Executive Summary
Communication Strategy
Information and Communication Management in the
Agricultural Sector

Region: Latin America and the Caribbean

Prepared by Táctica Corporativa,
by request from FORAGRO Technical Secretariat, IICA
By way of clarification

The organizations that are the object of this proposed communication strategy go by many different names, due to structural differences and the types of activities in which they engage. Therefore, throughout this document the term ORGANIZATION is used to refer to all the various agricultural technology research and innovation institutes, departments and directorates.

A reference document designed to serve as a detailed guide was produced (in Spanish) prior to the preparation of this executive summary. Please consult it if you require more details of the actions described.
A. INTRODUCTION

The objectives of the organizations in charge of agricultural technology research and innovation in Latin America and the Caribbean include promoting the further development of their field of specialization by means of mechanisms tailored to the needs of the national sectors in which they operate, to contribute to the growth of agriculture and the wellbeing of the rural population.

To achieve that objective, they seek to help make the agricultural sector more competitive, with one of the priorities being to generate information and technologies that will improve the conditions of their target populations.

In such circumstances, correct information and communication management (ICM) essential. The communication strategy set out in this document is based on this premise and focuses on efforts to sensitize people to the importance of information and communication management.

B. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

For the purposes of this proposal, information and communication management is defined as:

“Processes carried out to capture, classify, preserve, retrieve, share and disseminate information that an organization generates, receives and/or acquires" (Sanchez, 2006)

D. RATIONALE

IICA-FORAGRO conducted a status assessment to evaluate information management and technical communication among agricultural technology research and innovation organizations in Latin America and the Caribbean. The study focused on the mechanisms used, the organizations’ current capabilities and possible future trends in the field. This proposal was developed as a result of the assessment. Some of the study’s most important conclusions were as follows:

- Many different definitions of information and communication technologies exist.
- 80% of organizations have a unit/person specializing in the area.
- 67% of researchers did not receive training in ICM in 2006 or 2007. Nor have 65% of directors received training in recent years.
- 100% of the respondents said they used field visits to disseminate their work. Next in importance were: bulletins, websites, publications (journals or books published by the institutes), email and the media.
- Ways of increasing knowledge of ICM. In descending order of importance, the respondents mentioned: training with professionals and advisory assistance for the implementation of ICM projects. Electronic and printed bulletins. Support with self-taught material and online training. Sharing of experiences with professionals in the area. Creation of pilot projects in the area of communication. Virtual and onsite forums and conferences. Distribution of books and journals. Contact with colleagues in the region.
- 71% of organizations use the various information and communication technologies they possess every working day.
- The main way that the directors of the organizations surveyed communicate is via personal and institutional email (53%). The internal telephone system is next in importance.
- 71% said they did not know enough about ICM to use it to improve the quality of their day-to-day work.
- The directors surveyed are of the opinion that information and communication technologies help their institutions provide a better service and make their organizations more effective.
- The respondents mentioned the need to organize training in the use of information technologies and demonstrate their usefulness.

E. OBJECTIVES
- To sensitize decision makers to the importance of managing and communicating in an effective and consistent manner
- To train the target groups in ICM

F. METHODOLOGY

The methodology for executing this proposal is based on the “learning by doing” approach, which involves workshops, seminars and any other format that encourages creative and practical work, experimenting with processes based on ideas and previously formulated theoretical efforts.

The process is based on following through until a (feasible) solution to the problem is found. Efforts must be made to provide distance support to each of the organizations individually as they endeavor to implement a work plan to address the issue.

G. TIME FRAME FOR IMPLEMENTATION

The proposal consists of three consecutive years of planned actions designed to foster a process of learning and joint development. A shorter implementation period is not recommended, as the success of the methodology and the attainment of the objectives could not be guaranteed. The aim is to impact the day-to-day activities of the target organizations by improving the way in which they manage information and communication over the medium and long term:

- **Year 1**: focus attention on the topic and its importance for the target organizations, lay the conceptual and methodological groundwork, develop guidelines and lines of action together, and pinpoint needs, preferences and desires.
- **Year 2**: make it possible for the organizations to work on a short- and medium-term plan on the topic. Here the individual support is very specific.
- **Year 3**: continue certain actions involving cognitive follow-up and continuous improvement. The organizations should be self-sufficient by that time and the support provided would be more in the way of advisory assistance.

