



global forum for rural advisory services
forum mondial pour le conseil rural
foro global para los servicios de asesoría rural



Capacity Assessment of Regional Networks

Summary of the the Synthesis Report

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LR Brand, Inc.

The Global Forum for Rural Advisory Services (GFRAS) is about enhancing the performance of advisory services so that they can better serve farm families and rural producers, thus contributing to improved livelihoods in rural areas and the sustainable reduction of hunger and poverty. Rural advisory services help to empower farmers and better integrate them in systems of agricultural innovation.

The GFRAS structure reaches smallholder farmers via the regional rural advisory services networks, which are made up of national-level platforms. The national platforms, so-called country fora, include actors from all sectors working in rural advisory services, and work directly with smallholders. National platforms help prioritise national-level issues and formulate demands to be taken to the regional and global levels. © GFRAS, 2017

Correct citation

Lamm K. and Lamm A., LR Brand (2017). GFRAS Capacity Assessment of Regional Networks. GFRAS: Lausanne, Switzerland.

Note

The findings associated with this report are strictly for informational purposes. The aim of the assessment was to establish a measure of capacity at a specific moment in time, with no criticism or appraisal implied. Nevertheless, the results are intended to provide a basis for discussion and action within and between networks. Additional details are available in the comprehensive technical report or individual network reports.

DESIGN and LAYOUT
PolyCrea

COVER
CGIAR Climate Change

August 2017



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Acknowledgements

This capacity assessment process was commissioned by the Global Forum for Rural Advisory Services (GFRAS) and undertaken with financial support from the Technical Centre for Agricultural and Rural Cooperation (CTA), Deutsche Gesellschaft für internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH, and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC).



Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft
Confédération suisse
Confederazione Svizzera
Confederaziun svizra

Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation SDC



Additionally, the consulting team would like to recognise the following people, whose support and assistance made this data collection possible.

The GFRAS Steering Committee, particularly the Chair Rasheed Sulaiman

The GFRAS Secretariat: Karim Hussein, Natalie Ernst, Lorenz Schwarz, and Filippo Buzzini

The Network Champions:

Mr. Francisco Aguirre
Prof. Tunji Arokoyo
Dr. Patrice Djamen
Dr. David Dolly
Mr. Paul Fatch
Dr. Wayne Ganpat
Mr. Richard Githaiga
Ms. Beatrice Luzobe
Dr. Charles Masango
Max Olupot
Dr. Norma Samuel
Mr. Gibson Susumu

Contents

Acknowledgements	II
Preface by the GFRAS chair	IV
1. Participation in the Capacity Assessment	1
2. Capacity assessment process	2
3. Cornerstones of the process	3
4. Key findings	3
Overall report	3
General	5
Organisational and institutional functioning	5
Advocacy	6
Professionalisation of RAS	6
Knowledge management	7
ICT use	7
5. Open ended feedback	8
Top 5 strengths	8
Top 5 weaknesses	8
Top 5 ways to improve	9
Top 5 additional insights	9
6. Value of the capacity assessment process to participants	10
7. Annex A. Definition of terms	11
8. Annex B. Assessment detail data	13

Preface by the GFRAS chair

The Steering Committee of the Global Forum for Rural Advisory Services (GFRAS) is pleased to see the outputs of this lengthy process, involving many actors and champions worldwide. As regional networks and the country fora are the key pillars of GFRAS, strengthening their capacities is a priority. They ensure that ideas, tools and activities developed on a global level are translated to regional and national contexts and thus implemented at the ground level. They also help ensure that global activities focus on the right priorities for rural advisory services (RAS) on the ground. We are pleased to see that despite often limited human and financial resources, the networks seem to have an impact in their respective regions and beyond; and that there seems to be a need, as well as a demand, for these RAS networks worldwide.

GFRAS sincerely thanks all champions who work toward strengthened, professionalised and better recognised RAS worldwide, and whose contributions to the functioning of the national, regional and global networks are invaluable. GFRAS will continue to support and nurture these champions and will seek ways to further enhance their roles.

GFRAS will make an effort to ensure that results of the assessments are discussed and used, so that they help prioritise future activities and support. Furthermore, GFRAS itself will also use the results of the assessment and the discussions arising therefrom to support the regional networks in a more targeted way. We hope to therewith support the regional networks in becoming self-sustaining, autonomous and independent key actors within the agricultural innovations systems in their regions and in gaining recognition by policy makers and investors. GFRAS will also encourage and support networks to use their strengths and opportunities, especially in terms of ICTs and advocacy, so as to address some of the challenges encountered.

Based on the results of the assessments, GFRAS will place particular focus on finding ways and opportunities to improve funding for the networks as well as to strengthen the professionalisation capacity of the regional networks. We will strive to become a role model for regional networks in areas where capacities seem to be weakest. Greater emphasis will also be laid on activities related to monitoring,

evaluation, and learning, and to ensure that activities and learnings of the networks are well documented and made accessible to a wide range of actors.

We will continue to make an effort to encourage and facilitate peer exchanges between the networks – virtually and face-to-face – so as to increase learning amongst the different networks, both the more mature and the newer ones. This will help in taking GFRAS to the next level, being a thriving and vibrant network and forum relevant to both RAS actors on the ground as well as to those in the international development and agriculture community.

We hope that the insights of this summary report, the full technical report available online, as well as the reports from the different networks (which are available upon request), will pave the way for regional networks and country fora to develop innovative, creative and effective ways to progress and grow, and thus contribute towards strengthening and improving the role of RAS for sustainable development in their regions.

We also trust that partners and donors will gain insights into the existing strengths and challenges of networks, and consider them for future support.

We would like to thank everyone who has been involved in the process so far, particularly also LR Brand who has done a great job in supporting the networks in undertaking the assessments and putting together the reports, including this summary.

We look forward to continuing this journey and working towards strengthened RAS networks worldwide.

August 2017

Rasheed Sulaiman V



GFRAS Chair

1. Participation in the Capacity Assessment

A total of 56 countries were represented in the participatory capacity assessment process. Countries that were involved in the process are highlighted in orange in the map below. A total of four regional

networks, one sub-regional network, and four country fora participated in the capacity assessment, the assessed networks are highlighted in the map.



There were 185 capacity assessors that participated. Assessors represented both network Secretariat and Country Fora representatives as well as Board

members. Both male and female assessors were represented in the process.

