

**27th Session of the Committee on Agriculture**

**Item 2.11: Enabling smallholders and family farmers to access appropriate innovation, information systems and advisory services for sustainable agrifood systems**

**Introduction notes**

Access to appropriate innovation, information and advisory services by smallholders and family farmers is vital in transforming agriculture and food systems and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), in the context of the UN Decade of Family Farming (2019–2028). The key challenges around access to innovation, information and advisory services are availability, affordability and relevancy. The development and use of innovation and information are constrained by the gap between the service providers and users, and the fragmented and broken linkages between agricultural research, extension and farmers, as well as absence of institutional mechanism to bring them all together. This leads to a large number of smallholder farmers worldwide, especially women, lacking awareness and access to such information and innovation. In fact, it is estimated that more than 75% of family farmers worldwide have no access to reliable advisory services.

Extension and Advisory Services (EAS) play a critical role in improving access, bridging the gap between information provision and use, and to reach the most vulnerable farmers and delivering the last mile in order to “leave no-one behind”. However, EAS actors consistently challenged by rapidly dwindling investment, insufficient technical capacity, and lack of infrastructures and reform, while demand and functions for EAS is expanding rapidly to provide necessary support to farmers in many developing countries. A number of actions need to be taken to address the gaps: (i) develop the technical, organizational and management skills of EAS and necessary infrastructure to better deliver services, (ii) reorient innovation, information and advisory services in order to build resilient agrifood systems, (iii) increase investment and promote institutional reform to meet emerging needs, (iv) assess EAS performance and provide evidence to develop an enabling environment, and (v) develop programmes to understand farmers’ demands and facilitate the co-creation of innovative practices.

FAO is playing an important role in providing policy recommendations, guidelines and tools to overcome these challenges and assist Members by bridging the gap and making information and advisory services inclusive, relevant, accessible, and affordable to smallholders and family farmers. In order to improve the support in the context of complex globalized setting, such as market dynamics, digitalization and climate change, strengthening FAO’s capacity at headquarters and decentralized offices is critical to realizing its full potential.

The Committee is invited to:

- Provide guidance on renewed directions to strengthen the efforts to bridge the gap between information generation, service provision and use by smallholder family farmers, to help accelerate progress in achieving the Agenda 2030 Sustainable Development Goals and in implementing the UN Decade of Family Farming.
- Encourage Members to reform their information, innovation and extension and advisory service (EAS) systems, taking account of emerging issues and new developments with greater understanding of farmers’ needs.
- Recommend that Members and concerned stakeholders enable inclusive access to innovation, information and advisory services by smallholder family farmers and improve participation of farmers and all relevant actors of EAS in the co-creation of innovative practices, information and knowledge for decision-making.

*Selvaraju Ramasamy, Senior Agricultural Officer & Head, Research and Extension Unit, OINR*