Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

United Nations Decade of FAMILY FARMING 2019-2028

Rural communication services for family farming in Asia and the Pacific

Regional consultation and forum

Rural communication services for family farming in Asia and the Pacific

Regional consultation and forum

Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
Rome, 2024

Required citation:

FAO. 2024. *Rural communication services for family farming in Asia and the Pacific – Regional consultation and forum.* Rome. https://doi.org/10.4060/cc9261en

The designations employed and the presentation of material in this information product do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) concerning the legal or development status of any country, territory, city or area or of its authorities, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries. The mention of specific companies or products of manufacturers, whether or not these have been patented, does not imply that these have been endorsed or recommended by FAO in preference to others of a similar nature that are not mentioned.

ISBN 978-92-5-138518-0

© FAO, 2024

Some rights reserved. This work is made available under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-Share Alike 3.0 IGO licence (CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 IGO; https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/3.0/igo/legalcode).

Under the terms of this licence, this work may be copied, redistributed and adapted for non-commercial purposes, provided that the work is appropriately cited. In any use of this work, there should be no suggestion that FAO endorses any specific organization, products or services. The use of the FAO logo is not permitted. If the work is adapted, then it must be licensed under the same or equivalent Creative Commons licence. If a translation of this work is created, it must include the following disclaimer along with the required citation: "This translation was not created by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO). FAO is not responsible for the content or accuracy of this translation. The original [Language] edition shall be the authoritative edition."

Disputes arising under the licence that cannot be settled amicably will be resolved by mediation and arbitration as described in Article 8 of the licence except as otherwise provided herein. The applicable mediation rules will be the mediation rules of the World Intellectual Property Organization http://www.wipo.int/amc/en/mediation/rules and any arbitration will be conducted in accordance with the Arbitration Rules of the United Nations Commission on International Trade Law (UNCITRAL).

Third-party materials. Users wishing to reuse material from this work that is attributed to a third party, such as tables, figures or images, are responsible for determining whether permission is needed for that reuse and for obtaining permission from the copyright holder. The risk of claims resulting from infringement of any third-party-owned component in the work rests solely with the user.

Sales, rights and licensing. FAO information products are available on the FAO website (www.fao.org/publications) and can be purchased through publications-sales@fao.org. Requests for commercial use should be submitted via: www.fao.org/contact-us/licence-request. Queries regarding rights and licensing should be submitted to: copyright@fao.org.

Cover photograph: ©AFA

Design and layout: studio Pietro Bartoleschi

Contents

Preface v
Acknowledgements vi
Abbreviations vii
Executive summary ix

CHAPTER 1
Regional consultation and forum on rural communication services for family farming in asia and the pacific 1
1.1 ComDev Asia and the United Nations Decade of Family Farming 1
1.2 Mainstreaming rural communication services for family farming in Asia and the Pacific 2
1.3 Consultative process and studies on rural communication services in Asia and the Pacific 3
1.4 The regional forum on rural communication services 5

CHAPTER 2
Results of the regional forum on rcs in asia and the pacific 7
2.1 Trends in rural communication services policies and appropriation in Asia and the Pacific 7
2.2 Lessons learned 9
2.3 RCS perspectives in Asia and the Pacific: main conclusions 13

CHAPTER 3
Advancing rcs in asia and the pacific: Recommendations and the way forward 15
3.1 Advancing RCS for family farming: recommendations and the way forward 15
3.1.1 Priorities to advance RCS for family farming in Asia and the Pacific 15
3.1.2 Needs and opportunities to support RCS for family farming through policies and programmes 17
3.1.3 Next steps and follow-up activities 20
3.2 Roadmap and key recommendations 21
3.3 Closing remarks 24

Annex I. Technical webinar documentation report 25
Annex II. Regional forum agenda 39
Annex III. List of participants 40

Figures, tables and boxes

Figures

1. Rural communication services framework 3
2. Consultative process on RCS 4
3. RCS policies and trends 7
4. RCS ways forward 7
5. Trends in RCS appropriation 8
6. Lessons learned, Krishi Radio 10
7. Lessons learned, Digital Green 11
8. Lessons learned, SEWA Cooperative Federation 12
9. Three key themes on trends and perspectives 13
10. Priorities to advance RCS in the Asia and the Pacific region 15
11. Needs and opportunities to support family farming policies and programmes 17
12. Follow-up activities in mainstreaming RCS 20
13. Key recommendations 21
14. Roadmap: ComDev Asia activities and follow-up actions 21

A1.1 Poll: What is/are your preferred mechanisms/channels for knowledge sharing and collaboration? 34

Table

A1.1 Webinar programme 26

Boxes

1. Krishi Radio: reaching the most marginalized farmers through low-cost, scalable mediums 9
2. Digital Green: community-based video approach to agriculture 10
3. SEWA Cooperative Federation's digital interventions: conquering the gender digital divide one women's cooperative at a time 11
4. India's experience in advancing RCS for women farmers 18
5. The importance of RCS and RCS progress in Asia and the Pacific 19
6. ComDev Asia Radio Initiative 22
7. ComDev Asia Community of practice 23

Preface

Communication is a key factor and an asset in the rural transformations currently affecting family farming and food systems. The United Nations Decade of Family Farming (UNDFF 2019–2028) Global Action Plan calls for rural communication services (RCS) to be part of family farming policies and programmes and to be delivered in a sustained and inclusive manner.

RCS is a working definition that includes a wide range of demand-led communication processes, activities, media applications and institutional arrangements utilized to respond to the communication needs of family farmers and the rural population at large in a sustained and inclusive manner. To help advance RCS, ComDev Asia (CDA) was established as a regional communication initiative promoted by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), comprising farmer organizations, communication entities and networks and development institutions operating in Asia and the Pacific. In line with the UNDFF Global Action Plan, CDA implements a participatory communication plan (PCP), which includes the following lines of work: i) participatory communication, awareness-raising and engagement in family farming; ii) enhancing the communication capacity of farmer organizations; and iii) promoting rural communication services.

Within this context, CDA organized the virtual Regional Forum on RCS for Family Farming in Asia and the Pacific, held on 28 June 2022. The event was part of a consultative and interactive process consisting of a series of regional fora in Asia, Africa and Latin America, culminating in a global UNDFF forum on RCS for family farming, held on 11 July 2022.

The CDA regional RCS forum aimed to engage key stakeholders in discussing trends and experiences in the appropriation of media and ICTs for family farming and discussing how to promote RCS in the region as part of the UNDFF process. Representatives of farmer organizations, community media, communication practitioners, rural institutions and development agencies participated in the forum. The conclusions and recommendations of the forum offer a clear path to continue advancing RCS in Asia and the Pacific.

Acknowledgements

The Regional Forum on RCS in Asia and the Pacific was organized by ComDev Asia (CDA), a regional initiative facilitated by the College of Development Communication of the University of the Philippines Los Baños (UPLB-CDC). The initiative promotes Communication for Development (ComDev) in agriculture and rural development in Asia and the Pacific, with the technical and financial contribution of FAO. Members of the CDA Steering Committee – including the Asian Farmers' Association (AFA), the World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters (AMARC), Digital Green, the Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA), and FAO – actively supported the consultation and forum.

The present report was coordinated by Rosa Pilipinas Francisco (UPLB-CDC), Zane Andrei Cortez (UPLB-CDC) and Silvia San Marco (FAO), under the technical supervision of Mario Acunzo (FAO) and Maria Stella C. Tirol (UPLB-CDC). Thanks are due to Juvy Gopela, Anna Mae Restauro and Livia Giasinta for their support as writers and documenters; to the forum facilitator, Ryan Jay Galang (UPLB-CDC); and to Elena Cerrai (FAO) for social media coverage. Special thanks also go to Mario Acunzo for his final revision of the report and to Paoloregel Samonte and Dianne Berest for editing and proofreading.

Abbreviations

AFA	Asian Farmers' Association for Sustainable Rural Development
AMARC Asia-Pacific	World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters Asia-Pacific
CDA	ComDev Asia
ComDev	Communication for Development
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
GAP	Global Action Plan
ICT	information and communication technology
NAP	national action plan
NGO	non-governmental organization
PCP	participatory communication plan
UN	United Nations
UNDFF	United Nations Decade of Family Farming
UPLB-CDC	University of the Philippines Los Baños – College of Development Communication
RCS	rural communication services
SCF	SEWA Cooperative Federation
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SEWA	Self Employed Women's Association

©Digital Green

Executive summary

The United Nations Decade of Family Farming (UNDFF, 2019–2028) aims to unleash the potential of family farmers as key agents of change in transforming food systems in the context of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Outcome 4.4 of the UNDFF Global Action Plan (GAP) calls for improved communication and ICT capacities and services and increased awareness of the roles of family farmers and the challenges they face.

As the UNDFF calls for family farming policies, programmes and national action plans to include the sustained and inclusive delivery of rural communication services, ComDev Asia (CDA) is undertaking research and consultative processes with communication specialists, farmer organizations, rural institutions and governments. In 2022, to generate insights and garner consensus in this field, the consultative process included an assessment of current trends and experiences in applying RCS in Asia and the Pacific, as well as a series of seminars and an online community of practice.

On 28 June 2022, the CDA Steering Committee organized the Regional Forum on RCS for Family Farming in Asia and the Pacific to develop recommendations for the advancement and promotion of RCS in the region. The forum was co-organized by CDA partners from the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the College of Development Communication of the University of the Philippines Los Baños (CDC-UPLB), Digital Green, the Asian Farmers Association for Sustainable Rural Development (AFA), the Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA) and the World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters (AMARC). Participants included representatives from government agencies, academia, farmer organizations, rural institutions and community media.

At the forum, the RCS concept was introduced, findings were presented on RCS trends in policies, and the appropriation of RCS for family farming was highlighted through three case studies. The high point of the forum was a panel discussion wherein the following key recommendations for advancing inclusive RCS for family farming were agreed upon:

- Map the availability of, access to and gaps in communication services for family farmers through participatory needs assessment.
- Integrate communication strategies in national action plans (NAPs) and family farming policies.
- Collect evidence of RCS and advocate for policies to advance RCS, recognizing the role of community media and radio, and obtaining adequate infrastructure and investment for RCS.

- Promote capacity-building programmes in digital literacy.
- Jointly design communication technologies with communities, including developing RCS materials in local languages and dialects.
- Build RCS capacities among agricultural extension workers.

Finally, a proposal for CDA activities and follow-up actions was discussed as a roadmap towards implementing the key recommendations from the panel discussion, highlighting the importance of promoting RCS to meet farmers' needs and ensure their active participation using participatory methodologies and blended media.

©Community Radio Sagar Giri, Bangladesh

Chapter 1

Regional consultation and forum on rural communication services for family farming in Asia and the Pacific

1.1 ComDev Asia and the United Nations Decade of Family Farming

The United Nations Decade of Family Farming (UNDFF, 2019–2028) aims to unleash the potential of family farmers as key agents of change to transform food systems in the context of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The UNDFF serves as a framework for countries to promote integrated actions and cross-sectoral policies addressing environmental, economic and social issues that will place family farmers and their organizations at centre stage.