Secretariat- 122 Total

Board- 63 Total

Gender

72%

28%



Male
88



Female
34

66%

34%



Male
42



Female
21

2. Capacity assessment process

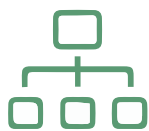
The capacity assessment was conducted in two main stages. First, a Delphi process (see Annex A) was conducted to identify the specific capacities that should be assessed within the RAS context. Second, an assessment of the participating networks was conducted.

The Delphi process was participatory and included 31 individuals from the GFRAS network and all constituent regional networks. Two instruments emerged from the

Delphi process: an assessment of perceived capacity and an assessment of objective capacity. An objective capacity assessment and a perceived capacity assessment were created for the five main areas of interest: Organisation and Institutional Functioning, Advocacy, Professionalisation of RAS, Knowledge Management and Information and Communication Technology Use. A sixth area, General, emerged that included overlapping capacities from the five originally included.



General



Org functioning



Advocacy



Professionalisation
of RAS



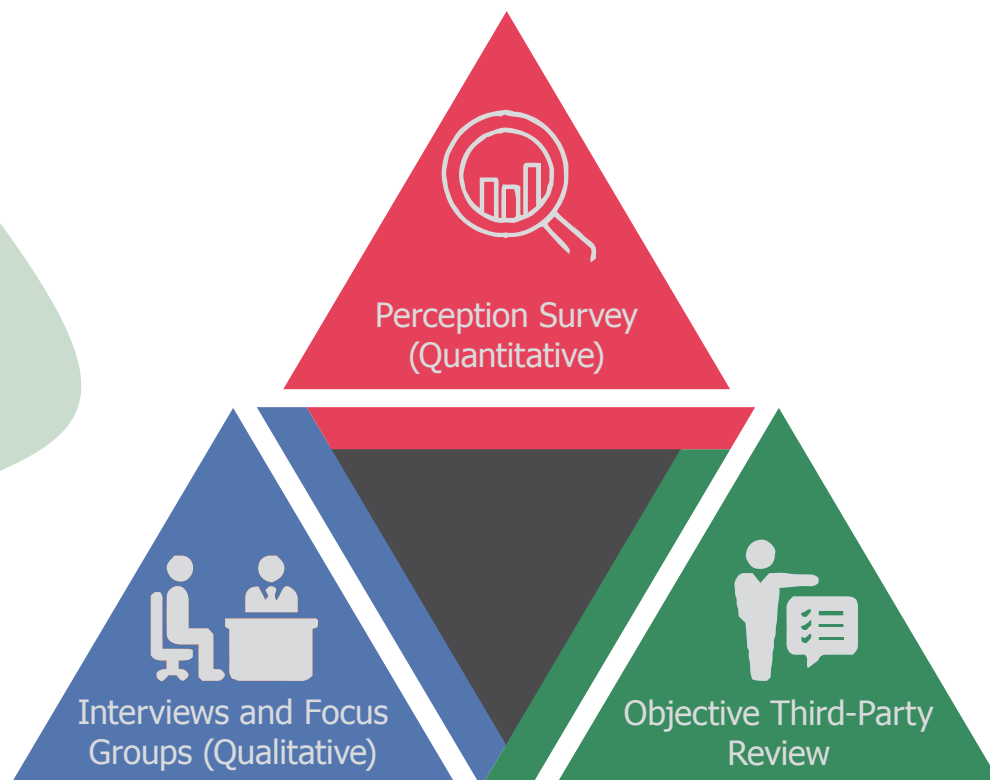
KM



ICT use

The capacity assessment included three main data collection methods: quantitative data collection, qualitative data collection, and an objective third-

party review. The approach allowed for triangulation of data and a more comprehensive assessment process.



3. Cornerstones of the process

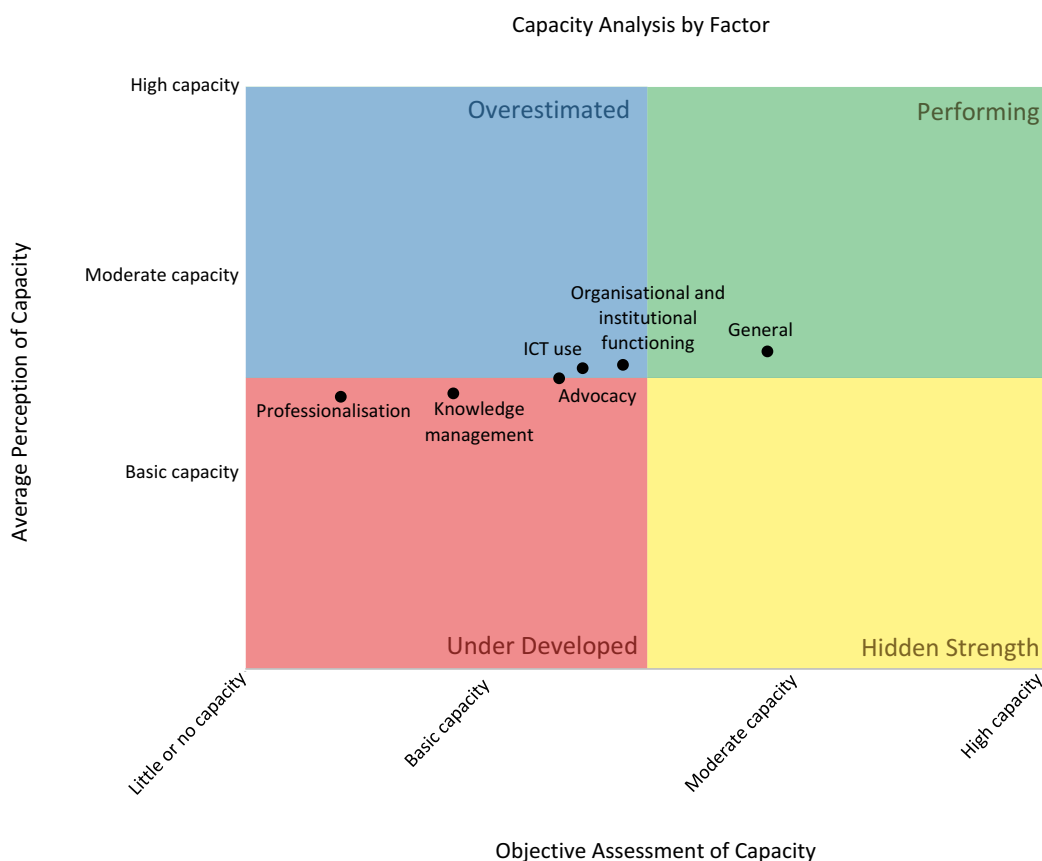
- The capacity assessment process was participatory from the inception, so the results and insights are directly attributable to the efforts of those members who participated.
- The entire GFRAS team, including all network champions, Secretariat members, country forum focal points, Board members, experts, and other key personnel should be commended for their support for and participation in this process.
- The consistent approach taken supports the seamless integration of results across multiple networks and geographies.
- Data were interpreted in a logical and replicable manner so that trends observed are verifiable from both primary, quantitative sources such as Likert-type questionnaires; and secondary, qualitative sources such as key informant interviews, focus groups, and thematic analysis of open-ended questions.
- The process was completed with a high level of attention to methodological rigour, including reliability and validity checks as well as data triangulation (quantitative, qualitative, and objective data analyses).
- The capacity assessment process was valuable to participating networks and helped provide network insights, supported conversations with funding agencies, and identified areas for increased focus and development.

