual, organisational, and system levels, in this way ensuring that rural advisory services can fully contribute to sustainable development.

Finances 2010–2015

The GFRAS Secretariat received USD 6.34 million during the first five years from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF), the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), and the European Union (EU) through the Global Forum on Agricultural Research (GFAR).

These contributions were spent according to the three main functions of GFRAS as well as in general areas, as follows:

Function 1 “Providing a voice within global policy dialogues and promoting improved investment in RAS” (includes travel, meetings, and

activities to provide voice for RAS at the global level (e.g. Rio+20, Global Conference on Agricultural Research for Development).

Function 2 “Supporting the development and synthesis of evidence-based approaches and policies for improving the effectiveness of RAS” (includes travel, meetings, and activities to provide evidence on RAS (e.g. working groups on policy and gender, *Guide to Evaluating Rural Extension*, Global Good Practice Initiative).

Function 3 “Strengthening actors and fora in RAS through facilitating interaction and networking” (includes travel, meetings, activities to strengthen

RAS actors (e.g. GFRAS annual meeting, support to regional networks).

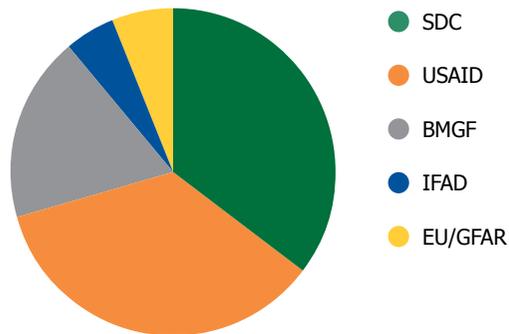
Steering committee (includes limited travel and venue costs for twice-yearly governance meetings).

General administration and management (includes software, management meetings, management advice, and communication).

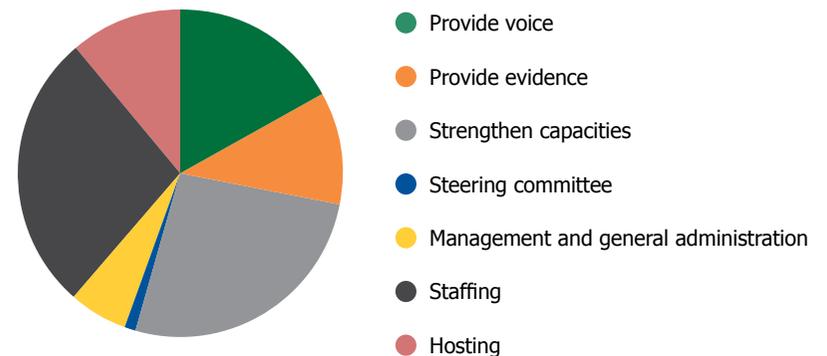
Staffing support to all activities (includes full or part-time salaries of secretariat and temporary staff).

Hosting (includes office space, financial administration, IT, and basic secretariat support).

Income



Expenditures



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