Communication is essential to meeting UNDFF objectives, particularly in raising public awareness of the important role family farmers play in achieving food security and the SDGs, involving stakeholders and facilitating dialogue and concerted action towards improved policies and programmes, sharing knowledge and information, and improving access to development opportunities. Within the UNDFF Global Action Plan (GAP), Pillar 4 focuses on strengthening the capacities of farmer organizations to generate knowledge, represent their members and deliver inclusive services in the urban-rural continuum. More specifically, GAP Outcome 4.4 calls for improved capacities and services in communication and in information and communication technologies (ICTs), and increased awareness of the role of family farmers and the challenges they face.

In support of the achievement of UNDFF GAP Outcome 4.4, ComDev Asia (CDA), a regional initiative that promotes communication for development (ComDev) in agriculture and rural development in Asia and the Pacific, was founded. Promoted by FAO and facilitated by the University of the Philippines Los Baños – College of Development Communication (UPLB-CDC), CDA aims to build ComDev capacities and to support rural communication policies and services in the region. The initiative includes a web platform (www.comdevasia.org),

a Facebook page (ComDev Asia), and a Twitter account (@comdevasia2019). The CDA website offers a variety of publications, resources and learning opportunities related to ComDev and family farming in Asia. Similarly, the Facebook and Twitter pages allow interaction among practitioners and network members on priority issues.

As part of its contribution to the UNDFF 2019–2028, CDA supports the regional Participatory Communication Plan (PCP) for family farming, which is aligned with UNDFF GAP Outcome 4.4 and includes three lines of action: i) participatory communication and awareness-raising on family farming; ii) enhancing the communication capacities of farmer organizations; and iii) promoting rural communication services (RCS). The PCP encourages the use of communication strategies and services and the local appropriation ICTs to advance family farming, natural resource management, climate change adaptation, agricultural innovation and the development of options for rural women and youth.

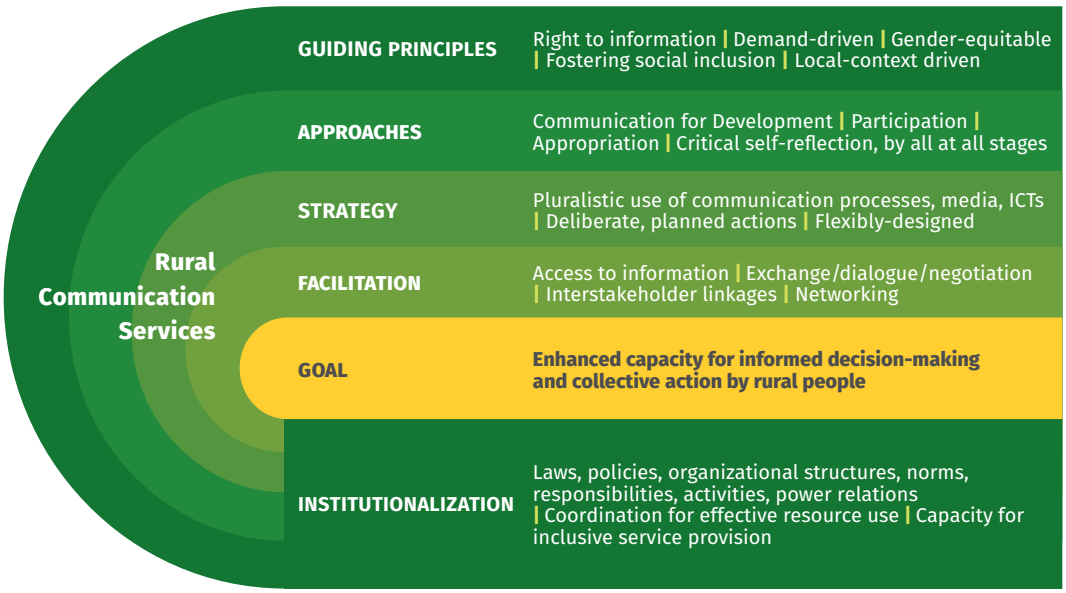
1.2 Mainstreaming rural communication services for family farming in Asia and the Pacific

The participatory communication plans (PCPs) launched by CDA and the two other regional communication initiatives (in Africa and Latin America) in the context of the UNDFF have the common goal of contributing to the design and implementation of farmer-centred RCS and promoting enhanced capacities and conducive policies for RCS.

The institutionalization of RCS as part of family farming policies and programmes also entails the recognition of: a) the role of community media and other local service providers; b) the need to enhance the communication capacities of farmer organizations; and c) the importance of generating evidence for mainstreaming RCS in family farming policies and programmes. An important dimension of this work is the documentation of experiences of RCS appropriation by family farmers and their organizations, comprising local media and ICTs, and the assessment of options for upscaling local initiatives.

The RCS framework (Figure 1) is a rights-based, participatory communication approach that aims to enhance the capacity of rural people for informed decision-making and collective action. RCS begins by identifying rural people's communication needs, exploring options for the use and convergence of media, and establishing institutional arrangements and partnerships to allow the inclusive design and delivery of RCS. As indicated by Mario Acunzo, FAO ComDev team leader, during his intervention at the forum, RCS provides a framework for mainstreaming communication activities to advance family farming. The framework allows for the negotiation and design of family farming communication services required by rural stakeholders, who participate actively in the design and delivery of such services.

Figure 1. **Rural communication services framework**



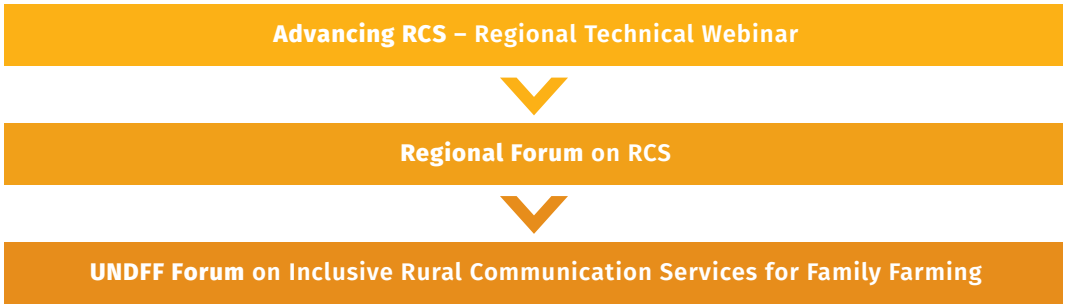
Source: FAO. (forthcoming). *Transforming rural Africa: Trends and experiences in rural communication services.* Rome.

To advance RCS for family farming and promote RCS as part of family farming policies and national action plans, CDA undertook research and consultative processes with the participation of communication specialists, farmer organizations, rural institutions and governments. The process included an assessment of current trends and experiences in applying RCS in Asia and the Pacific, a series of seminars, and the establishment of an online community of practice. CDA activities to support RCS will also cover two major dimensions: a) collecting evidence on communication and ICT appropriation by producer organizations in Asia and the Pacific to support the institutionalization of inclusive RCS; and b) supporting communication strategies for RCS in selected countries, together with capacity development among farmer organizations, community media and rural institutions.

1.3 Consultative process and studies on rural communication services in Asia and the Pacific

The Regional Forum on RCS for Family Farming was part of a consultative process comprising a series of regional webinars and consultations that culminated in a global UNDFF forum on RCS for family farming, held in July 2022. CDA has carried forward regional studies, surveys and consultations and organized ad hoc meetings to engage key stakeholders in the discussion on RCA trends and experiences, on the appropriation of media and ICTs for family farming, and on how to promote RCS in the region as part of the UNDFF process. Figure 2 provides a snapshot of this process.

Figure 2. **Consultative process on RCS**



Source: Authors' own elaboration.

On 7 June 2022, a virtual technical webinar was held for the Asia and the Pacific region to share the findings of the RCS study, validate the main conclusions, gather elements for policy recommendations, collect inputs regarding other priorities and needs, and identify mechanisms and actions (such as communities of practice) to steer exchange and collaboration and to gather evidence to advance inclusive RCS. Thirty-four specialists attended the webinar, including representatives from FAO headquarters, FAO Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific, UPLB-CDC, the Asian Farmers' Association for Sustainable Rural Development (AFA), Digital Green, Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA), SEWA Cooperative Federation, World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters Asia-Pacific (AMARC Asia-Pacific), Bangladesh NGOs Network for Radio and Communication, University of Reading, and AsiaDHRRA.

On 28 June 2022, the regional forum was conducted to discuss the conclusions of regional studies and agree upon recommendations and ways forward. The forum also aimed to generate conclusions and recommendations on RCS, garner consensus on improved mechanisms for collaboration and sharing through CDA, and identify entry points for RCS in the UNDFF processes underway in Asia and the Pacific.

The results of the technical webinar and regional forum contributed to the UNDFF Forum on Inclusive Rural Communication Services held on 11 July 2022, which brought together all three regional communication initiatives – CDA, from Asia and the Pacific; Yenkasa Africa from Africa; and Onda Rural, from Latin America; where the participants shared the findings of the regional consultations, developed recommendations for advancing RCS in the context of family farming policies and the UNDFF national action plans, and agreed on activities and next steps to foster collaboration and enhance capacities in this field.

1.4 The regional forum on rural communication services

The Regional Forum on RCS for Family Farming in Asia and the Pacific was held virtually on 28 June 2022. The objectives of the forum were to:

1. share the findings of a regional study on RCS in Asia and the Pacific, along with the conclusions and recommendations of the consultations held;
2. agree on recommendations for advancing RCS in Asia and the Pacific;
3. promote mechanisms for policy dialogue, knowledge sharing and collaboration on RCS;
4. promote the RCS agenda as part of the UNDFF process in Asia and the Pacific; and
5. define activities to support RCS as part of national action plans for family farming in selected countries.

Representatives of farmer organizations, governments, community media, communication practitioners, rural institutions and development agencies participated in the forum. The event was webcast on the CDA Facebook page. (The recording of the event can be viewed here.)

©CGIAR Climate

Chapter 2

Results of the regional forum on RCS in Asia and the Pacific

2.1 Trends in rural communication services policies and appropriation in Asia and the Pacific

Maria Stella Tirol, of the UPLB-CDC, discussed the trends in RCS policies and appropriation of RCS by family farmers in Asia and the Pacific, based on a study undertaken by CDA and Digital Green. The main trends identified were: inclusivity, decentralization and an enabling environment driven by ICT policies (see Figure 3).

Figure 3. **RCS policies and trends**

Transition from a top-down to a more inclusive policy approach

- There has been a shift towards a more farmer-centric approach as farmer groups have become more involved, and there is greater emphasis on the interests, information needs, local knowledge and experience of farmers.

Decentralization of extension systems

- The extension system was expanded to include multiple providers, comprising local government, farmer organizations and civil society groups.

Enabling environment driven by ICT policies

- Enabling factors led to rapid digitalization in Asia, primarily driven by four key principles for digital policymaking: a digital-first approach, involving stakeholders to bridge the digital divide, supporting and evolving ICT structure and launching ICT-based initiatives.

Source: Authors' own elaboration.