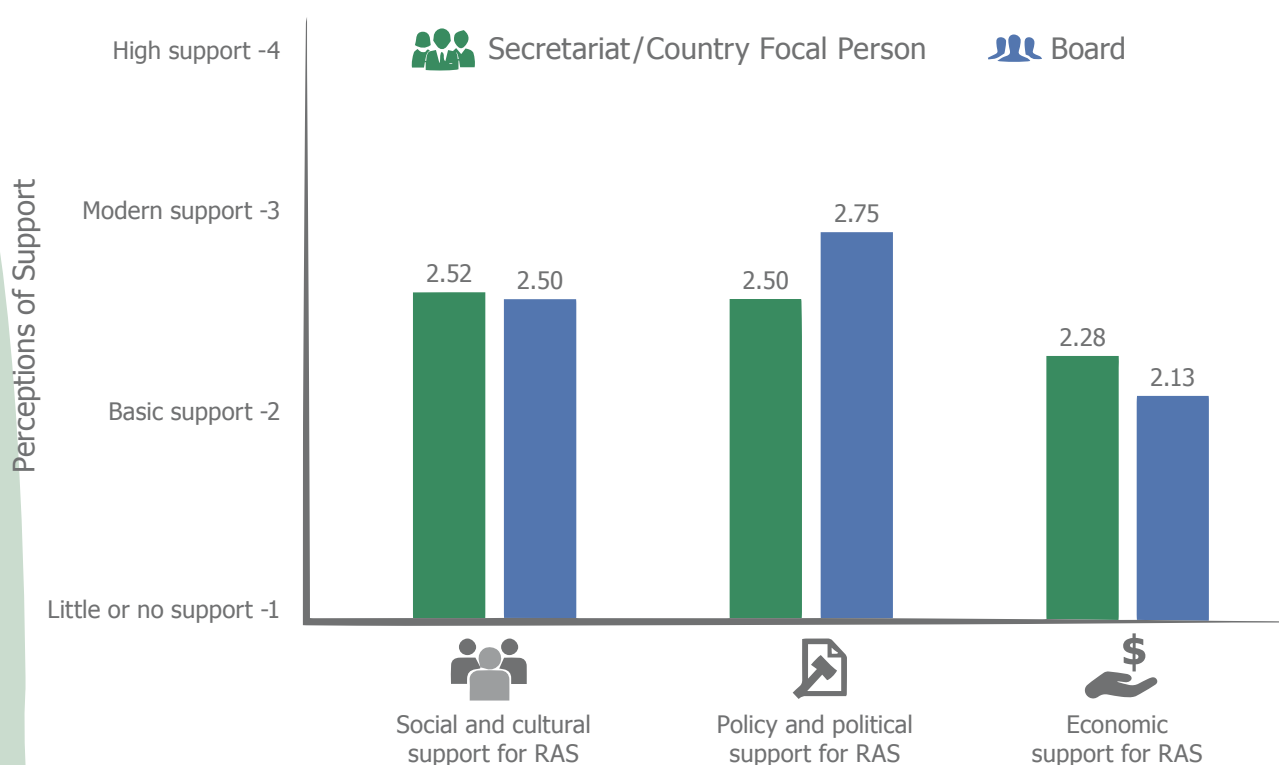
4. Key findings

Overall report

Results of the perceived and objective capacity assessments were plotted to provide a visual representation of capacity. Perception of capacity

data were plotted on the vertical axis while objective capacity data were plotted on the horizontal axis. The plot area was divided into quadrants to allow for easy classification of capacity.



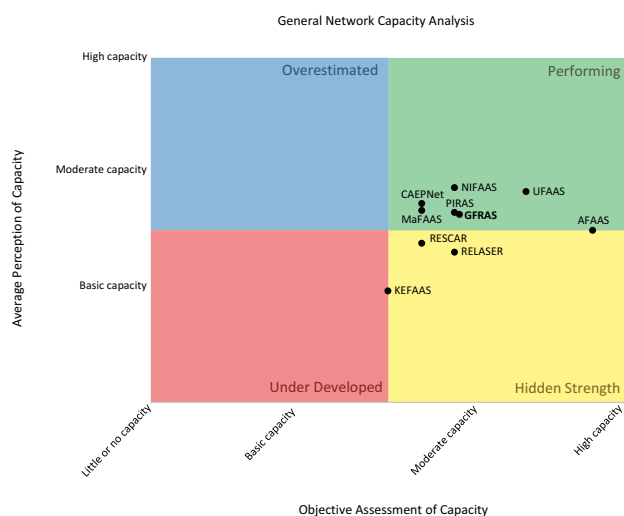


- As a proxy for the global capacity of the GFRAS network, the results of the capacity assessment are encouraging.
- There is a diversity among the regional and country fora in terms of levels of maturity and resources; however, the averaged results indicate a moderate level of capacity as assessed by both Secretariat, Board members, and objective analysis.
- Insufficient funding was the most prominent theme from both the quantitative and qualitative analysis, and was consistent across almost all networks and all focus areas.
- More mature networks tended to have higher levels of capacity.
- The results indicate that while there is capacity in the overall GFRAS network, it is recommended the primary focus should be on sharing this capacity to quickly improve constituent peer networks at regional and country levels.
- The directionality of all correlations was positive, indicating that an increase in one variable should result in a positive increase in another variable. This finding suggests that increased capacity in

any factor or dimension should have a positive effect on other factors, the primary difference being the magnitude of the expected difference.