H. BENEFICIARIES

**Primary Target Group**
- Decision makers of agricultural technology research and innovation organizations in Latin America and the Caribbean that are members of the Forum for the Americas on Agricultural Research and Technology Development (FORAGRO)
Secondary Target Group
- The organizations’ coordinators of technical information management
- The organizations’ coordinators of communications

I. KEY MESSAGES

- Importance of information management as an essential part of agricultural technological innovation
- Need to identify and share information about good practices in technical information management, as part of the efforts to promote institutional innovations

J. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PROPOSAL

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1. CAMPAIGN TO RAISE EXPECTATIONS

The aim of the campaign will be to underscore the true importance of the function that each target organization performs by emphasizing the value of the decision makers’ work.

For at least 1½ months, consecutive personalized messages will be sent containing statistical or numerical data quantifying the findings of the organization’s research and the real contribution that its work makes to society.

2. LAUNCHING OF THE INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION MANAGEMENT PROJECT

Material will be sent to the director of each organization explaining that the developments only hinted at in the campaign concern the ICM project, in which the decision makers will play a leading role.

This action will focus the thoughts of the directors and other beneficiaries firmly on ICM.

3. BASIC GUIDE TO THE ICM PROJECT

Direct interaction and advice on how to implement an ICM project in the organizations, tailored to individual needs. Each month, the director or person in charge of ICM will submit an update of his organization’s Basic Guide provided by the facilitator (FORAGRO Secretariat).

The content of each stage should be directly related to the personalized communications that will be implemented during the first year, dealing with ICM topics, methodologies and the application of successful ICM initiatives at the world level.

4. PROGRAM FOR INTERNATIONAL CERTIFICATION IN ICM

The main purpose of this program is to train the individuals responsible for ICM in the different organizations to properly manage and disseminate knowledge. To obtain this certification, an organization will have to meet the following requirements:
- At least two people must complete all the required courses
- The certification must be updated every year

The number of annual courses for certification may vary, depending on the trends in the ICM market.

Overview of the certification process:

- There will be mandatory and optional courses, and credits awarded for proficiency.
- The organization receives the certification and the expertise of the personnel who take part in the process is also recognized
- A minimum period of time is required for the certification process
- There are exclusive benefits for both the organization certified and the staff members who take part in the certification process.

5. FIFTH INTERNATIONAL MEETING OF FORAGRO - URUGUAY 2008

It is proposed that a specific activity be organized to address the topic of ICM, with the following agenda:
- A motivational presentation by an expert on the subject
- Design of a Flash animation to support the presentation of the ICM Program, so the target organizations recommit to the project as a whole
- Implementation of an activity in subgroups (Central, Caribbean, Andean and Southern regions) to present the Basic Guide to the project and promote the sharing of experiences

It is recommended that media organizations throughout Latin America and the Caribbean be contacted to disseminate information about the work that is being done.

6. SUPPORTING ACTIVITIES

Activities will be carried out at least once a month to generate various types of resources for education, support and improvements in the field of ICM:
- **Sequential Worksheets**: presentation of a problem, how to solve it and the mechanisms and resources needed.
- **Personalized Bulletins**: Containing information about new technological trends in information management, effective management mechanisms, etc.
- **Online courses**: design, development and implementation of virtual refresher courses on information management and communication management.
- **Virtual Forum**: design, development and implementation of an opinion forum with experts in management topics, for use by everyone involved in the training process throughout Latin America and the Caribbean.

7. RELATIONS WITH THE MEDIA

Implement a strategic plan to establish links with the media, contacting journalists specializing in business, technology and agriculture at the national level. This action should continue throughout the project.
YEAR 2: SPECIFIC TACTICS

SPECIFIC TACTICS

8. TRAINING OF SPOKESPERSONS

Targeted exclusively at the directors of organizations, to improve their ability to convey the importance of their work to the media and make them the spokespersons of the institutions they represent, with the professional approach needed to communicate their ideas. This training will include instruction in how to deal with the main types of media organizations.

9. QUARTERLY TRAINING ACTIVITIES

Opportunities for (preferably) face-to-face meetings, to reinforce the ties and cooperation among the organizations, and to reach consensus on ideas, projects and long-term relations.