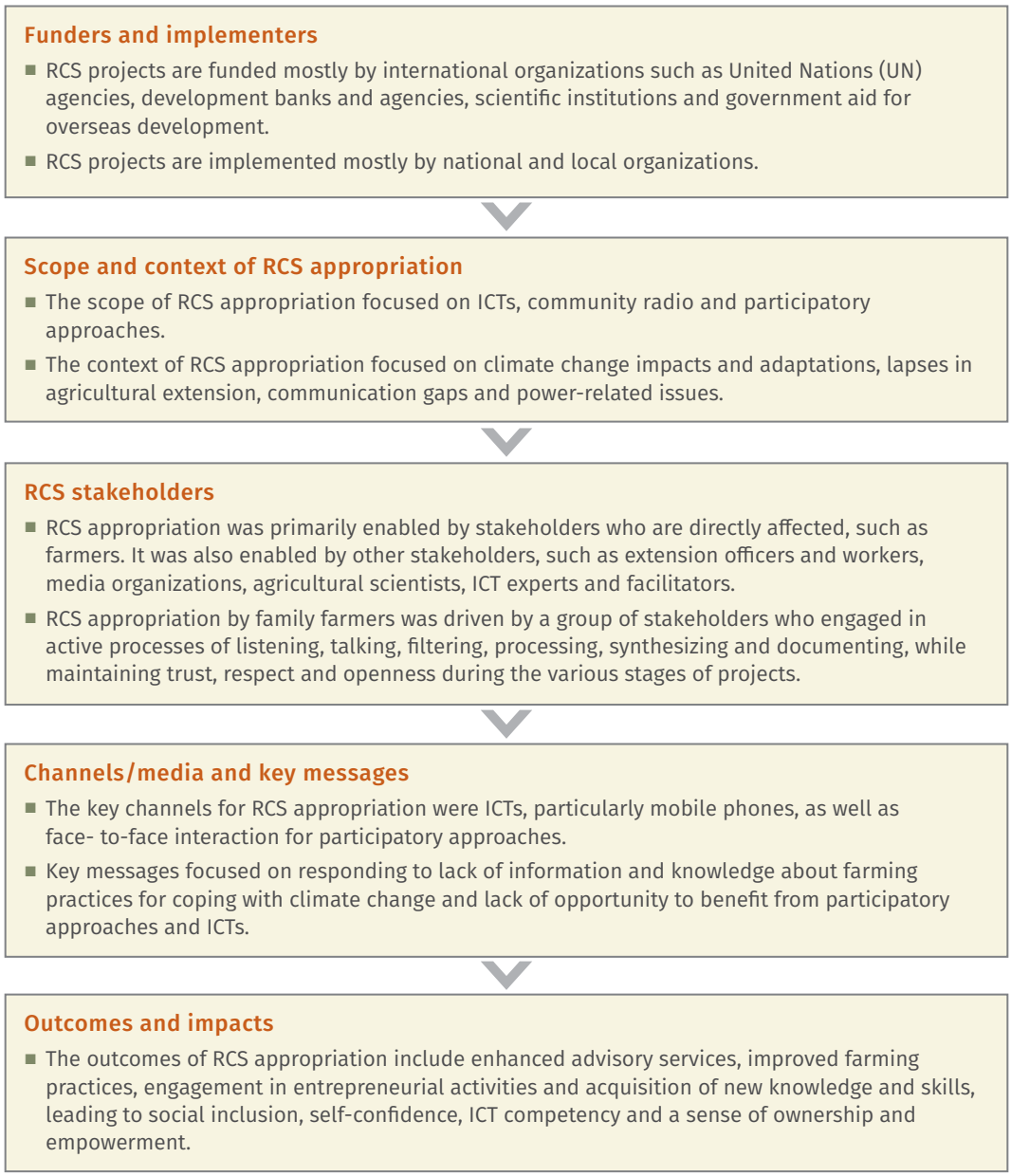
Given these findings, four recommendations were identified as ways forward (see Figure 4). Meanwhile, trends in the appropriation of RCS were determined through a desk study undertaken by UPLB-CDC, the findings of which are shown in Figure 5.[1]

[1] The desk study covered the following areas and countries in the region: Southeast Asia (Cambodia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Thailand, Timor-Leste, Viet Nam), South Asia (Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka) and the Pacific (Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu).

Figure 4. **RCS ways forward**

Source: Authors' own elaboration.

Figure 5. **Trends in RCS appropriation**



Source: Authors' own elaboration.

Based on these findings, Dr Tirol identified four key issues for RCS appropriation:

1. How participatory are RCS, given the various political settings in Asia and the Pacific?
2. Do farmers access, use and adopt knowledge and practices gained through ICTs?
3. How can programme and policy support be mobilized for underfunded and often neglected community media?
4. How is the current effort to institutionalize ComDev and RCS in agricultural development programmes going, particularly in family farming?

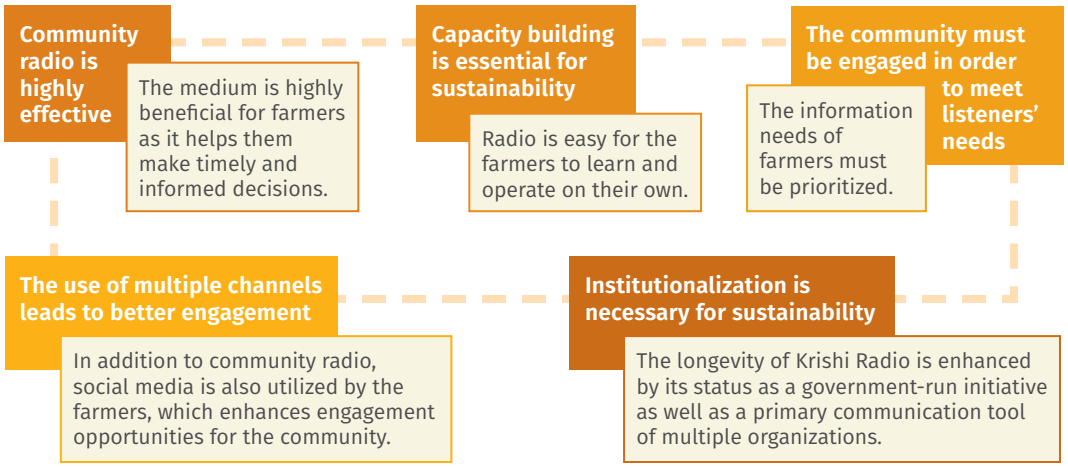
2.2 Lessons learned

Sanjeev Kumar, of Digital Green, led the next session on lessons learned from three case studies on RCS application in Asia and the Pacific. The case studies focused on Krishi Radio's community radio initiative (see Box 1 and Figure 6), Digital Green's community-based video approach (see Box 2 and Figure 7), and SEWA Cooperative Federation's digital interventions for women (see Box 3 and Figure 8). Mr Kumar pointed out that local context, low-cost media and holistic approaches work well in ensuring the active engagement of communities in RCS projects. He also noted that the essential role of women farmers in the RCS process was emphasized in the lessons learned from the case studies.

Box 1. Krishi Radio: reaching the most marginalized farmers through low-cost, scalable mediums

Krishi Radio was launched in January 2012 by the Agriculture Information Service as the only government community radio in Bangladesh. The medium's wide reach and engagement covers over 60 percent of community members within a 17-kilometer radius. Krishi Radio has been institutionalized and is the primary communication channel for multiple organizations, such as the Agriculture Office, the Fisheries Office and the NGO Nazrul Smriti Songsad.

Figure 6. **Lessons learned, Krishi Radio**



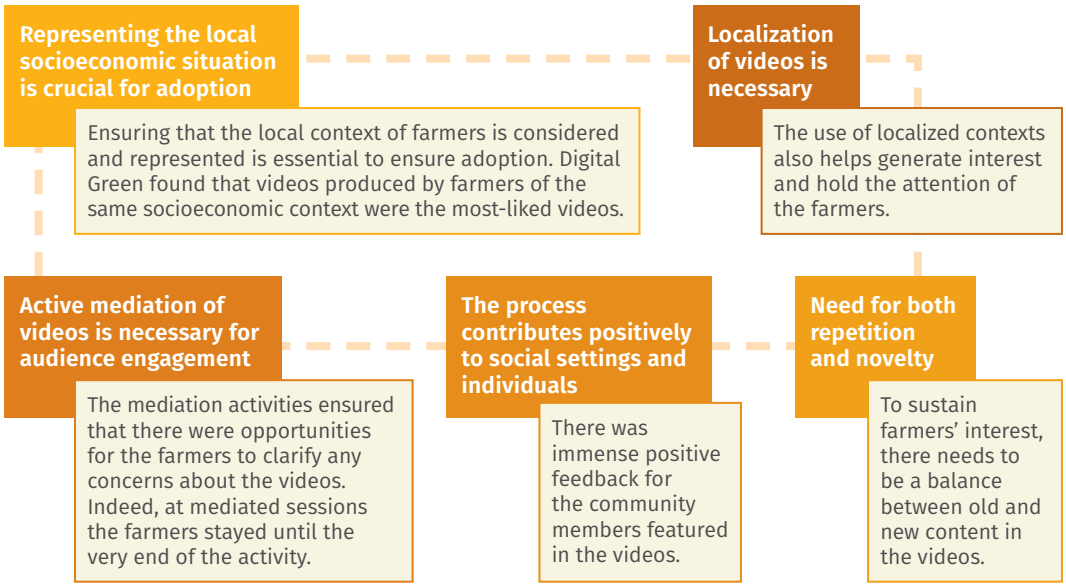
Source: Authors' own elaboration.

Box 2. Digital Green: community-based video approach to agriculture

Digital Green uses a community-based video approach to build the capacity of public and private extension systems to reach farming communities. The organization uses scientific knowledge that is integrated with localized and relevant information based on farmers' experiences. Its content is available in 50 languages. Digital Green's activities reached over 3 million farmers, most of them women farmers, and strengthened the agricultural extension system, with extension agents using community-based videos effectively. This initiative was supported by several champions and adopted by local government and institutions in India and elsewhere, which have shown significant interest in Digital Green's approach.

Mr Kumar also referred to how Digital Green's approach was used in policy development, indicating that the community video programmes were developed and disseminated extensively in close partnership with government institutions, from video development to dissemination. Digital Green also provides training on video development and has a collection of evidence that is shared with the government to be used for reference in policymaking.

Figure 7. **Lessons learned, Digital Green**

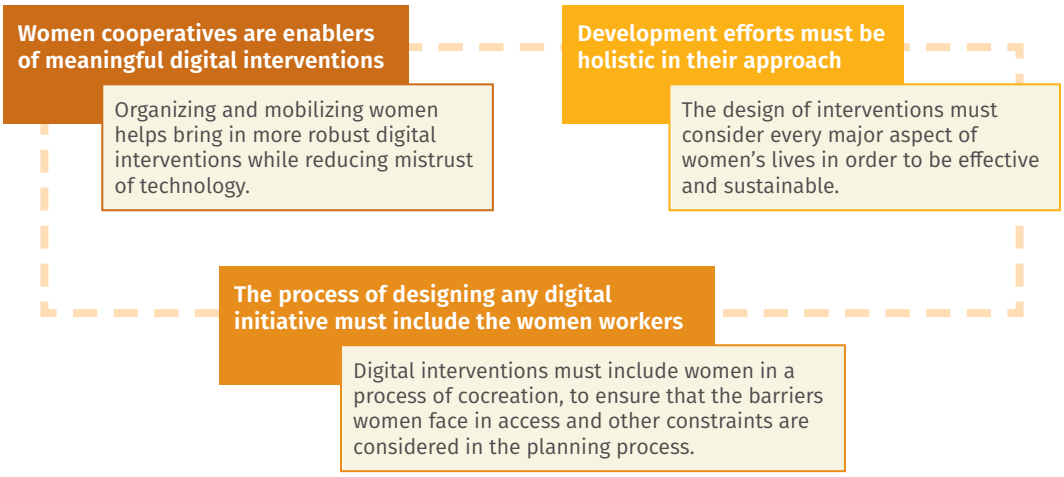


Source: Authors' own elaboration.