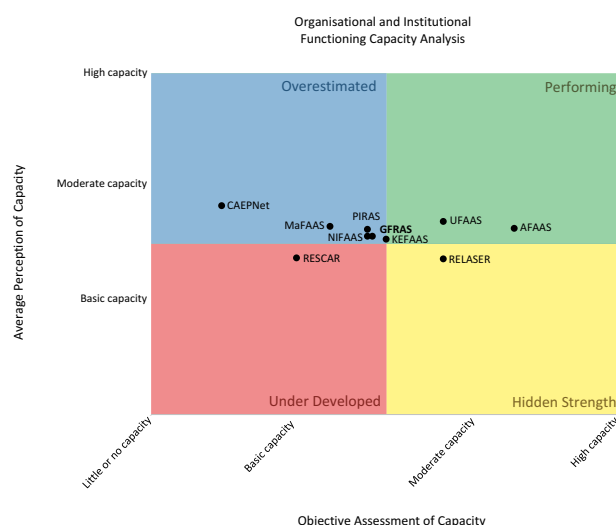
- GFRAS should consider developing a technical platform, such as a database of experts available online, for more directed and pragmatic knowledge sharing, best practice sharing and peer supported capacity development.
- It is recommended networks located in the 'Performing' capacity category within each focus area be identified as exemplars for other networks to emulate.
- The highest performing capacity category in average was the general category, the lowest performing was professionalisation.

General



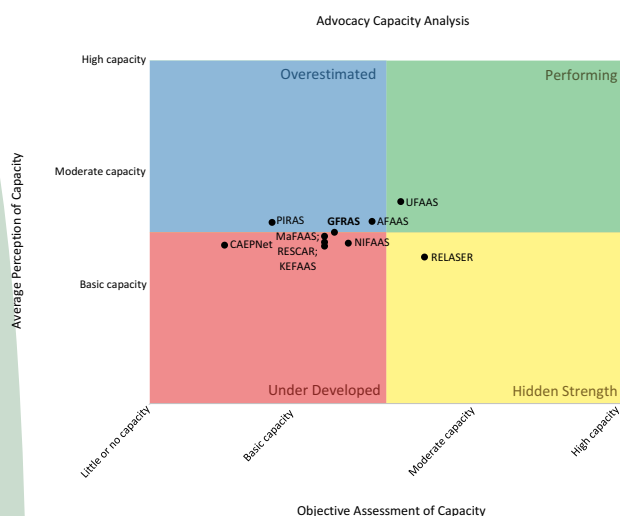
- There were two dimensions that exhibited high levels of perceived and objective capacity across most assessed networks: *communication languages* and *network collaborations*. It is recommended that the global network pursue opportunities to leverage these strengths.
- Networks may consider a stronger focus on how funds will be used rather than just on the need for funds. Focusing on what outcomes or impact is intended through the useful application of the funds should be a much more powerful value statement.
- Networks are encouraged to establish a protocol and procedure for funding management. It may be appropriate for GFRAS to proactively develop and provide guidelines and support to establish this capacity amongst networks.

Organisational and institutional functioning



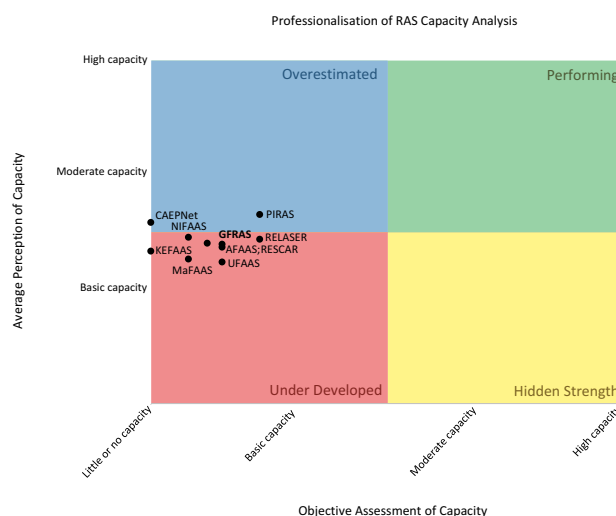
- Generally, there was a consistently high level of capacity for staffing adequacy across networks. The networks GFRAS should be commended for this finding as it is indicative of the support and commitment participants have.
- It is recommended that networks cultivate the paid or volunteer resources available and use them as a building block for future capacity building activities.
- Many networks have a vision and mission. For those that do not, it is recommended that establishing a clear vision and mission should be a priority. These should also be clearly articulated and connected with the overall GFRAS vision and mission.
- It is recommended that a process defining the frequency, conditions and methods for network officers to communicate with network members be developed, shared and implemented among networks.
- Networks might consider documenting standardised processes and making processes available across all networks. Existing processes could be shared among networks for benchmarking.

Advocacy



- The global GFRAS network had the highest level of performance capacity with regard to 'advocacy'.
- GFRAS networks are already interfacing with, and influencing policy.
- Assessment results indicate there is a significant amount of advocacy activity that is happening, but is not being captured systematically and effectively.
- Networks may consider documenting and recording the impacts and outcomes associated with this area of strength by developing and implementing a system to capture and record all advocacy activities undertaken by network members.
- It is recommended that networks should consider developing at least one case study where advocacy undertaken by a GFRAS representative has had an identifiable impact.
- It is suggested that networks continue to work on understanding RAS clients by exchanging information regarding client trends and needs, as well as best practices.

