Cooperatives and the Role of Information and Communication Technologies ICTs

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Introduction

Agricultural Cooperatives includes all types of farmer organizations:

- Agricultural producers.
- Forest users.
- Livestock raisers.
- Fisher folk.

They play a fundamental role in:

- Rural employment generation.
- Poverty alleviation.
- Food security.

Agricultural cooperatives are often weak due to the lack of an enabling environment.
FAO activities in implementing IYC

- FAO is the lead Agency promoting agriculture sector cooperatives within the IYC.
- FAO works closely with the RBAs, DESA, COPAC, ILO and ICA
- FAO participated in the launch of the IYC – October 2011.
- FAO held several events to support the year such as:
  - Side event “Agricultural Cooperatives: a means to achieving food security” on 31 October 2011.
  - Side event in the margins of the 56th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women in March 2012.
- FAO is planning to hold a multi-stakeholder session on “Farmers and enabling environment “ during the upcoming General Assembly of the WFO.
- FAO has chosen “Agricultural cooperatives: Key for feeding the world” as the theme for World Food Day.
The e-Agriculture Community of Practice lead by FAO was launched in 2007 and has grown to over 6,000 member in more that 150 countries;

- FAO itself has experienced successful implementation of the Bridging the Rural Digital Divide Programme;

- FAO and partners formed a global initiative known as Coherence in Information for Agricultural Research for Development (CIARD).
Other ICT initiatives that help with food security are:

- Global Online Research on Agriculture program (AGORA)
- Information Management Resource Kit (IMARK) e-learning initiative, the EC/FAO Programme on Linking Information and Decision Making to Improve Food Security”.
- Youth in Agriculture Blog Competition (YoBloCo Awards)
- Widespread use of Mobile Telephony in rural areas
Agricultural Cooperatives and ICTs

The types of services offered can be grouped into 4 main categories:

- Enhanced access to and management of natural resources.
- Access to input and output markets.
- Improved access to information, knowledge and capacity building.
- Enhanced voice in policy making.
Agricultural cooperatives can function more efficient by using ICTs and providing a series of benefits, such as:

- Enhanced connections between members.
- Improved accounting and administration.
Case studies of the use of ICTs in cooperatives
Kenya: Through mobile phone-based money transfer (MMT) services, farmers can receive funds to invest.
India: The Self-Employed Women’s Association (SEWA) establishes Community Learning Centers (CLCs)
**Niger:** The community listeners clubs mobilized more than 6,000 women and men and involved 9 community radio stations.
Rwanda: Procedure for registration is long. The RCA has made effort to facilitate the registration process.
Recommendations

- Establishment of an enabling environment including a legal, policy, business environment and participatory frameworks.

- *Training in the use of and application of ICTs in particular women and youth.*

- *Participatory needs assessments need to be carried out.*

- *Awareness needs to be raised on the benefit of ICTs.*

- *Address the crucial challenge of sustainability of the ICT’s projects.*

- *Governments and key donors should scale up the activities that have worked.*