Box 3. SEWA Cooperative Federation's digital interventions: conquering the gender digital divide one women's cooperative at a time

The Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA) Cooperative Federation utilized a social media approach intended to make women become more digitally aware, using digital platforms, with WhatsApp being the platform most commonly used among their members. This social media platform is used as a tool to source demand for and sell farmers' produce, to purchase farm inputs, to provide weather updates, and to resolve several crop-related issues that the farmers experience. These digital interventions helped SEWA Cooperative Federation raise awareness regarding COVID-19 as well as promote market linkages. They were also used as communication platforms within the cooperatives and collectives. Additionally, they enabled the federation to reach informal women workers and paved the way for policy changes in relation to a national action plan for family farming.

Figure 8. **Lessons learned, SEWA Cooperative Federation**



Source: Authors' own elaboration.

Considering that women farmers contribute greatly to agricultural production but receive little recognition, Palak Gadhiya of the SEWA Cooperative Foundation emphasized the importance of organizing and mobilizing women farmers to make their contribution more visible and, thus, to foster their development and economic empowerment.

Dr Gadhiya also provided three additional recommendations for use of ICTs in RCS in the region:

1. Digital platforms must be easy to use and should be highly graphic so that users with low literacy levels or no can easily access and use them.
2. Considering internet connectivity issues and costs, technology that uses low data or less internet is preferable for rural users.
3. Ongoing research must be conducted to understand what works and what doesn't, so that people are served with better technological instruments, especially in rural areas.

2.3 RCS perspectives in Asia and the Pacific: main conclusions

The main conclusions regarding RCS trends and perspectives were presented by Silvia San Marco of FAO and Rosa Pilipinas Francisco of UPLB-CDC. Ms San Marco presented the conclusions under three key themes (see Figure 9):

Figure 9. **Three key themes on trends and perspectives**

Main trends

- More inclusive and demand-driven RCS
- Pluralistic approaches
- Introduction of ICTs, especially mobile phones, combined with community media and face-to-face
- Active processes of listening, talking, filtering, processing, synthesizing and documenting in projects
- Increased digitalization

Elements lacking

- Institutional frameworks and policies for RCS
- Guidelines on farmer participation and collaboration in RCS
- Assessing farmers' ICT access and use
- Planning communication strategies
- Delivering services based on farmers' actual ICT access and usage trends
- Digital literacy, ownership and inclusion, especially of women and youth
- Increased digitalization

Positive outcomes

- Enhancment of entrepreneurial capacity
- Farmer acquisition of ICT-related knowledge and skills
- Enhanced advisory services for farmers and improved sharing of farming practices
- Improved farming practices, including marketing

Source: Authors' own elaboration.

Rosa Pilipinas Francisco, of UPLB-CDC, facilitated the discussion regarding the main conclusions. During the discussion, a participant from the Philippines inquired about the possibility of a policy that would allow subsidies for digitalization. In response, Mario Acunzo (FAO) shared possible approaches for RCS inclusion. In terms of infrastructure, he indicated, the RCS framework should enable needs assessment as well as the documentation of experiences and ongoing initiatives in the agriculture sector, with the end goal of bringing together different initiatives and services and promoting adequate investment for inclusive RCS. Furthermore, it was mentioned that several countries have Universal Access Funds to allow the agriculture sector to make proposals to the concerned agencies to bridge the rural digital divide and to provide investments in services that should be prioritized in consultation with the farmer organizations. He added that there is a lack of technical capacity to generate proposals for RCS based on multistakeholder dialogue. This is why it is crucial to continue developing the RCS framework and methodology.

©AMARC Sangham Radio

Chapter 3

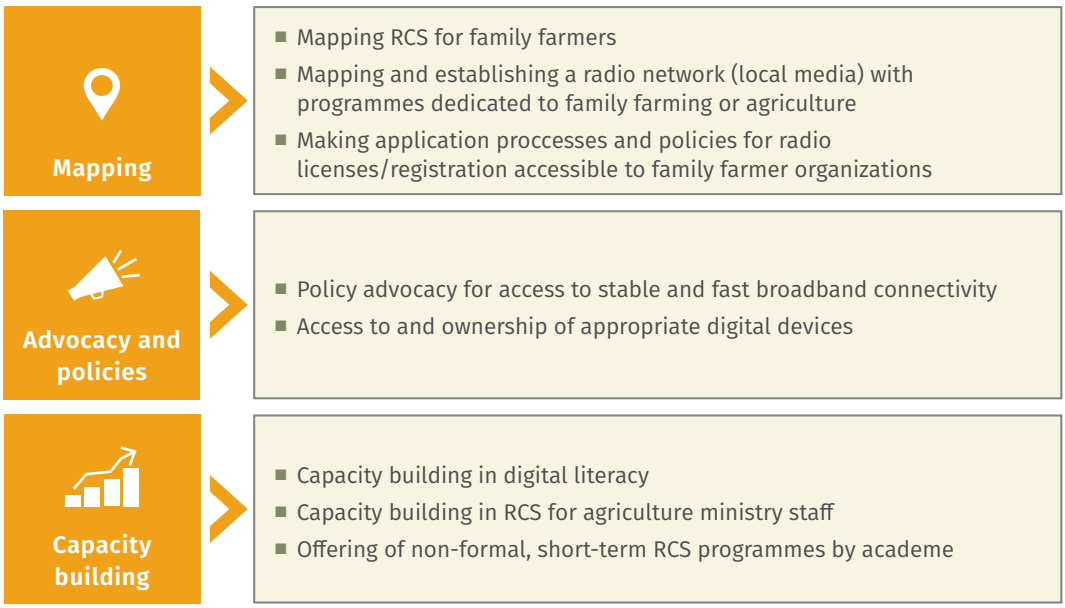
Advancing RCS in Asia and the Pacific: recommendations and the way forward

3.1 Advancing RCS for family farming: recommendations and the way forward

3.1.1 Priorities to advance RCS for family farming in Asia and the Pacific

RCS has a central role in supporting family farming. However, some gaps remain in the advancement of RCS, hampering its potential to reach family farmers and relevant stakeholders. Strategies for creating an enabling environment for RCS to fully support family farming were discussed by a panel, with Mario Acunzo serving as moderator. Figure 10 lists the priorities that were presented for advancing RCS in Asia and the Pacific.

Figure 10. **Priorities to advance RCS in the Asia and the Pacific**



Source: Authors' own elaboration.

Rosana Mula, of the Philippine Department of Agriculture – Agricultural Training Institute, mentioned that the bottleneck hampering the mainstreaming of RCS for family farming in national policies is the lack of ICT infrastructure (that is, connectivity) to support widespread implementation. This became especially challenging during the pandemic when training activities, extension advisory services and information dissemination activities needed to be reorganized using virtual means.

In addressing these challenges, the Agricultural Training Institute recognized the role of hybrid RCS, where more traditional media like community radio is complemented by web-based platforms, as well as the importance of materials in lingua franca or local dialects. Dr Mula was also keen to look into existing policies from other countries, which the Philippines could use as a reference for developing policy recommendations not only for agriculture but also for connectivity.

When asked about the possibility of a collaboration between the ministries of agriculture and telecommunications in the Philippines to address the needs of the agriculture sector in terms of infrastructure and investments, Dr Mula indicated that that is possible as they have already thought about exploring partnering with the Department of Information, Communication and Technologies, considering that lack of infrastructure is one of the key challenges they encountered in mainstreaming RCS for family farming. However, institutional changeovers must be taken into consideration, as different political leaderships may or may not support initiatives driven by data-based decision-making and connectivity.

©Technology Salon

3.1.2 Needs and opportunities to support RCS for family farming through policies and programmes

The regional forum allowed for the exploration of needs and opportunities to support RCS for family farming in policies and programmes. The following four recommendations were discussed (Figure 11):

Figure 11. **Needs and opportunities to support family farming policies and programmes**

Integration of communication strategy plans in national action plans

- National action plans (NAPs) address family farming from a holistic perspective by supporting the integration of family farming-related issues into national policies and programmes on food and on the wider agricultural, social and environmental, economic, and rural-development sectors (FAO, 2021). It is crucial that communication strategies be well-integrated in the NAPs so that communication will not be simply added-on to programme implementation.

Convergence between agriculture and media/telecom policies to advance RCS

- Since communication processes interact with other components within a system, agricultural information is affected by various components, including public media policies (Global Research Initiative for Rural Communication, 2017). It is important to create convergence between agriculture and media policies so as to advance RCS for family farming.

Codesigning communication technologies with communities

- At its core, communication for development is about empowering communities to become decision-makers with regard to their lives and their community agenda (FAO, 2016). Therefore, codesigning relevant communication technologies together with the communities is a key approach to mainstreaming RCS for family farming.

RCS materials in local languages

- It is necessary to deliver RCS materials in languages and formats that family farmers can easily understand and are familiar with (FAO, 2016).

Source: Authors' own elaboration.

To comment on and give further insights into the needs and opportunities, Megha Desai, Senior Coordinator of the Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA) India, and Pierre Ferrand, Agriculture Officer and Regional Focal Point for Family Farming at FAO Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific (FAORAP), were invited to the panel discussion.

Box 4. India's experience z advancing RCS for women farmers

SEWA is an organization representing 2.1 million women from 18 states of India that promotes full employment and self-reliance. SEWA treats women farmers as entrepreneurs and enterprise owners so that their agricultural activity is transformed from a subsistence and non-lucrative activity into a valuable and profitable enterprise.

Having begun with an agricultural campaign in 1995 aiming to address hunger among farmers, SEWA's approaches have developed into organizing farmers; building capacity; providing technical services; facilitating access to agricultural inputs, finance and markets; and forming economic enterprises. Approximately 80 percent of farmers in India are family farmers. They continue to face challenges such as limited land area and lack of access to resources (including financial resources) and to government schemes. Effective communication is vital to bringing them into the mainstream, and organizing is key for collective strength and visibility. SEWA uses various tools for rural communication, including participatory tools, and designs the tools considering the different cultures and languages of its members.

Data-based decision-making will help improve the condition of small farmers, but real-time data requires technology in the hands of women. SEWA uses various apps, including WhatsApp, Chatbot, Google Meet, and Zoom, to remain connected to the women and pass on and receive information and messages, and to conduct training. Some of the web-based tools SEWA utilizes are Ruri Sunday Shop, which connects the sales agents, customers and processing centres for agricultural produce; a financial tool that encourages women to save; and the SEWA App interface, which is used to exchange information with its members on their needs and demands and on government schemes that could help them.

The association also has a community radio station called Bali No Radio run by rural women trained in broadcasting, producing programmes, and running the station. Experiences of the rural community are aired in the programmes. SEWA produces programmes featuring agriculture, health care, government programmes, education, folk songs, traditional culture, etc. SEWA is now applying for a license renewal, and they expressed an appeal that the process be made simpler and more decentralized (that is, processed at the state level rather than the central level).