Professionalisation of RAS

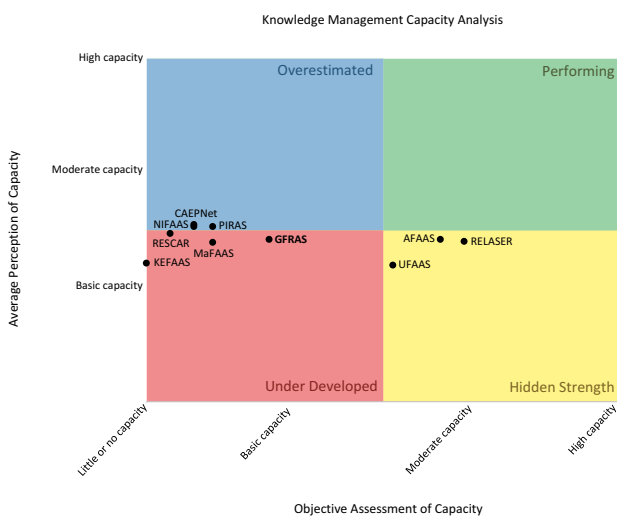


- Professionalisation of RAS had the lowest level of capacity relative to all other assessed areas.
- Given an environment of constrained resources and the low level of professionalisation capacity observed during the assessment, GFRAS might consider whether it is appropriate to dedicate resources to this area, or whether those resources would be better used in an area of relative strength. This recommendation is not representative of interest or importance from the networks per se, but a rather a question of strategy and resource allocation.
- If GFRAS decides to continue to maintain professionalisation as a strategic priority it should consider creating and implementing a monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) plan focused on professionalisation. Given the low level of existing capacity coupled with resource constraints of networks, it is recommended that resource investment in this area should receive special attention, and all activities should be tracked accordingly.
- It is recommended that the global network/forum identify the most important two or three specific professionalisation capacities and ensure all networks have access to the necessary support to build and establish these capacities. For example, ensuring all networks have a vision for the role of a RAS professional. The overall level of objective capacity is low, therefore, rather than focusing on major strategic changes, small incremental improvements may be beneficial to establish

momentum.

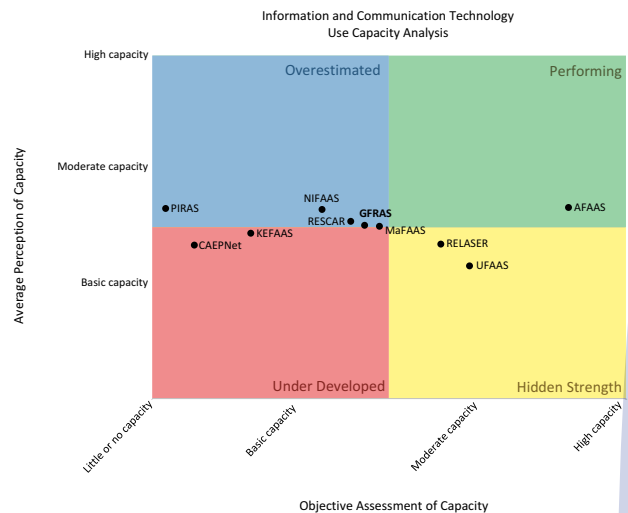
- It is recommended that networks increase the focus on needs assessments of RAS professionals and other actors involved in RAS. Once networks know the specific needs in terms of professionalisation in a given context, they will be able to develop and deliver professionalisation activities accordingly.

Knowledge management



- Perceptions of knowledge management (KM) capacity was generally higher with Secretariat respondents than with Board respondents. The difference between respondent groups indicates that Board members may not be aware of the KM activities occurring, or that Secretariat members are over-estimating the actual level of KM capacity.
- Networks should consider continuing to test, confirm, or modify KM beliefs based on member checking and evaluation activities.
- It is recommended that networks continue to make themselves aware of the trends and opportunities associated with RAS KM.

ICT use



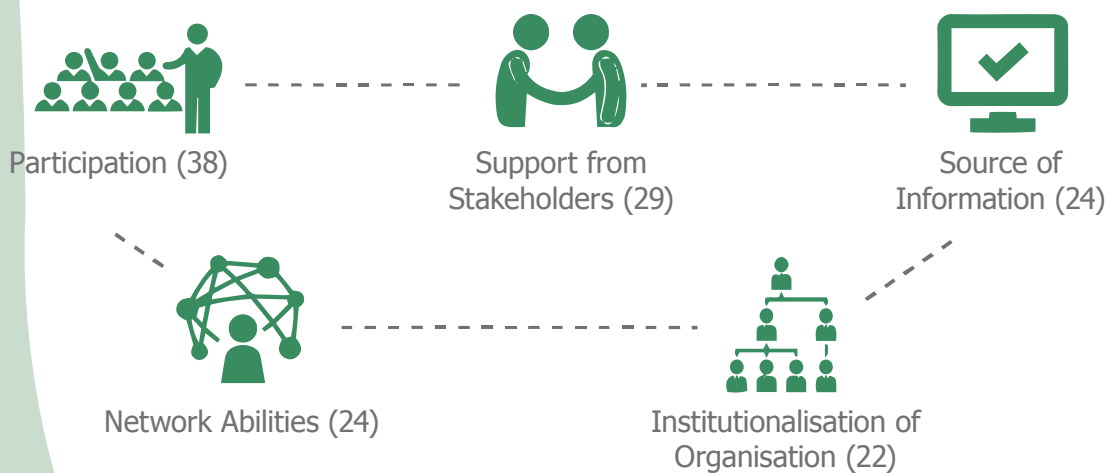
- There was a high degree of consistency in perceptions of ICT use between Secretariat and Board respondents.
- All networks had some level of capacity to use ICT.
- Networks should consider focusing on promoting ICT use amongst their members and maximising the value and utility of their existing toolset.
- It is recommended that network share information and best practices regarding ICT access issues.
- GFRAS may consider developing a centralised repository of ICT tools and best practices for use and adaptation across networks.

