

COMMISSION ON SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY FOR DEVELOPMENT (CSTD)

Fifteenth Session

Geneva, 21 to 25 May 2012

**Submissions from entities in the United Nations system and elsewhere on their efforts in
2011 to implement the outcome of the WSIS**

Submission by

FAO

This submission was prepared as an input to the report of the UN Secretary-General on "Progress made in the implementation of and follow-up to the outcomes of the World Summit on the Information Society at the regional and international levels" (to the 15th session of the CSTD), in response to the request by the Economic and Social Council, in its resolution 2006/46, to the UN Secretary-General to inform the Commission on Science and Technology for Development on the implementation of the outcomes of the WSIS as part of his annual reporting to the Commission.

DISCLAIMER: The views presented here are the contributors' and do not necessarily reflect the views and position of the United Nations or the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development.

ACTION IN 2011 TO IMPLEMENT WSIS ACTION LINE C7: E-AGRICULTURE

Submission from FAO, Office of Knowledge Exchange, Research and Extension
December 2011

SUMMARY

Actions related to WSIS Action Line C7: e-agriculture are underpinned by the global e-Agriculture Community. This community of practice was conceived in 2006 and launched in 2007 by a multi-stakeholder group¹ of organizations that believe in the critical role of information and communication technologies (ICT) in agricultural development. Facilitated by the Knowledge and Capacity for Development branch of FAO, the e-Agriculture Community (the Community) today has grown to more than 7,700 registered members from over 160 countries.

Continuing from 2010, in 2011 the Community has examined the critical role of gender in the ICT and agriculture domain. Also prioritized this year, the Community has focused on enhancing agricultural markets, and creating sustainable and scalable information advisory services with ICT. There is a particular interest in taking advantage of mobile technology, which has the fastest growth rate of any ICT in the developing world. The sectoral interests are rounded out by actions to address the challenges of capturing ICT's impact in agricultural initiatives.

In 2011 there was a special campaign aligned with the conclusion of the International Year of Youth. Partnering with the Young Professionals Platform for Agricultural Research for Development (YPARD), the Community published a series of articles written by young people about ICT, agriculture and youth. Giving a voice to the "digital generation" in the agricultural sector is essential to the future of rural development and food security.

Critical issues are and will continue to be elucidated and addressed through discussion forums, policy briefs and case studies. Online activities allow the Community to reach tens of thousands of individuals annually, a level of participation that could not be achieved otherwise. Partnerships with international, regional and national institutions are critical to the continuing success of the e-Agriculture Community, with organizations and individuals offering their time and knowledge to support the Community and enhance the use of ICT for sustainable agricultural development and food security. The World Bank and the Community have initiated an important collaboration to further develop resources for the recently launched "ICT in Agriculture" Sourcebook.

THE IMPLEMENTATION OF E-AGRICULTURE

The e-Agriculture Community is a global initiative to facilitate the exchange of knowledge related to "e-agriculture" (the role of ICT in agricultural development and food security), and to ensure that the knowledge created is effectively shared and used worldwide. It provides an international framework to facilitate the processes of capturing, managing, and disseminating the lessons learned through national and regional activities, as well as the results and implications of multilateral processes related to the use of ICT in agriculture and rural development. The e-Agriculture Community also provides the basis for the international community to monitor development and validation of conceptual models and methodologies, and to package and disseminate them once tested. Through its collective activities some additional outputs of the Community include: the development and strengthening of innovative mechanisms and processes for information exchange and communication, including normative

¹ Information on the "Founding Partner" is available at <http://www.e-agriculture.org/founding-partners>

guidelines and tools being formulated, tested and disseminated to address the range of demands and capabilities of different Community members; empowering networks for exchange of new mechanisms and processes among key stakeholders; relevant content in digital format being developed, filtered, mobilized and exchanged by community members; and other activities based on active partnerships and collaborative lesson-learning.

By the end of 2011, the e-Agriculture Community added about 1,000 new members growing to over 7,700 registered individuals. This membership encompasses development practitioners, policymakers, representatives of farmer organizations, researchers, and information and communication specialists involved in agriculture and rural development, from more than 160 countries.

The Community activities comprise three components: a web-based multilingual² space for knowledge sharing and collaboration on a neutral domain (www.e-agriculture.org); face-to-face events; and in-country interventions lead by Community members and their institutions.

Over this past year, participation from both the private sector and non-UN organizations was secured with subject matter experts volunteering their time. Subject matter experts in this year's forums and panels came from the Bangladesh Institute of ICT in Development, CTA, Donor Committee for Enterprise Development, Esoko, GSMA Fund, GIZ, IICA, IFAD, IN3, Katalyst, Sarvodaya-Fusion, the World Bank, and other organizations.

The e-Agriculture Community of Practice, however, continues to face financial limitations that constrain possibilities for further expansion, and thereby limit the potential of this dynamic Community. As there are no funds solely dedicated to the e-Agriculture Community, and limited resources to support its in-country activities and multi-lingual development. This is particularly relevant with regards to expanding its multi-lingual engagement to reach French and Spanish speaking community members more effectively. Through increased collaboration with the Instituto Interamericano de Cooperación para la Agricultura (IICA) and other partners in Latin America there has been a notable improvement in Spanish content this year.

INNOVATIVE POLICIES, PROGRAMMES AND PROJECTS

The Community is active online, during face-to-face events, and through the activities of members working in-country. Key topics identified by the Community become the focus of virtual discussions, face-to-face events, information collections, and policy briefs. The interplay between different formats and mediums is important.