According to Megha Desai, Senior Coordinator of SEWA, SEWA uses social media platforms primarily to communicate with the younger generation. SEWA Manager School develops e-learning business modules that are widely accessible. SEWA also sets up community learning and business resource centres to reach out to rural communities, where they provide access to the internet.

Box 5. The importance of RCS and RCS progress in Asia and the Pacific

Pierre Ferrand, of the FAO Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific, shared insights on how RCS can address the challenges that family farmers continue to face in ensuring food security and building sustainable food systems. These challenges include low productivity and inadequate access to natural resources, production inputs, markets and information. Ferrand indicated that RCS plays a critical role and enhances the efforts deployed by policymakers, family farmer organizations and other relevant stakeholders.

RCS also helps promote family farming among the general public and farming communities through awareness raising and communication campaigns. In this manner, the contribution of family farmers to ensuring food security and sustainable development, as well as their role as frontliners during the COVID-19 crisis, are being highlighted.

Moreover, Ferrand emphasized how RCS can support the dissemination of relevant information about policies and plans being adopted to promote family farming in the context of UNDFF. In countries where NAPs have been adopted, RCS can help in reaching out to farmers, increasing awareness of what is being implemented, and providing them with guidance on how to be fully involved in ongoing processes. In this regard, RCS is an enabling factor for fostering full inclusion of the different stakeholders in national-level processes such as NAP development.

Progress to date on UNDFF implementation in Asia and the Pacific and on the goal of developing 100 national plans for family farming by 2024 includes:

The association also has a community radio station called Bali No Radio run by rural women trained in broadcasting, producing programmes, and running the station. Experiences of the rural community are aired in the programmes. SEWA produces programmes featuring agriculture, health care, government programmes, education, folk songs, traditional culture, etc. SEWA is now applying for a license renewal, and they expressed an appeal that the process be made simpler and more decentralized (that is, processed at the state level rather than the central level).

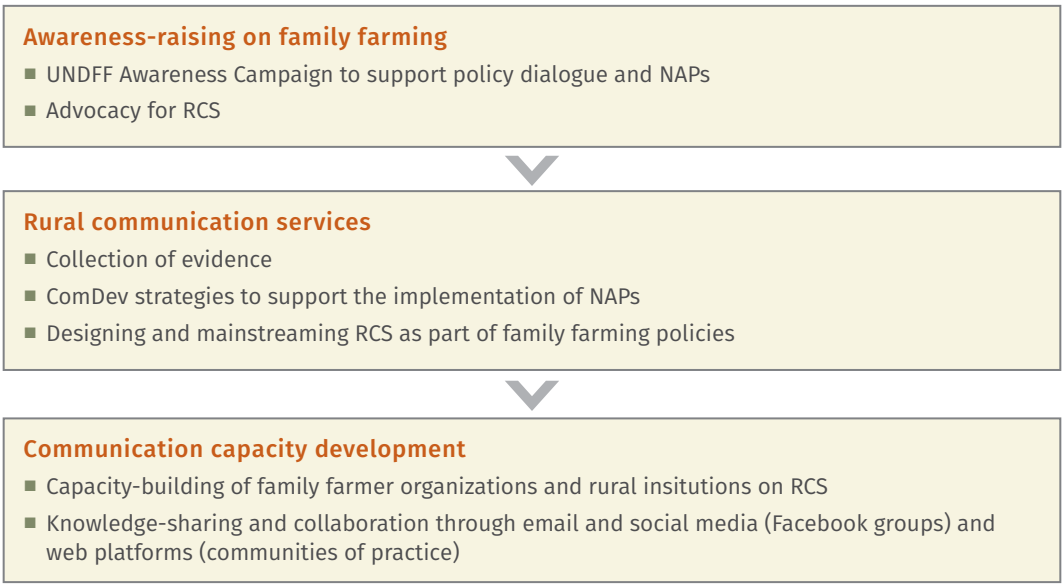
According to Megha Desai, Senior Coordinator of SEWA, SEWA uses social media platforms primarily to communicate with the younger generation. SEWA Manager School develops e-learning business modules that are widely accessible. SEWA also sets up community learning and business resource centres to reach out to rural communities, where they provide access to the internet.

- Three out of ten national action plans that have been approved worldwide are from Asia (Indonesia, Nepal and the Philippines).
- Five more Asian countries are in the process of drafting their NAPs (Bangladesh, Cambodia, India, Japan and the Lao People's Democratic Republic).
- Regional consultations have been launched to draft regional action plans, specifically for the regions of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation.
- Many countries in the region reiterated their support for family farming during the final stage of the UN Food Systems Summit held in September 2021.

3.1.3 Next steps and follow-up activities

Considering the priorities, needs and opportunities to mainstream RCS in family farming policies and NAPs identified by the panellists and forum participants, three lines of follow-up activities were presented (Figure 12).

Figure 12. **Follow-up activities in mainstreaming RCS**



Source: Authors' own elaboration.

The panel discussion then continued with Maria Stella Tirol (UPLB-CDC and CDA) and Ankita Singh (Senior Officer, Knowledge Management of Digital Green, India) sharing the next steps. Dr Tirol outlined CDA's plans to conduct a UNDFF awareness-raising campaign using community radio, considering that this medium remains prevalent in Asia and the Pacific. As to building up RCS, CDA continuously collects evidence through desk studies. Dr Tirol also noted that ComDev strategies need to be further mainstreamed to support the NAPs, considering that there should be a systematic, organized plan to carry out the activities and plans for family farming. CDA also intends to advocate for the use of RCS, particularly in terms of using local media and appropriating ICTs based on the needs of family farmers, and to generate evidence so that inclusive RCS can be institutionalized as part of national family farming policies.

As to Digital Green's next steps, Ms Singh highlighted that the organization will be conducting training in community-based video production in the next few months. The training will aim to help participants understand the community video production process. It will be conducted using a hybrid modality, including online training and self-learning sessions.

3.2 Roadmap and key recommendations

To synthesize the results of the regional study, the technical webinar and the regional forum discussions, Rosa Pilipinas Francisco, of UPLB-CDC, presented the following key recommendations (Figure 13) and roadmap (Figure 14):

Figure 13. **Key recommendations**

Source: Authors' own elaboration.

Figure 14. **Roadmap: ComDev Asia activities and follow-up actions**

Source: Authors' own elaboration.

Following Ms Francisco's presentation, a poll was administered to gather information on which CDA activities are most relevant to the participants' lines of work. Poll results were as follows:

71% communication capacity-development

63% awareness-raising activities

58% rural communication services

Box 6. ComDev Asia Radio Initiative

As part of the UNDFF awareness campaign, a radio initiative is being implemented by AMARC Asia-Pacific, under the aegis of ComDev Asia. Twenty-six community radio stations and three national broadcasting federations in Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Nepal and the Philippines worked together to produce radio programmes. The campaign has successfully reached more than one million listeners across the region.

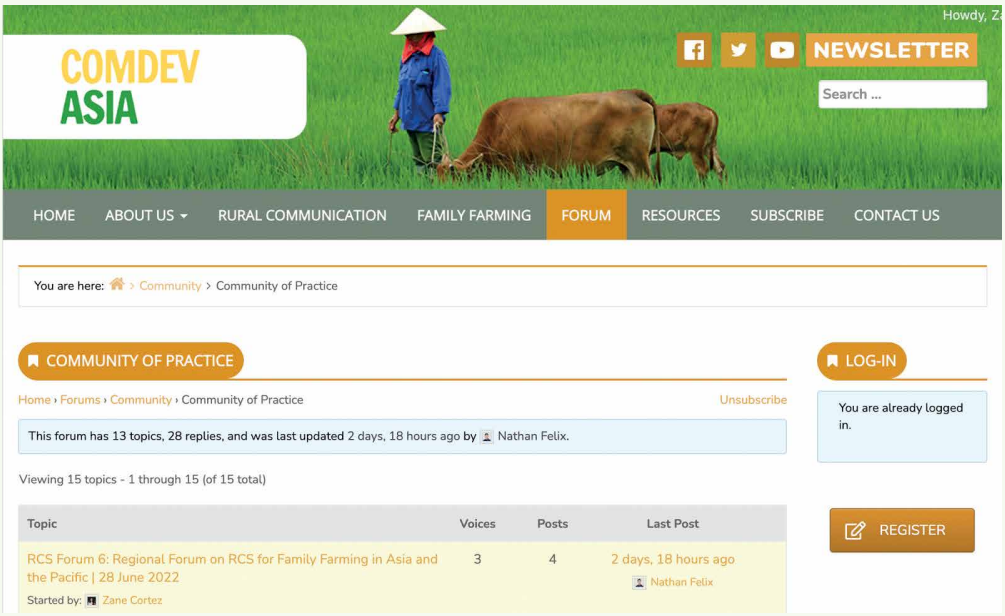
In her presentation, Rachana Mukhia, of AMARC Asia-Pacific, shared the salient features of the radio campaign:

- Closer linkages will be forged between family farmer organizations and the radio stations for a participatory campaign.
- Campaign is being conducted in local languages and in English to reach out to both local and international audiences.
- Detailed mapping of local radio stations is being conducted to support forging longer-term partnerships with family farmer organizations.
- Thirty feature-length programmes will be produced in the campaign in national languages, as well as in English.
- Dissemination will be pursued beyond target countries.
- The radio campaign will be supported by a social media campaign to raise awareness and generate wider interest.
- Radio programmes will be disseminated through relevant channels, including:
  - local dissemination through national networks of community radio stations;
  - involvement of international stakeholders and media networks;
  - online dissemination;
  - dissemination to AMARC Asia-Pacific network, consisting of 1 500 community and local radio stations in Asia and the Pacific.
- Results will be monitored, as follows:
  - a common monitoring mechanism will be used across all countries;
  - mapping will juxtapose local stations vis-a-vis family farmer organizations;
  - mapping results will be shared with all UNDFF stakeholders.

Box 7. ComDev Asia Community of practice

Edmund Centeno, of UPLB-CDC, explained how the participants could engage in the ComDev Asia Community of practice to continue the conversation on RCS and family farming in Asia and the Pacific:

1. Register at https://bit.ly/ComdevasiaCOP
2. The ComDev Asia team will create an account for you and your credentials will be sent to your email.
3. Once you have an account, go to the ComDev Asia website, click on FORUM and log in.
4. View topics and click RCS Forum 6.
5. Reply to the thread. Post your contributions through 5 July 2022, 17.00 (Manila time).



3.3 Closing remarks

Irish Baguilat, representing the Asian Farmers' Association for Sustainable Rural Development (AFA), indicated that one of the main challenges faced by smallholder farmers in Asia is the high price of inputs, brought about by the war in Ukraine, which is leading to more complex challenges (such as income disparities). Baguilat also emphasized the need to mitigate the effects of climate change and promote more sustainable approaches to farming, which the UNDFF framework can help support by amplifying the voices of farmers and fishers. Baguilat also shared that AFA showcases farmers as innovators who sustain and nourish communities through the framework. Finally, she commented that the case studies presented shed light on gaps but also on positive outcomes, and this illustrates how to support farmers and build their capacity.