5. Open ended feedback

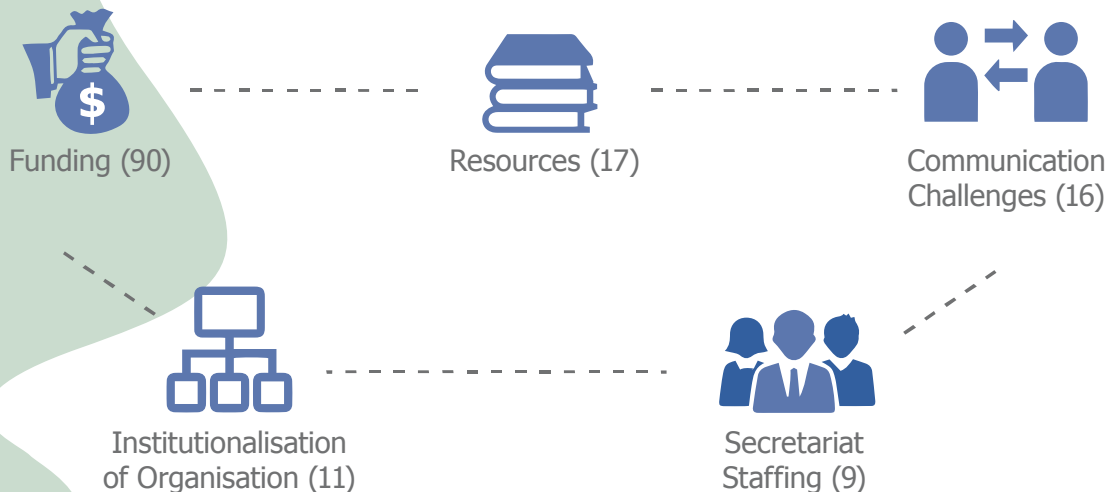
In addition to providing quantitative data, both Secretariat and Board respondents were asked several open-ended questions about the network. The results were grouped thematically, with numbers of responses within each theme in parentheses. It is noteworthy that institutionalisation of organisation was a theme in all areas. The result indicates

that there is a large difference in this area among networks, some are more mature and stable, whereas other networks still need to establish an ongoing organisation. Funding was clearly established as the biggest weakness across networks, and the need for additional funding was identified as the top way to improve.

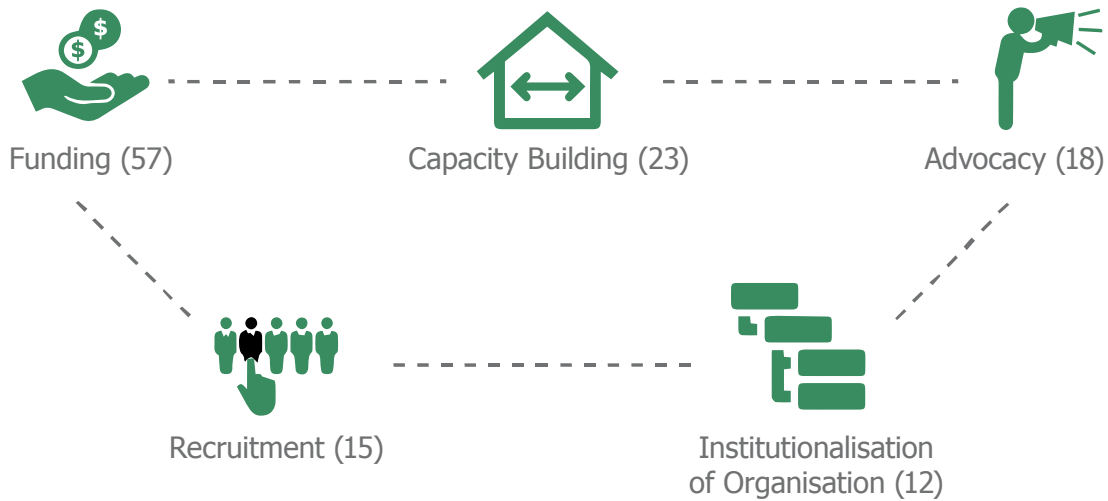
Top 5 strengths



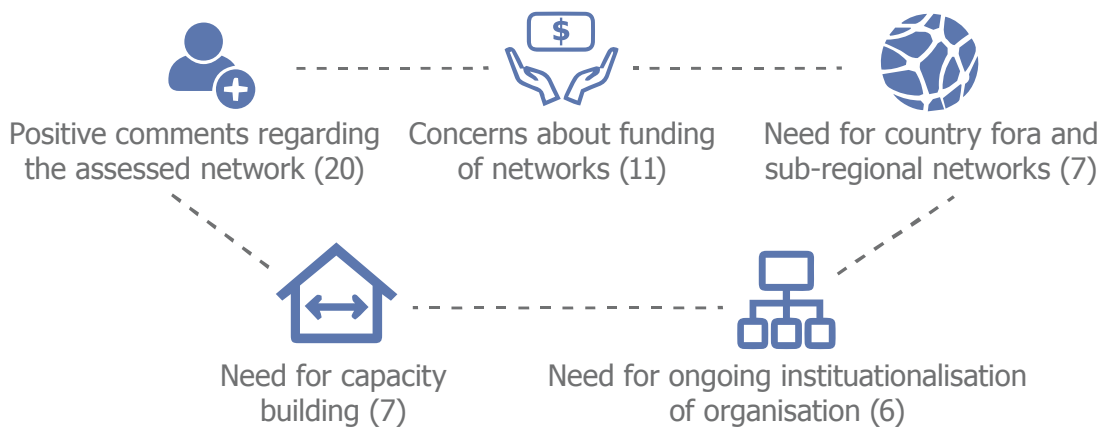
Top 5 weaknesses



Top 5 ways to improve



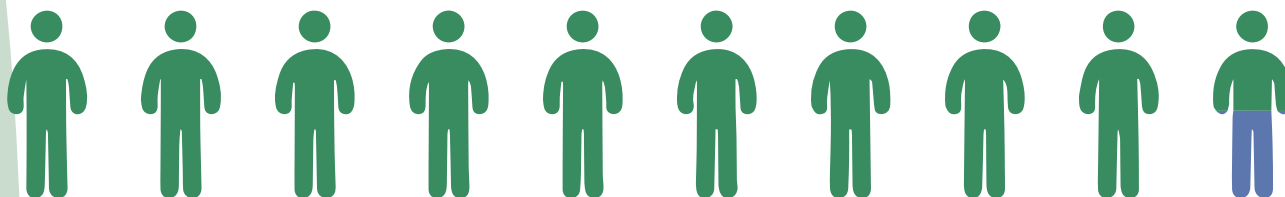
Top 5 additional insights



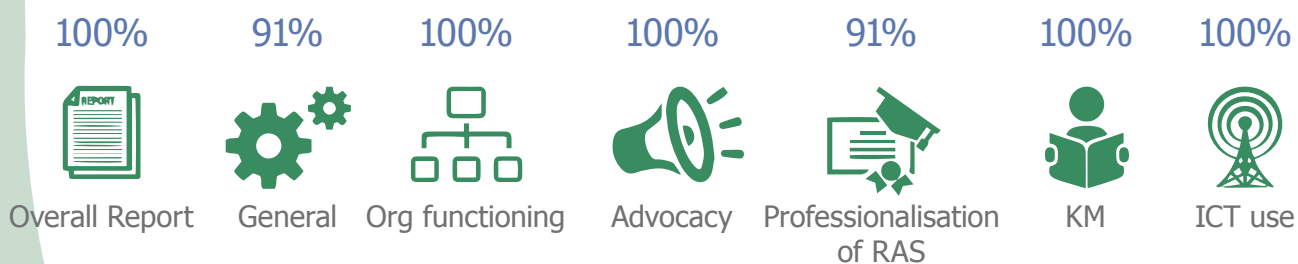
6. Value of the capacity assessment process to participants

A follow-up evaluation survey was sent to the GFRAS champions involved in the assessment process. A total of 15 champions were identified for participation in the survey and 14 responded, giving a response

rate of 93%. The respondents Agreed or Strongly Agreed that the process was useful on 97% of all questions.