FAO³ currently provides secretariat services and serves as the Facilitator of the community, coordinating activities and programmes based on commutation and collaboration with the Community at large. FAO also coordinates and facilitates the development, content creation/packaging, and maintenance of the web-based platform, as well as coordinating face-to-face events and drafting of policy documents.

The success of the Community depends to a great extent on the active engagement of a wide range of stakeholders, all with a common interest. The web-based collaboration component of the e-Agriculture Community's activities is the most popular and effective tool to engage with its members. In 2011 memberships was more than 7,700 registered individuals. The platform relies solely on volunteer efforts to lead discussions and assist in providing content, which

² The Platform is available in English, French and Spanish.

³ The e-Agriculture Community of Practice benefits from FAO's experience on its successful implementation of the Bridging the Rural Digital Divide Programme and its related web-based platform (see <http://www.fao.org/rdd>).

contributes towards the development of policies and good practices. For this the Community is grateful to the individuals and organizations that have willingly taken on leading roles in the Community's activities.

The Community continues to collect resources and good practices focused on specifically identified "Key Topics" that arise from the Community members' main areas of interest. These now include:

- ICT and agricultural value chains
- ICT, agriculture and gender issues
- Mobile telephony in rural areas
- Public-private Partnerships for Rural ICT
- "ICT in Agriculture" Sourcebook (published by the World Bank)

During this year, virtual forums with the participation of thousands of individuals from around the world have focused on:

- Strengthening Agricultural Marketing with ICT
- Mobile Information Services: The Benefits of Forming Strong Partnerships to Create Sustainable and Scalable Information Advisory Services
- Challenges and Opportunities for Capturing Impact in ICT initiatives in Agriculture
- Genre, TIC et Moyens d'Existence en Milieu Rural
- The CIARD Framework⁴ for Data and Information Sharing
- ICT for Rural Economic Development

More information on these virtual events, including the discussion forums, resource materials and summary policy briefs can be found at <http://www.e-agriculture.org/forums/forum-archive>.

The e-Agriculture Community continues to make active use of social media, including Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn. These communication channels further expand the Community's objectives of improving the use of ICTs for rural development through knowledge sharing across a diverse network of development stakeholders. They also allow targeted communication with groups such as young people and professionals.

In 2011 blogging was successfully added to the Community's arsenal of knowledge sharing functions. In collaboration with YPARD, the Community featured a series of more than twenty young people writing on the subject of "youth, ICT and agriculture".

To develop relevant capacity, Community members were invited to participate in the expanding free e-learning resources available, which are providing training and professional development opportunities for ICT practitioners in developing countries. The Information Management Resource Kit (IMARK)⁵ curriculum now offers several modules in multiple languages. The Community features information on each new module as they arrive.

FUTURE ACTIONS/INITIATIVES TO BE TAKEN

The e-Agriculture Community will focus on expanding its mechanisms for knowledge sharing around lessons learned through in-country interventions, in particular as relates to the identified Key Topics. These lessons will be drawn from the activities of e-Agriculture Community members, encompassing national and regional level interventions on information exchange and communication, from which successful elements will be expanded and scaled up. The mechanisms will foster the capturing and sharing of lessons through the e-Agriculture

⁴ <http://www.ciard.net>

⁵ <http://www.imarkgroup.org/>

Community's online platform, and through other major participating institutions in support of capacity development.

"ICT in Agriculture" Sourcebook

The World Bank and the e-Agriculture Community are collaborating in a series of online forums to further develop resources for the recently launched "ICT in Agriculture" Sourcebook⁶. These discussion forums will be vehicles to inform the World Bank of other projects/programmes that Community members are carrying out and that could complement the research of the World Bank.

The ICT in Agriculture Sourcebook offers practical examples and case studies from around the world. A compilation of modules related to 14 agricultural subsectors, each module covers the challenges, lessons learned, and enabling factors associated with using ICT to improve smallholder livelihoods. Its aim is to support development practitioners in exploring the use of or designing, implementing, and investing in ICT enabled agriculture interventions.

Frameworks for Development and Evaluation

There is a growing body of knowledge, draft frameworks and other supporting materials in the field of digital ICT programme development and monitoring and evaluation (M&E).⁷ The e-Agriculture Community will continue to advance this important body of work, and will build upon the expert consultation held in 2010 to further refine frameworks that will guide planning and implementing development investments that exploit ICT, as well as monitoring and evaluating their impacts on rural livelihoods.

Challenge of Financial Constraint

Currently no steady funding source is provided by any institution, apart from the continued staffing contributions offered by FAO and forum support provided ad-hoc by partner organizations through subject matter expert participation. FAO's contribution to the Action Line on e-agriculture, and to the Community's facilitation and platform, will continue. The Organization stands firm in its role of providing content support; identifying and providing subject matter experts as editors and moderators; and related activities. However, in order to sustain the continuing expansion of the e-Agriculture Community, especially in regards to supporting country-level interventions, the establishment of a formal Secretariat and identification of dedicated funding is imperative.

The strategy for mobilizing resources for activities under this initiative would have two elements, namely (a) provision of resources by the stakeholders themselves, from both core and project funding, and (b) mobilization of funds from multilateral and bilateral sources to finance the development of the Community's activities. Contributions from the second source are essential in this stage of expanding development of the e-Agriculture Community.

⁶ <http://www.ictinagriculture.org>

⁷ ODI/FAO/DFID (2001/3), ODI/InfoDev (2006/7), Various/Gates (2007), IICD (2007)