

VERCON – Virtual Extension and Research Communication Network

Researchers and extension workers are exchanging information in seconds rather than days

Weak linkages between extension and research often result in systematic knowledge and information “bottlenecks” that limit the effectiveness of research to contribute to agricultural development. Yet, knowledge and information gained through agricultural research are essential for improving food security. In the last ten years, FAO has supported information and communication interventions at the national level in ten countries spread across five regions (Africa, Asia, Near East and Latin America, Central and Eastern Europe) incorporating new Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) with traditional media such as rural radio and drama.

Conceptual models, methodologies and tools have been developed, such as the **Virtual Extension and Research Communication Network (VERCON)** and related Internet-based networks. The VERCON’s innovative nature is its capability to achieve effective linkages by connecting geographically

dispersed people and enhancing two-way communication, managing large volumes of data, and rapidly collecting, processing and dispersing information in a variety of forms.

The VERCON concept consists of two fully-integrated and inter-dependent components: the human and the technological.

- **the human component**
a network of policy-makers, researchers extensionists, academics, NGOs and farmers, committed to collaboration, communication and supporting agricultural producers. The network is flexible and can expand to include more stakeholders or contract to focus on specific actors and their information or communication requirements and functions.
- **the technological component**
the tool that allows members of the network to communicate, store and disseminate information. This could include functions such as online resources, discussion forums and question-and-answer services.



Extension workers using VERCON in Egypt



Extension field visit in Costa Rica



Ugandan Study tour visits Egypt



Bhutan VERCON participatory evaluation

Lessons to share

The introduction and successful adoption of new ICTs has involved complex institutional change. Analysis of the major success factors identified six interrelated categories: **technology, people, content, partnership, institutional and financial factors**. The VERCON model aims to strengthen linkages by supporting communication and the creation, sharing, storage, retrieval and dissemination of information between agricultural research and extension, as well as other stakeholders through two interdependent, but essential components – the human and the technological.

Sharing is the winning solution. Creating a knowledge sharing culture is challenging, often due to “closed” information exchange environments. Working with small network groups can help in facilitating exchange mechanisms and break down institutional ‘walls’.

VERCON is supported by the **FAO Research and Extension Division (NRD)**
www.fao.org/nr/dep/nrr_en.htm

and the **Knowledge Exchange and Capacity Building Division (KCE)**
www.fao.org/kce/en

For information:
VERCON Egypt www.vercon.sci.eg/Vercon_en/vercon.asp
PLATICAR Costa Rica www.platicar.go.cr
VERCON Bhutan www.vercon.bt/main/index.php
ARENET Uganda www.arenet.or.ug



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