Usefulness results for each area are indicated below.



Results from the follow up survey indicated that the capacity assessment process was valuable for participants, specifically the following themes emerged when analysing open ended feedback regarding the process:

1. Capacity assessment data is valuable to stimulate conversation within the network
2. Capacity assessment information is valuable for working with funding organisations
3. There is a need for ongoing support to build capacity for areas of weakness identified through the capacity assessment process

7. Annex A. Definition of terms

Advocacy	Advocacy involves promoting, supporting, or defending something. An important aspect of advocacy for GFRAS is drawing attention to the strategic role of rural advisory services (RAS) in rural development more widely
AFAAS	African Forum for Agricultural Advisory Services
Board	Any individual or group of individuals that the Process Champion identified as appropriate to respond to the quantitative survey regarding the network. This group of respondents may have included Steering Committee members, Advisory Boards, or other individuals familiar with the network's capacity.
CAEPNet	Caribbean Agricultural Extension Providers Network
Capacity	The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) ¹ defines 'capacity' as the "ability of people, organisations and society as a whole to manage their affairs successfully." Capacities are thus all aspects, features, attributes, ways of working, approaches and characteristics of networks and fora that influence their ability to successfully manage their affairs.
Country Fora	Entities that bring together a wide range of actors and stakeholders involved in or benefitting from rural advisory services in a country. They provide a mechanism for the diverse actors – including farmers – to exchange information, share lessons, identify opportunities for providing services to each other and for innovating on how to provide effective advisory services in their domains of work.
Delphi Process	The RAND Corporation developed the Delphi method to collect knowledge and create consensus on a specific topic from a group of experts. According to this method, several rounds of questionnaires are sent out and the anonymous responses are aggregated and shared with the group after each round. Three iterations of the Delphi method were used to complete this study. See Dalkey, N. and Helmer, O. 1963. An experimental application of the Delphi method to the use of experts. <i>Management Science</i> 9(3): 458–467; Ziglio, E. 1996. The Delphi method and its contribution to decision-making. In: Adler, M. and Ziglio, E. (eds) <i>Gazing into the oracle: The Delphi method and its application to social policy and public health</i> . Bristol, PA: Jessica Kingsley. 3–33.
Dimension	Groups of individual capacity items that refer to similar conceptual concepts.
Factor	The highest-level grouping of capacities. Factors within the capacity assessment included: General Network, Organisational and Institutional Functioning, Knowledge Management, Information and Communication Technology Use, Professionalisation of RAS and Advocacy. Capacity factors are composed of Dimensions, which are composed of individual capacity items.
Information communications technology (ICT)	Information and Communication Technologies, an umbrella term that includes any communication device or application for collection, processing, storage, retrieval, managing and sharing of information in multiple formats. This encompasses, amongst others, radio, television, cellular phones, computer and network hardware and software, satellite systems and so on, as well as the various services and applications associated with them, such as videoconferencing and distance learning, social media and others.
KEFAAS	Kenya Forum for Agricultural Advisory Services
Knowledge Management	A practice or system of enabling individuals, teams and entire organisations to collectively and systematically create, harvest, share and apply knowledge, in order to better achieve their objectives, improve their practices and learn from what they do.
Likert-type	Frequency scale using fixed choices designed to measure attitudes or opinions (Bowling, 1997; Burns, & Grove, 1997). For this assessment, the following scale was employed: 1 = little or no capacity; 2 = some capacity, but very limited; 3 = good capacity but could still be improved; 4 = exceptional capacity, no need for improvement.

1 OECD. (2006). *The challenge of capacity development: working towards good practice*. Paris: Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development

MAFAAS	Malawi Forum for Agricultural Advisory Services
Network	The main members of GFRAS. A regional network is a group of people from a particular geographical region that have agreed to participate in GFRAS and to fulfil the expectations detailed by the GFRAS organisation ² .
NIFAAS	Nigerian Forum for Agricultural Advisory Services
Organisational and Institutional Functioning	An ability to function properly and fulfil an identified purpose or task through the effective application of human, physical, financial and intangible resources.
PIRAS	Pacific Islands Rural Advisory Services
Process Champion	An individual or group of individuals identified by a network as the primary point of contact for the capacity assessment process. This individual or group of individuals was responsible for providing a list of Secretariat and Board respondents as well as sending out pre-notice email messages for all survey data collection. Furthermore this individual or group of individuals was the recipient of the final report from their respective network.
Professionalisation	A profession is a type of job that requires special education, training, or skill. Professionalism and professionalisation is defined as the skills, good judgment and behaviour that is expected from a person who is trained in a particular profession.
Real Limits of Perceived Capacity Scale	Perceived capacity was measured using a 5-point Likert-type scale. Scores were calculated and results were categorised into one of four categories based on the real limits of the scale. Specifically: 1.00 – 1.74 = <i>Little or no capacity</i> 1.75 – 2.49 = <i>Basic level of capacity</i> 2.50 – 3.24 = <i>Moderate level of capacity</i> 3.25 – 4.00 = <i>High level of capacity</i>
Real Limits of Objective Capacity Assessment	Objective capacity was calculated based on the number of objectively verifiable capacities divided by the total number of potential capacities within a dimension or factor area. Scores were calculated and results were categorised into one of four categories based on a continuum of potential results. Specifically: 0% – 24% = <i>Little or no capacity</i> 25% – 49% = <i>Basic level of capacity</i> 50% – 74% = <i>Moderate level of capacity</i> 75% – 100% = <i>High level of capacity</i>
RELASER	Red Latinoamericana de Servicios de Extensión Rural (Latin American Network of Rural Extension Services)
RESCAR-AOC	Réseau des services de conseil agricole et rural d'Afrique de l'Ouest et du Centre (West and Central Africa Network of Agricultural and Rural Advisory Services)
Rural advisory services (also called extension)	Rural advisory services, also called extension, are all the different activities that provide the information and services needed and demanded by farmers and other actors in rural settings to assist them in developing their own technical, organisational and management skills and practices to improve their livelihoods and well-being
Secretariat	A group of individuals directly responsible for the activities of the network. The group may be paid employees or volunteers.
UFAAS	Uganda Forum for Agricultural Advisory Services

² GFRAS. (2011). *Regional network membership in GFRAS*. GFRAS Resource Paper.

