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Unlocking sustainable food systems through inclusive Rural Communication Services

Agriculture today is increasingly knowledge-intensive, and rural communities need timely, accessible and relevant information to thrive – particularly on climate adaptation, food markets, and agricultural innovations. **Inclusive Rural Communications Services (RCS)** play an important role in delivering this knowledge, helping farmers work together, make informed choices and build sustainable agrifood systems.^{1,2} By responding to diverse needs, RCS can foster mutual learning, strengthen social inclusion and create vital linkages between rural institutions and communities.

FAO works with partner institutions, including the International Association for Media and Communication Research (IAMCR), to build a robust evidence-base for RCS approaches, and help institutionalize them into family farming policies and programmes.^{3,4} FAO also closely collaborates with academia, farmer organizations and rural institutions through studies, consultations, and efforts to build actionable insights. These partnerships have been put into practice and further strengthened through three regional Communication for Development (ComDev) initiatives – [ComDev Asia](#), [YenKasa Africa](#), and [Onda Rural](#) – which leverage community media, research and stakeholder engagement for inclusive RCS.

► Evidence from the field

Different types of RCS are being deployed globally to tackle development challenges and create new opportunities through innovative, inclusive, low-cost communication solutions and services.

Bangladesh – Krishi Radio for climate resilience

Broadcasting daily across 12 upazilas in southern Bangladesh, Krishi Radio grew from 75 000 daily listeners in 2015 to over 250 000 by 2021. It delivers critical advisories on weather, market prices, and climate-resilient practices – especially vital in cyclone-prone regions. Its participatory model includes 25 listener groups, live call-ins, and community volunteer training, ensuring local voices shape programming.

India – Digital Green’s participatory video and AI

Digital Green shares local innovations through community-based video – a scalable, low-cost method helping rural households adopt sustainable practices. Integrated into India’s national advisory services, Digital Green strengthens public extension systems, promotes ecological stewardship, and is now use in several African countries with AI services like Farmer.Chat, which delivers personalized advice in local languages.⁵



Costa Rica – Farmer-led environmental services

Over 1 000 farmers are driving soil recarbonization and seed conservation under Costa Rica’s National Plan for Family Farming, using locally adapted media to translate technical knowledge into community action. These efforts have strengthened alliances among farmers, universities and development agencies, amplifying the role of family farmers in sustaining ecosystems services.

Mexico – Community-owned telecoms boost inclusion

In Oaxaca, Indigenous Peoples-owned community networks are providing affordable 2G services to over 60 villages, with legal reforms, including Indigenous Social Use Concessions, embedding them into national policy. The Wiki Katat initiative is combining national infrastructure with community-led delivery to expand 4G services, while investments in intranet platforms and digital training – especially for women and youth – are boosting entrepreneurship and cultural identity.⁶

Somalia – Rural radio for emergency response

FAO has aired over 110 distance-learning radio programmes in local languages via 21 stations in Somalia since 2020, reaching 750 000 to 900 000 weekly listeners. Aligned with seasonal calendars, they offer guidance on agriculture, fisheries, nutrition and climate-smart practices – with surveys showing a 96 percent uptake from listeners. The initiative now underpins Somalia’s Climate Change Adaptation Communication Strategy, linking early-warning data with community voices.

RCS matter for sustainable food systems

As countries move towards more resilient and equitable agrifood systems, RCS should be treated as a cross-cutting priority in both policy and programme design, supported by well-defined services and institutional structures to ensure their long-term sustainability. When institutionalized, RCS:

- ▶ Enhance agricultural innovation systems
- ▶ Promote economic and social inclusion
- ▶ Support environmental services and climate resilience
- ▶ Strengthen emergency response mechanisms

RCS operate across **three key dimensions**:



Policy and programme – Ensuring farmers’ voices shape inclusive policies.



Institutional and organizational – Coordinating communication systems for timely, relevant information.



Socio-cultural – Facilitating two-way communication and community engagement.

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For more information:  <https://www.fao.org/communication-for-development>  comdev@fao.org

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