



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.



FAO and ICT's

- The  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 e “**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



GOOD PRACTICES IN BUILDING INNOVATIVE RURAL INSTITUTIONS TO INCREASE FOOD SECURITY



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.



A dynamic facilitation process: bringing networking to life.



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.***

