



“Communicating Knowledge”

From good practice to systematic change

A joint FAO/GTZ workshop on communication and knowledge management in rural areas

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the German Agency for Technical Cooperation (GTZ) are organizing a technical consultation workshop on the topic of communication and knowledge management in rural areas. The workshop will be jointly organized with the Faculty of Agriculture of the University of Perugia and will be held at the Domus Pacis Conference Centre in Assisi, Italy from 18 to 22 June 2007. The main aim of the workshop is to bring together experts and practitioners working in the areas of communication for development, research, extension and knowledge management to discuss current issues and share their practical experiences in rural development settings.

The workshop is designed to build a common understanding and framework for addressing knowledge management within an agricultural knowledge and information system environment and to look at how communication for development approaches can foster dynamic interaction between different forms of knowledge to support local problem-solving and decision making processes as well as improve efficiency of projects/programmes. It is expected that the group discussions will assess needs and opportunities for collaborative action to improve the existing communication and extension services and to implement effective knowledge management tools that would address the needs of rural stakeholders and of development interventions.

Background

In 2004 FAO and GTZ held their second joint workshop under the title "Effective communication between Research, Extension and farmers". The objective of the workshop was to engage communication experts, academicians and practitioners in a dialogue on communication between national and international research, extension services and their clientele¹. The workshop provided the basis for analysis and identification of communication gaps and the development of appropriate communication strategies especially suited for rural areas. It also opened the door to a strengthened collaboration between the two organizations. The upcoming third joint workshop is seen as a continuation of these collaborative efforts in the field of communication for development and knowledge management for rural development. As for previous workshops, the focus will be on the identification and description of critical success factors as guidelines for practitioners.

Communication for development and knowledge management

Communication is a key component of agricultural and rural development. Sustainable development goals can only be achieved if knowledge and information are shared effectively and rural people are actively involved and motivated to reach success. The systematic use of communication can support development initiatives by: giving a voice to relevant stakeholders such as rural people, development workers, local authorities and national decision makers; fostering policy acceptance; mobilizing people for participation and action; conveying information for education and training; and disseminating new agricultural technology.

Experience has shown that knowledge is a key element of any development effort. Its use and application by project stakeholders can significantly shape the outcomes of a project. Agricultural producers in rural settings require information on input and production markets, weather, calamities etc., as well as on technology and

¹ The results of the workshop were summarized in the publication *Framework on effective rural communication for development*, Rome 2006.

quality standards. In addition they need the capacities to use information and to generate knowledge. Achieving further increases in productivity is greatly dependent on knowing how to fine-tune natural resource management and make judicious use of inputs.

A knowledge-intensive type of production also implies that those who provide support services are adequately skilled to respond to farmers needs and to keep abreast of market trends, and that more demand-oriented research, technology transfer and training are also required. Institutions, organizations and in particular development projects need efficient internal and external knowledge management: the knowledge base (data, information, experience and skills) needs to be analyzed, synthesized and made available in a systematic way to be productively put to use. Active knowledge management leads to increased efficiency and quality in planning and implementation of programmes.

Today the information and communication technologies (ICTs) such as the Internet and mobile telephones, have become a crucial force in world economic and social development and can significantly assist countries in addressing major obstacles in agriculture and rural development. Particularly in rural areas, which are characterized by a dearth of information and skills due to remoteness, poor infrastructure, low population density and lack of resources, they can significantly increase the possibilities for knowledge creation, sharing and dissemination. Knowledge transfer and sharing processes however, are far more complex than the simple transfer of information.

Existing knowledge is often not readily useful for solving local problems. Whether it is locally generated or acquired from global resources, knowledge must be shared and delivered to users in appropriate formats and channels that are relevant to them for solving their problems and making informed decisions. Everyone has to use knowledge that is specific to his or her own situation. While more knowledge is available, it is even more critical to develop local capacity to actually absorb and interpret this knowledge. Yet, knowledge is also an economic good that has a price and may be difficult to access. Therefore the question for rural dwellers in low-income countries is who generates and controls the relevant knowledge.

While access to an abundance of information and knowledge could not be possible without information technology, the key issues around communication and knowledge management, the rules, concepts and structures are not only about technology. **Communicating knowledge requires the conveying of insights, skills or experiences which cannot be simply communicated through a channel as facts or figures.**

There are basically two types of knowledge: **Tacit and Explicit. Tacit knowledge**, understood as “what each one of us knows... what is in our heads” but has not yet been captured in script or database format, is best transferred through “Communication”. It is estimated that on an average, only 1/3 of the transferred knowledge is “**explicit**” (captured), the rest basically occurs through oral communication or on-the-job training (implicit knowledge). Knowledge management is more disciplined about collecting and organizing what we need to know to make decisions, whereas communication is more focused on the exchange that takes place among people. Both are necessary and closely linked, especially nowadays that we are over-flooded with messages and key information but under supplied with meaningful, concise and well-organized information which will help us in decision making processes and project implementation.

Rationale

There is growing evidence of the lack of appropriate knowledge management and communication policies, structures and methodologies that respond to the needs of poor populations in remote rural areas, as well as a lack of adequate information and extension services. National agricultural research, extension and education systems need to increase effectiveness and capacities to respond to the technology and market needs of small-scale farmers. This requires the provision of effective knowledge-generation, management, communication and dissemination systems, aiming to strengthen links among farmers, researchers, extension workers, agri-business and communicators

Therefore, new policies have to be defined which integrate communication, knowledge management and rural infrastructure to best serve the needs of the agricultural and rural development actors. In particular, evidence of ‘policies in action’ and good practices should be further identified, evaluated and developed into feasible strategies. Issues to be discussed during the workshop include: review of existing policies, strengthening existing capacities, distribution of power, adequate technology and infrastructure, dissemination and documentation of traditional knowledge. Opportunities will be given to lesson learning from various organizations and networks active in the field.

Expected results

The expected results of the workshop are to:

- Give an overview on current methods, disciplines and good practices in knowledge management and communication for rural development.
- Create an understanding of how to implement knowledge management strategies in rural areas and within development programmes.
- Create the basis for a handbook/guidelines on Communication and knowledge management in rural areas (critical success factors, issues, strategies, information sources, cases) including an outline for IMARK module.
- Strengthen collaboration between experts and institutions participating in the workshop for further joint activities on communication and knowledge management for development.
- Set up a virtual community.
- Identify strategic approaches to mainstream Communication for Development principles and knowledge management practices in rural development projects.

Methodology

- Expert workshop with selected practitioners and invited resource persons
- Building on International scene (InfoDev, ODI, WB)
- Keynote presentations for an overview on the current state of the disciplines and concepts; as well as pointing out the limits of knowledge management for creating impetus and innovative spirit
- Peer assist space for identifying pressing issues and sharing experiences
- Working groups analyze issues and define critical success factors, challenges, objectives, links to other issues and good practices, as well as future scenarios
- Preparation of case studies and issues from participants (pre-workshop)
- Plenary sessions for consolidations of working group findings
- After-action review at the end of every day (in plenary)

Dates

From Monday 18 June (evening) to Friday 22 June 2007 (afternoon)

Participants are expected to be on site the evening of 18 June for team building exercise.

The workshop includes ½ day excursion in Umbria on good examples of KM and communication.

Organizers

FAO

Research and Extension Division,
Knowledge Exchange and Capacity Building Division

GTZ

Knowledge Systems in Rural Areas
BEAF
Knowledge Management

University of Perugia

Faculty of Agriculture

Location

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