



The Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), UK Department for International Development (DFID) and the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) undertook a study in 2001-2 to analyse the role of information in livelihoods, and make recommendations on how agencies can capitalise on and integrate the best elements of traditional communication methods and new information and communication (ICT) technologies within the livelihoods approach. This included a literature review and field trips to Ghana, Uganda and India.

Information and communication are recognised as essential components of the development process, yet these systems are rarely well integrated into development strategies and programmes. The rush to develop internet access in developing countries needs to be adjusted to the context of already established and effective communication systems, and attention needs to be paid to bridging the rural **digital divide** between those who can afford access to the new technologies and those who cannot.

Rural communities, their institutions, government and other agencies all have well developed local communication and information networks, and many people still trust what they can hear and see first hand above other information. Television and radio can reach a wide audience in many developing countries, and access to the internet is growing throughout the developing world. In addition to the current emphasis on extending technologies and internet access, consideration needs to be given to bringing in appropriate content such as that derived from communities' rich, vital and experiential knowledge of agriculture. The latter has always circulated in local informal networks, and new hybrid communication systems are needed which can integrate existing information and networks, to inform and be informed by the internet.

The study examined the role of communications and information in **livelihoods approaches**, which have emerged through debate over the last decade and are being adopted by governments and development agencies to eliminate poverty and increase food security in developing countries. The underlying principles are people-centred and reflect the diversity of poor people's livelihoods and the need to analyse these in a holistic manner. They stress the inter-relationship between community-level activities and the broader policy and institutional framework ("the rules of the game"). They recognise that people's priorities and opportunities change and that interventions which seek to reduce poverty must be dynamic and respond to these evolving

opportunities. The principles also acknowledge that "sustainability" encompasses economic, environmental, institutional and social parameters. Information and communication are critical components of livelihoods approaches, essential to supply the information required by the poor in order to make decisions on their livelihood strategies, and to supply information required by institutions responsible for making decisions about the policies and processes to support those strategies.

Improved communication and information alone however are not sufficient for improved livelihoods. Stakeholder participation in decision-making processes, and building multi-sectoral collaboration and partnerships between them are also crucial. This wide range of stakeholders, from farmer to international support agency, all have their own specific information needs and delivery preferences. Sustainable development and the elimination of poverty also demand attention to national political economic and social processes, international relations and trade.

The study found that information and communications systems were most likely to improve livelihoods in rural areas if they:

- **share costs** appropriately, between government for public goods information services and social protection, and users for private goods, and work in partnership with the private sector to ensure effective coverage in remote rural areas,
- ensure **equitable access** to all, especially women, the poor, the disabled, people living in remote areas and otherwise disadvantaged communities,
- contain a high proportion of **local or appropriately localised content**, both to maximise local usefulness and uptake, and to enrich local, national and international knowledge,
- build on **existing systems**, including information content (indigenous knowledge, local sources and databases etc), information technology (tv, radio, telephone, internet etc), processes (existing surveys, research and extension etc), and policy environment.
- **build capacity** at the local level to generate content and use new technologies, among intermediaries and knowledge brokers, practitioners and policy makers,
- use **realistic technologies**, which can be used easily, managed and maintained, integrate existing and new technologies and are affordable,
- build **knowledge partnerships** between knowledge users, producers and intermediaries at and across all levels to convert information into useful knowledge.



## A Collaborative Programme for Evidence Based Policy and Operational Frameworks for Knowledge Systems in Support of Rural Livelihoods

Provision of information and knowledge services are recognised as essential components of the development process to empower poor communities, enhance skills, inform development agencies and policy makers, and for linking and informing decision-making processes at every level. Recent advances in information and communication technologies have created new opportunities to accelerate this process. However, information and communication systems are rarely well integrated into development strategies and programmes.

The Collaborative Programme for Evidence Based Policy and Operational Frameworks for Knowledge Systems in Support of Rural Livelihoods will address these issues for rural areas at two levels – one, the policy environment and two at the operational level.

The programme builds on a recent DFID/FAO/ODI collaboration that explored livelihoods approaches to information and communication, and made recommendations on practical issues to address policy and institutional constraints in this area. The proposed work would further the existing work and partnership, and would draw upon World Bank and FAO work on Agricultural Knowledge and Information Systems (AKIS) and on all three partners' experience with Poverty Reduction Strategy Plans (PRSP). It will enable the three organizations to develop a common framework and approaches for rural information and communications at the policy and operational levels.

Between September 2003 and March 2004, FAO, DFID, the World Bank and ODI will pursue a process of consultation and dialogue with internal and external stakeholders, assemble evidence and opinion from centres of international expertise, and commission studies to fill identified gaps in knowledge and understanding. This will include field missions to Vietnam and Armenia, and locally contracted country studies in Mali and Equador.

The principal objective of the preparatory phase will be to develop a plan for a 3-5 year collaborative programme which, wherever possible, exploits and collaborates with existing development projects and programmes, particularly those developed and/or managed by FAO, DFID and the World Bank.

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