**Communication for Development: meeting today’s
agriculture and rural development challenges**

**Rationale**

Nowadays communication is increasingly recognized as a driver of change and a key factor of development. Communication for Development (ComDev) is a people-centred communication approach integrating participatory processes and social media, ranging from rural radio to ICTs, and is different from information dissemination or institutional visibility.

Present challenges in the agricultural and rural development sector such as climate change and food crises, call for a more systematic use of ComDev methods and tools to ensure equitable access to knowledge and information and the active participation of rural people in development. This entails a reconsideration of the role that ComDev can play, both in the context of agriculture and rural development policies and programmes, as well as at the community level.

ComDev is directly related to sustainable development, because it contributes to the participation and social appropriation of the development process. Rural programmes and projects that are implemented with ComDev components guarantee participation and thus prompt ownership of development objectives. If communities take leadership and ownership of programmes and projects intended to improve their lives, those programmes are likely to be more sustainable once external technical assistance has withdrawn.

Acknowledging the importance of ComDev, in July 2008, during the 63rd period of sessions of the General Assembly, the Secretary General of the United Nations transmitted the report “Communication for Development Programmes within the United Nations System”, presented by the Director General of UNESCO in conformity with Resolution 50/130 of the General Assembly.

This resolution makes clear recommendations to UN agencies and organizations on the institutionalization of ComDev:

“Encourages the relevant agencies, organizations, funds and programmes of the United Nations system, including the regional commissions, as appropriate, to use informal mechanisms such as round-table conferences to improve communication for development programmes in the United Nations system”;

“Emphasizes the need for the relevant agencies, organizations, funds and programmes of the United Nations system to develop a systematic approach to capacity-building in the development of communication capacities, particularly with respect to the training of field workers and development workers and technicians as well as communication planners and specialists, especially in the developing countries”;

“Invites the relevant agencies, organizations, funds and programmes of the United Nations system, as well as Governments and the regional commissions, to consider identifying focal points for the purpose of facilitating dialogue in the exchange of information on communication issues related to development so as to strengthen coordination and international cooperation in this area”.

The potential of ComDev has yet to be fully exploited in the rural sector. In many cases ComDev components are not adequately integrated in the design and implementation of agricultural development initiatives, and there is an increasing need for enhancing human and institutional capacities in this field.

Opportunities exist for upgrading and up-scaling activities and services from very specific and localized experiences to more sustained communication processes. Within this context there is an urgent need to identify appropriate measures for the integration of ComDev in national agricultural and rural development policies, the institutionalization of ComDev services and the enhancement of the capacity of rural institutions and stakeholders.

Key international events such as the first World Congress on Communication for Development ([WCCD] held in Rome in October 2006) and the UN Interagency Roundtables on ComDev have stressed the importance of mainstreaming ComDev in the development agenda. FAO has been leading ComDev efforts to fight hunger and achieve food security and is now striving to identify new opportunities for promoting ComDev as part of the agricultural and rural development agenda.

FAO is organizing an international Expert Consultation on ComDev to provide a space for development agencies and institutions, donors, NGOs and the academia to take stock of ComDev initiatives to address present challenges in the agriculture and rural development sector, identify emerging trends and foster cooperation among relevant stakeholders. The consultation aims to promote partnerships and explore mechanisms for collaboration and joint action among institutions committed to rural development and social change.

Participants will represent all fields of activity related to rural communication, including major players among development organizations, key donor countries, universities with specialized ComDev departments, global information and exchange networks and international experts.

**Overall Objective**

The overall purpose of the Expert Consultation is to assess the role of ComDev in relation to emerging challenges and to identify priorities and strategic initiatives, to position ComDev in the development agenda and to maximize its contribution to agriculture and sustainable rural development.

**Expected Results**

The expected outcomes of this Expert Consultation include:

* Key issues, challenges and trends identified in relation to the application of ComDev in the agricultural and rural development sector.
* Learning practices and innovative applications of ComDev to agriculture and rural development shared.
* Experiences and perspectives on the institutionalization of ComDev services into agricultural and rural development policies gathered.
* Priorities and strategic interventions to enhance effectiveness of ComDev in agriculture and rural development identified at the institutional and field level.
* Prospects and key initiatives to position ComDev in the agricultural sector and strengthen collaboration identified.
* Potential partner international organizations, able to implement and support priority ComDev programmes and follow up actions, identified.

**Deliverables**

The deliverables foreseen are as follows:

* Background document assessing needs and opportunities and identifying key issues for ComDev in today’s agricultural and rural sector.
* Overview paper on ComDev within FAO: issues, functions, key initiatives and stakeholders, institutional perspectives.
* Expert Consultation report, prepared based on the proceedings of the event and other documentation available.
* Position paper on the role of ComDev to meet today’s agricultural and rural development challenges.

**Consultation Format**

The Expert Consultation will be held from 14 to 16 September 2011 at FAO headquarters in Rome (starting in the afternoon of 14 September). A Steering Committee including the Technical Centre for Agricultural and Rural Cooperation (CTA), the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), the International Institute for Communication and Development (IICD) and FAO will provide overall guidance on the organization of the event and will share results and follow-up actions.

A Senior ComDev consultant, in agreement with FAO ComDev Team, will design the consultation format and methodology, and will take care of preparatory activities of the event. The suggested methodology may invite participants to prepare short case studies and/or thematic papers on ComDev experiences and initiatives in advance; and analyse constraints and opportunities for the institutionalization of ComDev services in agricultural policies. Sessions could be structured as thematic interactive dialogues. One session could be organized as a short seminar open to the public, and specific topics could be debated among specific groups of stakeholders.

An “open space” for display of publications, video and interactive sessions will be set up at FAO headquarters in Rome during the event, where FAO staff and visitors will be familiarized with the themes of the Expert Consultation and meet with invited experts.

**Key themes for discussion**

Participants’ contributions have been initially clustered around the following themes:

1. **Communication for rural development today**
* Current trends
* Role of agriculture and rural development
* Short case studies on field experiences
* Evidence of ComDev contributions in this sector
1. **Issues and challenges for ComDev in the agricultural sector**
* New issues in the rural sector
* Current potential areas of intervention (e.g. agricultural innovation systems, NRM, climate change adaptation, food security, disaster risk reduction, IPs and equity issues, etc.)
* Strategic priorities: M&E, capacity development, funding, networking
* Institutional arrangements
* Interface with other disciplines (KM, Extension, ICTs)
1. **Institutional aspects and positioning of ComDev**
* ComDev integration in national development policies
* Positioning in institutional frameworks (e.g. development agencies)
* Up-scaling of ComDev activities
* Collaboration and partnerships
* Priorities and follow-up actions

**Background documents**

* Background paper
* National and global case studies /presentations
* Overview paper on ComDev in FAO
* ComDev training modules and publications
* Guidelines on ComDev in rural development
* Regional perspectives (knowledge sharing platforms & consultations)

**Participants**

The consultation aims to bring together a selected number of participants including experts from FAO and other development agencies, donors, scholars from universities in different regions, ComDev networks, as well as international experts with extensive experience in the field of communication and rural development.

**Contacts**

For further information about the consultation please refer to:

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