It is recommended that at least two representatives of each organization take part, to give more people the opportunity to acquire knowledge. Time should be set aside to enable the organizations that are implementing joint projects to work on them.

10. CONTINUATION OF SUPPORTING ACTIVITIES

- **Follow-up to and Advisory Assistance with Projects:** By this point, the organizations will be implementing their respective institutional management projects, either individually or jointly through work involving two or more countries. IICA will have the support of a team set up ahead of time to manage this activity.
- **Annual Updating of Certification in ICM:** coordination, revamping and incorporation of new courses, and updating of the certifications issued the previous year, and training of new staff.
- **Personalized Bulletins, Online Courses and Virtual Forum:** Already mentioned. Plus actions with the press.

YEAR 3: SPECIFIC TACTICS

SPECIFIC TACTICS

11. AWARDS CEREMONY FOR ICM PROJECTS

Activity designed to create an opportunity to acknowledge and applaud the efforts related to information and communication management.

Biannual ceremony. By the third year of implementation of this proposal, the aim will be to encourage the execution of individual or multi-organization projects in the field of ICM.

These activities should take place at year’s end, given the level and scale aimed for.

12. ASSESSMENT OF EXTERNAL TARGET POPULATIONS
Actions aimed at providing follow-up and evaluating results, with a view to encouraging all the organizations to use a research tool to assess whether the organization’s different target populations are receiving the information in the way they want.

This tool will make it possible to gauge the effectiveness of the actions carried out. It should be applied in all the participating organizations simultaneously, to achieve cost savings.

13. CONTINUATION OF SUPPORTING ACTIVITIES

- Personalized Bulletins, Online Courses and Virtual Forum, Annual Updating of Certification in ICM: already described. Plus actions with the press.

K. ANNUAL EVALUATION

All the actions executed consecutively from the first till the third year should be evaluated using research tools tailored to the needs of each tactic executed. Concurrent evaluations and evaluations at the end of each stage are essential.

L. GENERAL BUDGET

This breakdown of activities and materials includes the general aspects of the proposal.

1. Execution of the Strategy
To implement and oversee the communication strategy proposed in this document, it is recommended that one of the following two options be used to select the personnel required:

- **Communication Agency**: firm specializing in the management of communication strategies at the international level. Once the strategy has been appraised, the communication agency could charge a fixed monthly fee to implement it (roughly US$2500-3000).
- **IICA Personnel**: selection or hiring of at least two people to execute the strategy as members of the staff of IICA’s Directorate of Technical Leadership and Knowledge Management. The salary paid to these officials should be the current average remuneration of communicators in Costa Rica, plus mandatory deductions.

2. Support Materials
The cost of producing these materials will depend on their specific characteristics, the quantity produced and exactly when they are produced. Graphic design costs would currently be around:

- Sequential Worksheets: US$110
- Personalized Bulletins (maximum of 12 pages long): US$300
- Online Courses: US$250
- Forum: US$150

3. Continuation of Internet-based Tactics
The Internet-based actions proposed in the strategy, such as forums, online courses and specific sections on websites, could be coordinated with the internal resources of IICA’s
Directorate of Technical Leadership and Knowledge Management or third parties could be hired who specialize in Web design and programming. The cost of such tools varies according to their complexity, so it will depend on the specific characteristics involved.

4. Shipping of Materials
Bearing in mind that our target group is distributed throughout Latin America and the Caribbean, effectiveness and efficacy are key concerns. Therefore, it is recommended that private courier services be used, to guarantee security, accountability and the capacity for follow-up.

Several factors will determine the budget for this service: the weight of packages, the distance between the place where they are shipped and their destination, and the time of year when packages are sent.

Clarifications:

The detailed budget for a project of this magnitude depends on a series of variables that can only be calculated accurately if all the components are carefully defined. However, considering the resources required to support the digital and printed outputs described in the proposal, the total investment needed to produce small quantities of high-quality products could be around US$50,000.

Providing the professional support required, hiring either the services of a company or staff, would call for an average annual investment of around US$36,000 or 30,000, respectively.

At this point, it is impossible to calculate the exact cost of hiring third parties for meetings and activities that require the participants to travel.

The exact amounts involved would depend on how soon quotations are requested and the precise details of the project that is finally approved.
## M. GENERAL SCHEDULE OF ACTIVITIES

### FORAGRO Secretariat

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