8. Annex B. Assessment detail data

Perception and objective data

Table 1. Capacity by area

	Average Perception <i>M</i>	Verified capacity (%)
General factor	2.63	65
Organisational and institutional functioning factor	2.56	47
Information communication technology use factor	2.55	42
Advocacy factor	2.49	39
Knowledge management factor	2.42	26
Professionalisation of RAS factor	2.40	12

Note real limits of perception scale: 1.00–1.74 = little or no capacity, 1.75–2.49 = basic level of capacity, 2.50–3.24 = moderate level of capacity, 3.25–4.00 = high level of capacity.

Note real limits of verified capacity scale: 0–24% = little or no capacity, 25–49% = basic level of capacity, 50–74% = moderate level of capacity, 75–100% = high level of capacity.

Table 2. General network overview

	Average Perception <i>M</i>	Verified capacity (%)
Communication languages	2.97	72
Gender equality	2.93	33
Funding management	2.74	11
Network collaborations	2.72	89
Funding sufficiency	1.74	0

Note real limits of perception scale: 1.00–1.74 = little or no capacity, 1.75–2.49 = basic level of capacity, 2.50–3.24 = moderate level of capacity, 3.25–4.00 = high level of capacity.

Note real limits of verified capacity scale: 0–24% = little or no capacity, 25–49% = basic level of capacity, 50–74% = moderate level of capacity, 75–100% = high level of capacity.

Table 3. Organisational and institutional functioning overview

	Average Perception <i>M</i>	Verified capacity (%)
Network vision and mission	3.06	83
Effective leadership	2.92	0
Effective activities	2.63	N/A
Organisational and institutional functioning performance	2.59	44
Standardised processes	2.48	31
Adequate staffing	2.46	100
Protecting against different types of risk	2.15	N/A
Sufficient funding for organisational and institutional functioning	1.71	0

Note real limits of perception scale: 1.00–1.74 = little or no capacity, 1.75–2.49 = basic level of capacity, 2.50–3.24 = moderate level of capacity, 3.25–4.00 = high level of capacity.

Note real limits of verified capacity scale: 0–24% = little or no capacity, 25–49% = basic level of capacity, 50–74% = moderate level of capacity, 75–100% = high level of capacity.

Table 4. Advocacy overview

	Average Perception <i>M</i>	Verified capacity (%)
Network understands RAS clientele	2.69	7
Network is visible actor for RAS	2.66	28
Aware of policy trends and opportunities associated with RAS	2.60	N/A
Network effectively advocates for RAS	2.56	39
Advocacy performance	2.54	80
Advocacy messages communicated effectively	2.51	22
Advocacy activities are organised and appropriate	2.33	N/A
Sufficient funding for advocacy activities	1.52	0

Note real limits of perception scale: 1.00–1.74 = little or no capacity, 1.75–2.49 = basic level of capacity, 2.50–3.24 = moderate level of capacity, 3.25–4.00 = high level of capacity.

Note real limits of verified capacity scale: 0–24% = little or no capacity, 25–49% = basic level of capacity, 50–74% = moderate level of capacity, 75–100% = high level of capacity.

Table 5. Professionalisation of RAS overview

	Average Perception <i>M</i>	Verified capacity (%)
Network promotes RAS professionalisation	2.68	26
Aware of trends and opportunities available for the professionalisation of RAS	2.61	7
Network develops RAS capacity through professionalisation activities	2.39	7
Professionalisation of RAS performance	2.37	11
Sufficient funding for professionalisation of RAS	1.56	0

Note real limits of perception scale: 1.00–1.74 = little or no capacity, 1.75–2.49 = basic level of capacity, 2.50–3.24 = moderate level of capacity, 3.25–4.00 = high level of capacity.

Note real limits of verified capacity scale: 0–24% = little or no capacity, 25–49% = basic level of capacity, 50–74% = moderate level of capacity, 75–100% = high level of capacity.

Table 6. Knowledge management overview

	Average Perception <i>M</i>	Verified capacity (%)
Aware of trends and opportunities associated with RAS knowledge management	2.60	11
Network members participate in knowledge management activities	2.55	28
Network effectively supports knowledge management activities	2.52	48
Knowledge management performance	2.50	22
Knowledge is accessible	2.42	44
Sufficient funding for knowledge management activities	1.71	22

Note real limits of perception scale: 1.00–1.74 = little or no capacity, 1.75–2.49 = basic level of capacity, 2.50–3.24 = moderate level of capacity, 3.25–4.00 = high level of capacity.

Note real limits of verified capacity scale: 0–24% = little or no capacity, 25–49% = basic level of capacity, 50–74% = moderate level of capacity, 75–100% = high level of capacity.

Table 7. ICT use overview

	Average Perception <i>M</i>	Verified capacity (%)
Network has a positive perception of ICT use	2.93	N/A
Network promotes ICT use	2.70	17
Network members use ICT tools	2.69	39
Network supports multiple channels for information exchange, sharing ideas, and communication	2.66	41
Network has personnel capacity to support ICT use	2.59	64
Network has technical capacity to support ICT use	2.59	47
ICT use performance	2.57	22
Network addresses ICT access issues	2.43	53
Sufficient funding for ICT use activities	1.68	11

Note real limits of perception scale: 1.00–1.74 = little or no capacity, 1.75–2.49 = basic level of capacity, 2.50–3.24 = moderate level of capacity, 3.25–4.00 = high level of capacity.

Note real limits of verified capacity scale: 0–24% = little or no capacity, 25–49% = basic level of capacity, 50–74% = moderate level of capacity, 75–100% = high level of capacity.

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