Two additional important points Baguilat discussed were the following:

1. Promoting participatory approaches in RCS ensures that communication services respond to the needs of farmers, while ensuring their active participation in the process. AFA hopes that CDA will continue to foster this approach.
2. The use of blended methodologies is key to reaching farmers everywhere in the region.

Baguilat closed her intervention by stating that AFA looks forward to working with all partners on this initiative.

©Community Radio Gurbaba, Nepal

Annex I.

Technical webinar documentation report

Advancing rural communication services in Asia and the Pacific: A technical webinar

7 June 2022, 17.30 Philippine/11.30 Rome

Details of the technical webinar

The webinar was conducted on 7 June 2022, at 17.30 (Philippine time) via Zoom. The aim was to share findings of the RCS studies, validate the main conclusions of the studies and extract elements for policy recommendations, collect inputs in relation to other priorities and needs, and identify mechanisms and actions to steer exchange, collaboration and evidence collection to advance inclusive RCS.

Thirty-four participants attended the webinar, including representatives from the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the FAO Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific, FAO Indonesia, the University of the Philippines Los Baños – College of Development Communication (UPLB-CDC), the Asian Farmers' Association (AFA), Digital Green, Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA), SEWA Cooperative Federation, AMARC Asia–Pacific, Bangladesh NGOs Network for Radio and Communication, University of Reading and AsiaDHRRA. Table A1.1 shows the webinar programme.

Table A1.1 **Webinar programme**

Segment	Presenter
Overview of the webinar	**Ryan Jay Galang** – Facilitator, UPLB-CDC
RCS Framework	**Mario Acunzo**, FAO ComDev Team
Policy trends	**Sanjeev Kumar**, Digital Green
Trends in appropriation of RCS	**Maria Stella C. Tirol**, UPLB-CDC
Panel discussion: Case studies from Asia	**Rosa Pilipinas F. Francisco** – Moderator, UPLB-CDC **AHM Bazlur Rahman**, Bangladesh NGOs Network for Radio and Communication **Palak Gadhiya**, SEWA Cooperative Federation **Ronali Pradhan**, Digital Green
Poll	Facilitator
Breakout session	***Breakout group 1*** Moderator: **Maria Stella C. Tirol** Rapporteur: **Juvy N. Gopela** ***Breakout group 2*** Moderator: **Ankita Singh** Rapporteur: **Louise S. Villanueva**
Plenary	Facilitator
Closing message	**Ma. Estrella Penunia**, AFA

Overview of the webinar

Ryan Jay Galang of UPLB-CDC facilitated this segment. He began by sharing an overview of the webinar, highlighting that the aim was to learn about the results of the RCS studies conducted on the trends of RCS appropriation and policies, and to validate the conclusions and recommendations drawn from these studies. He also briefly discussed the programme flow and explained that the webinar is part of a consultative and interactive process leading up to the Regional Forum on Rural Communication Services and the United Nations Decade of Family Farming (UNDFF) Forum on Inclusive Rural Communication Services for Family Farming to be held on 28 June 2022 and 11 July 2022, respectively. Mr Galang encouraged everyone to participate actively in the webinar in order to leverage knowledge, experiences and learnings gained from different perspectives.

RCS framework

Mario Acunzo (FAO) provided an overview of RCS and its context within ComDev. He explained that ComDev is a participatory communication approach that seeks sustainable social change by empowering people and helping them plan and manage communication processes for their own development. The approach supports community mobilization and

collective action by facilitating informed decision-making through access to information in local languages and in accessible formats, using media appropriated by the communities.

Dr Acunzo further explained that RCS includes a wide range of farmer-centred communication processes, activities, media and ICT applications, as well as institutional arrangements, to respond in a sustained and inclusive manner to the communication needs of the rural population. The RCS concept is being developed on the basis of a rights-based approach: Communication services must be delivered on a regular basis, enabling people to access information and knowledge that will allow them to enhance their livelihoods and advance towards sustainable change.

Dr Acunzo presented the RCS Framework, pointing out that there are several criteria associated with the concept of RCS and that the overall goal is to enhance the capacity of rural people for informed decision-making and collective action. He emphasized the importance of institutionalizing RCS in public policies.

Dr Acunzo also mentioned the three key features of RCS: (1) convergence and appropriation of media and technologies; (2) beginning with people's needs for enhanced local communication processes and capacities; (3) fostering dialogue, mediation and knowledge sharing.

Finally, Dr Acunzo emphasized that evidence-based approaches are required to institutionalize RCS as part of family farming and that CDA offers a space to advance the work on RCS in the region and to promote an agenda where farmer organizations, institutions and media can really make a change and firmly incorporate RCS into family farming policies and programmes.

Policy trends

Sanjeev Kumar, from Digital Green, discussed three major themes that emerged in their study of RCS policies:

Transition from a top-down to a more inclusive policy approach

In almost all the cases they reviewed, information is provided to farmers in a top-down approach; with government and sector institutions recognizing the importance of agriculture in national development and controlling the information that is disseminated and how it is disseminated. However, after implementing this approach for some time and realizing its ineffectiveness, the government moved to more inclusive and farmer-centric approaches, and much of the policy language started to include demand-driven extension and the formation of farmer groups and institutions.

Decentralization of extension systems

In the late 1990s, in some countries, extension activities were devolved to local governments. The results of this decentralization has been mixed. Several countries are moving to a more pluralistic approach, involving the private sector, civil society and farmer

groups. This was found to be successful in some places, as demand-driven services are more focused, farmers' needs are taken more into account, and media and ICTs are being piloted, developed and deployed.

Creating an enabling environment through ICT policies

In most countries, governments are now providing an enabling environment through ICT policies. This encourages stakeholders to help bridge the digital divide, support ICT infrastructure and launch ICT-based initiatives. However, access to ICTs continues to be a challenge. In Asia and Africa, governments have been emphasizing improvements in digital infrastructure, building digital skills, and providing digital services and platforms. While some focus on traditional mass communication channels, such as television and radio, several countries in South Asia have launched policies under the Digital First approach. These include the Digital India Initiative, which has components that focus on digitalization of the rural and agriculture sector; the Digital Nepal Framework, which addresses crucial challenges in the agriculture sector; and Digital Bangladesh Vision, which addresses infrastructure in rural areas. Countries in Southeast Asia also have policies and frameworks that address connectivity issues (such as, the National Broadband Plan of the Philippines). Overall, the Asia and the Pacific region has shown a significant increase in ICT and digital infrastructure and access is growing faster than in any other region; but there are still gaps that need to be addressed, particularly in the emerging economies in the region.

Mr Kumar also presented some suggestions on how to make policies more effective, scalable and institutionalized:

- Policies should not only ensure the availability of ICTs, but also access and participation on the part of communities.
- The participation of farmer organizations ensures that farmers' voices are heard.
- Digitization should consider equitable access, gender equity, social and economic factors, collaboration with farmer organizations and the use of both traditional and new media.
- Policies should provide a framework that ensures that RCS addresses issues of access and the needs of farmers, and that it be more research-driven, have better impact, reach a wider scale, and be institutionalized.

Trends in appropriation of RCS

Maria Stella Tirol, of UPLB-CDC, presented the results of the desk study undertaken by FAO, through CDA together with UPLB-CDC, on the appropriation of RCS in family farming in Asia and the Pacific, with emphasis on trends, challenges and prospects. The trends were gathered from a review of RCS interventions in 17 countries in Southeast Asia, South Asia and the Pacific. Following are the highlights of Dr Tirol's presentation:

- The RCS interventions reviewed were mostly in agriculture and social development programmes funded by five types of institutions – United Nations agencies, international lending banks and agencies, scientific institutions, government aid for

overseas development, and research grants. In Southeast Asia, all types of funders were observed; for South Asia, most were faculty research grants; and in the Pacific, the Australian Agency for International Development was the dominant funder.

- Most of the implementers of RCS are research and development institutions, government agricultural agencies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), people's organizations, academic institutions and private media organizations. In Southeast Asia, all types of implementers exist; academic institutions dominate in South Asia, and NGOs and people's organizations were the primary implementers in the Pacific.
- The RCS project deals mainly with the introduction of ICTs, with mobile phones being the primary device, the capacity of which is enhanced by internet-based applications. In South Asia, this is complemented by community radio. In the Pacific, however, participatory approaches are the main scope of RCS projects.
- RCS has been appropriated to address four main areas of concern: 1) climate change impacts and adaptation, 2) lapses in agricultural extension services (including lack of services and information), 3) communication gaps and ICT utilization, and 4) power-related issues (such as power imbalance between extension agents and farmers, deprivation of choices regarding ICT access and opportunities for such access). These issues are common across all subregions, with the exception of the power issues, which are highly prevalent in the Pacific.
- Stakeholders include farmers, extension officers and workers, media organizations, scientists in agriculture and allied fields, ICT experts and group-process facilitators. All are engaged in a process of listening, talking, filtering, processing, synthesizing and documenting information, with mutual trust, respect and openness.
- In terms of channels and media used for RCS, ICTs dominate, with mobile phones being the most popular device used. These are generally complemented by local mass media. face-to-face interactions dominate during participatory approaches.
- The content or key messages of the RCS efforts in Asia and the Pacific revolve around two major topics: 1) response to the lack of information and knowledge about improved and innovative farming practices that can help farmers cope with climate change, and 2) responses to lack of opportunity to benefit from participatory approaches and ICTs.
- As evidenced by the case studies, RCS initiatives in Asia and the Pacific yield four positive outcomes: (a) enhanced advisory services for farmers, (b) improved farming practices, including marketing, (c) acquisition of new knowledge and skills related to the use and operation of ICT devices and equipment, and (d) engagement in more entrepreneurial activities. Given these outcomes, impacts generated can be grouped into three sets of interrelated phenomena, namely: (i) social inclusion, multi-stakeholder engagement and collaboration; (ii) a sense of ownership, equalizing effect and empowerment; and (iii) self-confidence, ICT competency and entrepreneurship.

Dr Tirol also shared that some of the challenges that need to be addressed are clarifying issues of participation, policy support and funding for community media; barriers to the adoption of the technologies; and the need for consensus in terms of institutionalizing ComDev and RCS.

Panel Discussion: case studies from Asia

Rosa Pilipinas Francisco, of UPLB-CDC, served as the moderator of this panel discussion. Three resource persons, representing the Bangladesh NGOs Network for Radio and Communication, Digital Green and SEWA Cooperative Federation, were brought together to share their thoughts and insights about the findings and lessons learned from the recent studies conducted by FAO, through CDA with Digital Green.

Bangladesh NGOs Network for Radio and Communication

AHM Bazlur Rahman presented the case of Krishi Radio in Bangladesh – a community radio used to reach the most marginalized family farmers through low-cost, scalable media. Launched in January 2012, Krishi Radio is the only government community radio in Bangladesh established by the Agriculture Information Service. With over 250 000 listeners, the programmes of this radio station are broadcast in 12 upazilas of Amtali, in Barguna District.

Institutionalization has been identified as one of the key factors to its sustainability. Mr Rahman shared that the network's approach to media development is both knowledge-driven and context-sensitive. It considers the challenges and opportunities created by Bangladesh's rapidly changing media environment, including the development of community radio broadcasting that is instrumental in giving voice to the voiceless.

Along with 19 other community radio stations, Krishi Radio is trying to contribute to the seven pillars of family farming. Altogether, community radio stations in Bangladesh broadcast almost 200 hours of programming every day, wherein farming and agriculture are two of the main issues discussed. According to Mr Rahman, their programme contributes not only to agriculture but also to socioeconomic services promoting health, education, social protection and financial inclusion. They also promote the consumption of healthy and nutritious food, youth investment in family farming, and knowledge sharing at different levels, by providing sufficient access to knowledge, information and education. Krishi Radio particularly promotes gender equity in family farming and the leadership role of women. One of their programmes raises awareness and increases understanding regarding the productive work carried out by rural women and their role in preserving local seeds, knowledge, culture and traditions that promote the economic, political and social development and autonomy. Another Krishi Radio programme contributes to the use of ICTs that utilize information about weather and production costs and prices, providing inclusive rural communication and information services. This is especially important as 20 of the 64 districts in Bangladesh are in coastal areas that are prone to natural disasters and the effects of climate change.

Mr Rahman also shared some challenges faced by community radio in Bangladesh, one of which is meaningful connectivity, which means regular internet use, on an appropriate device, with sufficient data, and with a sufficiently fast connection. At the farmer level, affordability of ICTs, such as smartphones and the internet, remains a challenge, as is the need for digital literacy (utilization of ICT infrastructure and ICT tools, especially for the family farming community for accessing market information and to encourage the use of

ICT tools at the rural level). For community radio broadcasting, there is a need to reskill and upskill community radio broadcasters in the use of ICTs and social media for broadcasting family farming programming.

Upon concluding his presentation, Mr Rahman was asked by Rosa Pilipinas Francisco how he thinks institutionalization could address the challenges he mentioned. In response, Mr Rahman shared that there has been a significant shift in the medium used by their listeners in the sense that, before, they were using radios, while now they are using mobile phones to listen to the radio. This was facilitated by a government policy to democratize the internet at the rural level. He added that what still needs to be done is to promote digital literacy and advocate for family farming, along with democratizing the internet in rural areas.

Digital Green

Digital Green's case centres on the power of video in public and private extension systems to reach farming communities. Ronali Pradhan, of Digital Green, shared that their organization uses simple information technology tools to drive transformative innovation to improve human lives. Digital Green uses a social and behaviour-change communication approach that applies principles of adult learning and positive deviance, leveraging low-cost, zpeer-to-peer, video-based knowledge exchange. By mobilizing partners around the world, they have taken innovation to scale, working alongside countries (primarily in South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa) to tackle their livelihood problems and identify sustainable solutions through digital acceleration. This approach combines skill development, digital-literacy training and development of intuitive digital tools to ensure that: digital connectivity strengthens the value and power of local farming networks; individual farmers exercise agency over their information; and farmer groups harness aggregated member data to access better services, new income streams and greater power in the agriculture ecosystem.

Ms Pradhan also expounded on how knowledge-sharing videos are produced and how the Digital Green approach was institutionalized from local practice to the policy level in Bihar. She explained that the process begins with diagnosing local challenges, practices, gaps and demand. As such, the target group is involved from the start. The videos are developed and disseminated by trained local frontline workers who are from the community. The members of the community become the actors in the videos. Local dialect is used and videos are shot in the location. Thus, the model applies a community-driven approach. A feedback loop is an important component of the process, wherein community feedback is collected and fed into the system every month, making the approach even more inclusive and long lasting. In the state of Bihar, Digital Green's work with the livelihood mission became so successful and garnered such positive feedback from the women groups involved that the state leadership decided to institutionalize the video approach throughout the state.

SEWA Cooperative Federation

SEWA Cooperative Federation's (SCF) case uses digital platforms, with WhatsApp being the most popular among cooperative members. In answer to the moderator's question about why SCF decided to use digital platforms and what their experience has taught them about the use of such platforms vis-à-vis the challenges, such as poor internet connectivity and

access to electricity, Palak Gadhiya stated that organizing women farmers is critical as they contribute greatly to agricultural production yet are not recognized or acknowledged. Moreover, organizing and mobilizing these indigenous women builds their capacity to make their contribution more visible and over time they are empowered both personally and economically. SCF has two women collectives in Gujarat – Megha Cooperative and Kheda Cooperative; and SEWA Bharat, their sister organization, supports a farmer producer company at Bihar – Karnabhumi. In 2019, SCF realized that the demand for online purchases had increased among the consumers, particularly among working women needing door-to-door delivery of groceries. Hence, they introduced SEWA Lilotri, a WhatsApp-based retail marketing platform to deliver fresh fruits and vegetables to consumers. Through this platform, they are catering to B2B and B2C consumers on a regular basis.

Dr Gadhiya also shared that one gap they found in digital inclusion is capacity. During COVID-19, they developed a digital literacy programme that provided training on various topics, such as WhatsApp use, how to make a conference call, and how to send an SMS. Many of the training courses were tailor-made as per the demand of the cooperatives. The training has enabled cooperative members to utilize their devices or those in their household for their businesses. Dr Gadhiya also mentioned some of the lessons that their organization has learned:

- **Women's cooperatives are enablers of meaningful digital interventions.**
  - Megha Cooperative has a WhatsApp group to communicate with the farmers on the availability and prices of seeds and fertilizers and to inform them about their services. For instance, during COVID-19, the cooperative distributed Rabi-season seeds to its members through 10 master trainers who were trained in digital communication. Furthermore, a total of 36 000 people were made aware of COVID-19-related information.
  - Karnabhumi introduced district-wide WhatsApp groups to facilitate farmers' online purchase of seeds, to provide weather updates and to resolve any crop-related issues that the members experienced. More than 800 farmers were reached through this initiative. Further, tools like KoBo and Google Forms were used to aggregate farmer demand for inputs, with members and staff being trained to collect demand through calls instead of door-to-door, which was not possible during the lockdown period. The data collected through such tools was cleaner, timely, actionable and more accurate.
- **Digital tools enable more women to participate in and benefit from initiatives implemented to support them.** Digital interventions have allowed women to save time and travel costs as physical meetings have now moved to free or subsidized online platforms, which have become mainstream for women.
  - The women farmers who earlier could not attend meetings due to the length of the travel involved, can now easily make decisions on their agricultural practice with the support of video conferencing platforms.
  - Interventions are needed at various levels – individual, local and policy – to ensure sustainable results. In order to empower women to bring about the changes they

wish to see. A bottoms-up approach of advocacy is applied. SCF incorporates 3 Ps – patience, persistence and perseverance, to guide them through this process.

- **Development efforts must be holistic in their approach: SEWA Federation always keeps in mind that all the interventions for women collectives must be holistic and provide needs-based solutions.**
  - Also, ensuring that women have a robust means of livelihood without looking into other aspects of their lives such as health or childcare will not yield sustainable results. Therefore, interventions need to be designed to include every major aspect of the lives of the women farmers and provide them with social security, rather than just livelihood security.
  - In terms of needs-based solutions, prior to these interventions, the women farmers had to submit a request for assistance after observing the issue they were having on their farm and wait for an agronomist or expert to reach their field and determine the treatment. These interventions have enabled the women to post about their problems in their fields on messaging platforms and get accurate insights on the diagnosis and treatment of crop diseases.

Lastly, Dr Gadhiya shared the challenges they faced:

- Women farmers often do not own their own phone, which delays communication and timely action.
- Some lack digital literacy. As such, at the initial stage, they are hesitant and fearful of learning and using the digital tools, worrying, for instance, what will happen if something goes wrong. Also, language is a barrier as most of the platforms are not in the local language. This delays the process of understanding and using the platforms to their fullest.
- Many times in villages in the interior of the state, the internet connection is unstable and interrupted. To manage this issue, members usually make sure they reach a location where they get a stable connection in time for any online meetings or events.
- The majority of the members are unaware of issues of privacy in data sharing and privacy settings. Hence, there is a constant fear of using digital technology.

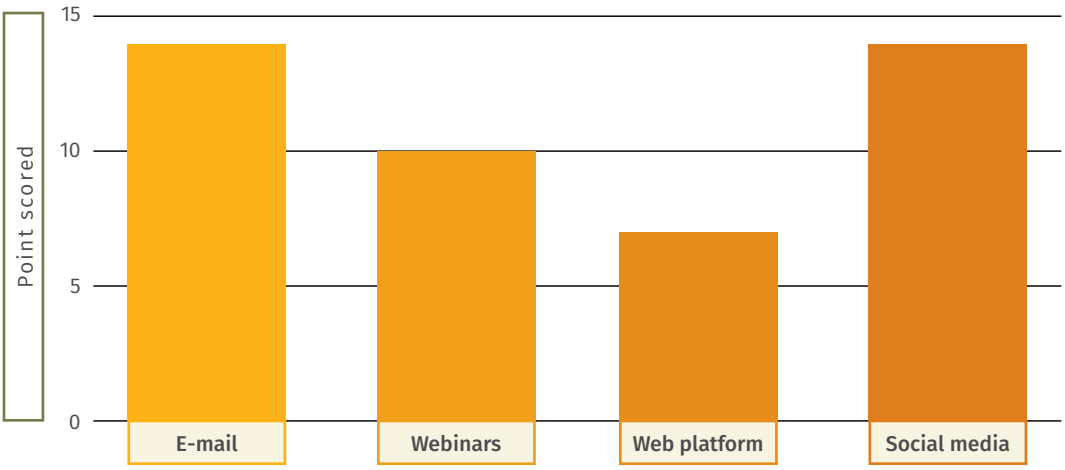
Before ending the panel discussion, Ms Francisco asked each of the panellists to share advice for organizations regarding appropriating RCS in family farming in Asia. Mr Rahman said that RCS plays a significant role in Bangladesh and that there is a need for more RCS programmes to promote digital literacy and connectivity and to address the rural–urban digital divide. Ms Pradhan emphasized that ICTs are great mediums to disseminate farm practices, but that feasible and accessible ICTs must be selected. She also mentioned that the content should be demand-driven, that farmers must be involved from the beginning, and that proper formative research must be conducted at the beginning in order to develop very targeted, timely and location-specific content, which should be disseminated through mediums which are accessible to most of the target audience. Ms Pradhan also emphasized that all of these need to be institutionalized with a like-minded government department extension framework.

Lastly, Dr Gadhiya shared the following five suggestions: 1) keep women at the forefront of digital inclusion programmes - including ownership of devices and building their capacity (including women's decision-making in agri-tech) as this contributes to individual and community-level development; 2) an appropriate digital literacy programme needs to be designed targeted at women workers (considering contextualization and language inclusion); 3) the digital platforms must have easy-to-use interfaces and use more graphics so that members with low literacy levels or no education can easily access and use them; 4) considering internet connectivity issues and charges, tech that uses low data or less internet is preferable and more readily acceptable to rural users; and 5) ongoing research must be conducted to understand what works and what doesn't work on a timely basis so that the people are served with better technological options.

Poll

Before proceeding with the breakout sessions, a poll was launched asking the question "What is/are your preferred mechanisms/channels for knowledge sharing and collaboration?" Twenty-four participants answered the poll, with the following results: 14 chose email, 14 also answered social media, 10 chose webinars, and 7 chose web platforms.

Figure A1.1 **Poll: What is/are your preferred mechanisms/channels for knowledge sharing and collaboration?**



Source: Authors' own elaboration.

Breakout session

The participants were divided into two groups for the breakout session. Each group was moved to a breakout room in Zoom and assigned a discussion moderator and rapporteur. The groups consisted of around 13 participants, excluding the moderator, rapporteur and back-up documenter. The breakout session lasted 40 minutes.

The discussion in the breakout session revolved around answering the following questions:

- Based on your experience, which are the main dimensions you agree with and what are the missing elements?
- What are the elements and priorities to include rural communication services (RCS) as part of family farming policies and programmes? What are the steps required to achieve this?
- How can we better foster the sharing of knowledge about RCS? How can we collaborate on RCS?

Before proceeding to answer these questions, the moderator briefly provided a summary of the conclusions pertaining to each question.

Breakout group 1

Question 1: *Based on your experience, which are the main dimensions you agree with and what are the missing elements?*

Key discussion points:

- There was agreement that all RCS activities must build on existing systems, both in policy and practice.
- Institutionalization
  - The use of existing policies is important for the success of RCS.
  - In some countries where there are NAPs for family farming, these plans serve as a good platform for mainstreaming RCS.
  - This is also an opportunity to work with family farming organizations and support them in establishing their local agenda for RCS.
- Digital-first approach
  - The team members discussed and agreed on the need to have alignment on the wording and actions included in a digital-first approach.
  - As part of this approach, the suggested dimensions include:
    - Meaningful connectivity: There must be inclusivity in the access to and use of ICT tools. More than just providing the infrastructure for ICT, it is also important to consider who is able to actually access and use the ICTs.
    - Digital skills (safety and security of ICT tool users): There was mention by SEWA of the fear of using the technology, which is manifested in two ways: lack of confidence in the farmers' own digital skills and security concerns over what the consequences of using these tools might be. As such, proper training must be provided for ICT users to better support them in the process of using ICTs.
    - Relevance: The content must be appropriate and adapted to the local context.

- Farmer-centric approach
  - Participatory: RCS services must be demand-driven and focused on the farmers' needs. In this sense, channels must be provided for farmers to express their needs. This will lead to greater adoption of RCS as the recommendations provided will be based on the advice of the farmers themselves.
  - Family farming organizations are good partners in establishing the RCS agenda and actions.

Question 2: *What are the elements and priorities to include RCS as part of family farming policies and programmes? What are the steps required to achieve this?*

Key discussion points:

- Research is important in both policy and practice for the success of RCS. There needs to be research that can show us what is needed and what is working in the implementation of RCS.
- As part of policy, there is a need to deepen the capacity and regulatory frameworks for RCS. This also extends to media policy.
- In terms of channels:
  - Farmer field schools work well for extension.
  - Participatory video, community radio, posters and social media with infographics can be good ways to disseminate information.
    - Facebook is by far the most used social media.
- Capacity-building is essential and must be inclusive. It should not be limited to farmers; it should include extension workers.
  - Capacity-building also requires cooperation with federations.
    - Federated structures will play a central role in capacity-building.
    - The agenda for RCS should be built together with family farming organizations.
    - There is also a proposal to consider the cooperative or federation structure to help empower farmers in terms of RCS. We could use family farmer organizations as RCS champions. One examples of this is SEWA. SEWA can already try to explore building the agenda including RCS, developing proposals for the implementation of RCS based on the voices of the farmers and engaging in dialogue with farmers.

Question 3: *How can we better foster the sharing of knowledge about RCS? How can we collaborate on RCS?*

Key discussion points:

- Suggestion to use Facebook as a medium for imparting knowledge. This can be combined with email and social media.
- People don't like to use platforms because it requires effort. To engage people, a newsletter with a good mailing list that is issued regularly would be helpful.
- CDA's community of practice is very heavy and there are so many steps to follow that it is quite difficult to access.

- We can combine tools depending on our purpose, on our audience, and on whether we want an in-depth discussion or just a simple exchange of information and knowledge.

Breakout group 2

Question 1 *Based on your experience, which are the main dimensions you agree with and what are the missing elements?*

Key discussion points:

- the need for monitoring and evaluation;
- address language barriers;
- tackle contradicting policies between traditional media and digital platforms;
- ensure access to information and inclusivity for family farmers and farmer organizations; farmers should be able to influence policies;
- need for synergy among the tools being used (online, traditional media, face-to-face);
- communication should reflect realities and facts.

Question 2: *What are the elements and priorities to include RCS as part of family farming policies and programmes? What are the steps required to achieve this?*

Key discussion points:

- advocacy and policy literacy are important;
- use local languages;
- applying for and renewing licenses should be simple;
- ensure the participation of women and youth;
- in airwave management, regulations should be considered because they can affect outcomes.

Question 3: *How can we better foster the sharing of knowledge about RCS? How can we collaborate on RCS?*

Key discussion point:

- The majority prefer email and social media.

Plenary

During the plenary, the rapporteurs from each breakout group presented the highlights of their discussions. Afterwards, the facilitator opened the floor for clarifications, questions and reflections. No further questions were raised and the programme proceeded. Mario Acunzo reiterated the importance of the webinar, emphasizing that it was part of the processes that brings RCS to the centre of the international and regional agenda on family farming and that it was part of a consultative process, together with the Regional Forum for Asia scheduled for 28 June 2022, leading to the global forum on RCS for family farming to be held on 11 July 2022. The key messages discussed aim to build and consolidate the ongoing work in family farming action plans and national policies.

Before closing the programme, Mr Galang requested that the participants like, subscribe and follow the CDA's Facebook and Twitter accounts as well as the website. He also reminded the participants of the upcoming activities mentioned by Dr Acunzo.

Closing Message

To close the programme, Esther Penunia, of AFA, shared her key takeaways from the webinar:

- RCS provided by different types of service providers, including mass media, online media and offline tools, have a positive impact on farmers in terms of providing extension, building entrepreneurial skills, finding markets for their products, and building solidarity among farmers and other stakeholders.
- If we are to strengthen RCS, we must address the following issues:
  - Access: There is now a proliferation of online applications where farmers can get a lot of information and content, but the COVID-19 pandemic has shown that there is a great divide between the urban and rural areas in terms of digital technologies and language.
  - Content: The onslaught of the digital age has brought to our eyes and ears a lot of information, but also disinformation, misinformation, much distraction and has been a bad influence in deciding what to do and how to converse with other human beings. As such, the content should be looked into and regulated.
  - Governance: Who owns the communication channel has an impact on the content and messages that will be disseminated. There is a need for inclusive governance processes in RCS mechanisms.
- Policies that should be advocated for before the governments:
  - Access to ICT infrastructure down to the remote areas of rural communities;
  - Farmer-friendly and less tedious policies for licensing community-based and managed RCS equipment, tools and technologies;
  - Policies to regulate against scams, fake news and disinformation.
  - Policies that will provide very adequate investment and support for community-based RCS technologies and for building farmers' capacity for better RCS.
- Way forward:
  - Digital literacy is important, as is providing content to the various RCS at the local, national and regional levels and linking the RCS policies and programmes to the UNDFF global, regional and national action plans.
  - Share the information presented at the webinar and continue to brainstorm on how to work together to have better RCS for the benefit of millions of small-scale family farmers, women, men and youth in Asia.

Annex II.

Regional forum agenda

Regional Forum: Rural Communication Services for Family Farming in Asia and the Pacific

28 June 2022
5:30 pm - 7:30 pm Manila time

AGENDA

RCS for Family Farming
Mario Acunzo
FAO ComDev Team

Trends in Policies and in the Appropriation of RCS by Family Farmers in Asia and Pacific
Maria Stella Tirol
UPLB-College of Development Communication (CDC)

RCS for Family Farming: Lessons learned from the field
Sanjeev Kumar
Digital Green

Trends and Perspectives on RCS: Main Conclusions from Regional Study and Consultations
Silvia SanMarco & Rosa Pilipinas Francisco
FAO ComDev Team & UPLB-CDC

Panel Discussion: Advancing RCS for Family Farming: Recommendations and Way Forward

Roadmap and Key Recommendations
Rosa Pilipinas Francisco
UPLB-CDC

ComDev Asia Community of Practice
Edmund Centeno
UPLB-CDC

Closing Remarks
Irish Baguilat
AFA

Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

COMDEV ASIA

United Nations Decade of FAMILY FARMING 2019-2028

Annex III.

List of participants

No.	Name	Organization/institution
1	Reymlani Pelayo Sullera	Central Mindanao University
2	Suman Basnet	AMARC Asia-Pacific
3	Rachana Mukhia	AMARC Asia-Pacific
4	Pamela Joyce M. Eleazar	UPLB-CDC
5	Irish Dominado	AFA
6	Maria Angeli Maghuyop	UPLB
7	Pierre Ferrand	FAO Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific
8	Mohummad Kamrul Hassan	Women's Environment and Development Organization
9	Rajesh Ramtel	AMARC Asia-Pacific
10	Anna Mae Restauro	University of Reading
11	Matilde V. Maunahan	UPLB
12	Michelle B. Gatab-Laruan	Benguet State University
13	Janu Bhandari	AMARC Asia-Pacific
14	King Niño Manzano	UPLB
15	Sanjeev Kumar	Digital Green
16	Jacquelyn H. Basilan	University of the Philippines Open University
17	Ele D. Lunzaga	Central Mindanao University
18	Irish Baguilat	AFA
19	Megha Desai	SEWA
20	Ankita Singh	Digital Green
21	Sophie Treinen	FAO
22	Rosana P. Mula	Department of Agriculture – Agricultural Training Institute
23	Rose Ann P. Leonor	Department of Agriculture – Agricultural Training Institute
24	Pamela MG. Mappala	Department of Agriculture – Agricultural Training Institute
25	Mario Acunzo	FAO

No.	Name	Organization/institution
26	Silvia San Marco	FAO
27	Elena Cerrai	FAO
28	Maria Stella Tirol	UPLB-CDC
29	Rosa Pilipinas Francisco	UPLB-CDC
30	Edmund Centeno	UPLB-CDC
31	Ryan Jay Galang	UPLB-CDC
32	Louise Villanueva	UPLB-CDC
33	Juvy Gopela	UPLB-CDC
34	Zane Andrei Cortez	UPLB-CDC
35	Joseph Lydio Roble	UPLB-CDC
36	Jaime Manalo IV	Philippine Rice Research Institute
37	Rico Martin	
38	JC Rodriguez	

Rural communication services for family farming in Asia and the Pacific

Regional consultation and forum

Rural communication services for family farming in Asia and the Pacific

Regional consultation and forum

The Global Action Plan of the UN Decade of Family Farming (UNDFF 2019-28) recognizes the need to promote rural communication services (RCS) to advance sustainable food systems. RCS comprise demand-led communication processes, media applications and institutional arrangements to respond to the needs of family farmers and rural populations in a sustained and inclusive manner.

This report summarizes the results and takeaways of online consultations and a virtual Regional Forum on RCS for Family Farming in Asia and the Pacific, organized in 2022 by ComDev Asia (CDA), a regional communication initiative, in collaboration with FAO, farmers' organizations, rural institutions and communication networks.

For more information:
comdevasia.org
www.fao.org/communication-for-development/en

Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
Rome, Italy

ISBN 978-92-5-138518-0
9 789251 385180
CC9261EN/1/03.24