COMMISSION ON SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY FOR DEVELOPMENT (CSTD)

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Submissions from entities in the United Nations system and elsewhere on their efforts in 2013 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 17th 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.

FAO's input to the SG's report on the Implementation for the follow-up to the World Summit on the Information Society

Action Line C7

1. 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 group[1] of organizations that believe in the critical role of information and communication technologies (ICT) in agricultural development and food security. Facilitated by the Knowledge and Capacity for Development branch of FAO, the e-Agriculture Community (the Community) today has grown to near 11,000 registered members from over 170 countries. Eighty percent of the members are in developing countries.

In 2013 the Community continued to examine the critical role ICT can play in communicating knowledge and information that is essential to agricultural development and food security. Content, its availability and accessibility, in the form of both public goods and value added services has been identified as a critical issue facing certain challenges. Public sector policy needs to bridge ICT and agriculture, brining both topics into the forefront of this fast moving area of commerce and development. The role of mobile technology, which has the fastest growth rate of any ICT in the developing world, and its ability to reach people in rural areas, remains a priority among the Community's technical interests.

Highlights of the year include the ICT4Ag Conference in Rwanda, and online discussions around ICT enabling rural financial services, ICT and agriculture strategies, and preparation for the WSIS+10 review. In addition knowledge sharing was extended through collaboration with CTA on the *ICT Update*, USAID's FACET project, and Mercy Corps.

Digital communication activities allow the e-Agriculture Community to reach tens of thousands of individuals annually, a level of participation that would not otherwise be achieved. Partnerships with international, regional and national institutions are critical to the continuing success of the e-Agriculture Community. Organizations and individuals offer their time and knowledge to support the Community because of the value that results.

2. 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

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

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.

At the end of 2013, the e-Agriculture Community had grown to over 10,900 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 170 countries.

Eighty percent of the Community's members are in developing countries. The Community activities comprise three components: facilitated online interaction, focused on a multilingual[2], neutral domain (www.e-agriculture.org) and social media; face-to-face events; and in-country interventions lead by Community members and their institutions. The Community's use of social media expands the knowledge sharing opportunities and allows for targeted communication with groups such as young people and professionals. 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 a critical element of the Community's success.

FAO[3] 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 highlight of the Community's interaction and collaboration is embodied in the online discussion forums. By sharing experiences, new tools, challenges and solutions, novel content is created, which in turn contributes towards the development of policies and identification of good practices. All e-Agriculture forums follow a process based on experience gained over the past six years.

To develop relevant capacity, individuals and institutions are invited to participate in the expanding amount of free e-learning resources, which provide training and professional development opportunities for ICT practitioners in developing countries. The Information Management Resource Kit (IMARK)[4] curriculum now offers several modules in multiple languages.

3. INNOVATIVE POLICIES, PROGRAMMES AND PROJECTS

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 Community relies on

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[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).

[4] http://www.imarkgroup.org/

volunteer efforts to lead discussions and assist in providing content, which contributes towards the development of policies and good practices. Subject matter experts in this year's forums and panels from AFRACA, APRACA, AZMJ, Bangladesh Institute of ICT for Development, CGAP, CTA, East African Farmer Federation, FAO, Ghana's Ministry of Communications, Grameen Foundation, Microinsurance Agency, Rwanda's Ministry of Agriculture and Animal Resources, SB Consulting, Secretariat of the Pacific Community, VACID Africa, and the World Bank volunteered their time to work with the Community.

The ICT4Ag Conference[5] organized by the Technical Centre for Agricultural and Rural Cooperation (CTA) and the Government of Rwanda, with support from the CGIAR, IICD, FAO, the e-Agriculture Community, and many others, brought together over 400 practitioners, donors and policy makers in Kigali, Rwanda. The conference was a key milestone in promoting the application of ICT in the agricultural sector, and placed a particular emphasis on value chains, advocacy and policy development.

3.1. Public policy and the role of the public sector in e-agriculture

The e-Agriculture Community continues to build upon a set of insights and recommendations[6] on the role of the public sector:

- **Mobile-based information delivery** holds great promise and is either being considered or is in use as a major channel for mobile agricultural information services (MAIS).
- **Clear policies** need to be formulated by governments and the public sector that define the principles for their involvement in the development of MAIS, that also take account of national communication policy or information and communications technology (ICT) policy. This requires collaboration between the agriculture and telecommunications sectors of government.
- **Partnership with the private sector** has proven to be an essential mechanism for the public sector to develop sustainable MAIS. The roles and responsibilities of the private and public sectors have to be clearly defined in each particular case, preferably through a formal written agreement. The most frequent split of roles is that the content is provided by one and the delivery mechanism is handled by the other.
- **Trustworthiness and reliability** of the public sector information and advice delivered through MAIS is of paramount importance to the people whose livelihoods depend on actions influenced by what they receive. In this context, clear policy guidelines should be formulated to ensure the validity and accuracy of the technical information and advice provided. Appropriate processes need to be put in place to ensure the reliability of the information and advice provided by the public sector through MAIS, potentially including quality control by government-approved experts.
- **Accountability** for the quality (correctness and accuracy) of technical information and advice delivered through MAIS should be formally recognized by the respective public and private sector actors involved. This accountability should be defined in any partnership agreement between the actors in MAIS.

[5] http://ict4ag.org/en/

[6] http://www.fao.org/docrep/017/i3074e/i3074e00.htm

- **Lessons learned and good practices** are captured and disseminated by e-Agriculture and others through various mediums, such as brochures, digital content, television and radio, so that provinces/countries can benefit from the experience of others.
- Special consideration must be given to **literacy and gender** to ensure technology does not expand divides.

CTA led the development of new case studies and policy guides based on experiences in various developing countries. This was disseminated through the *ICT Update*[7].

3.2. ICT in Agriculture Practices

The World Bank and the e-Agriculture Community continued their collaboration around online forums that raise awareness of, and expand on resources in, the *ICT in Agriculture* sourcebook[8]. These discussion forums respond to the growing demand for knowledge on how to use ICT to improve agricultural productivity and raise smallholder incomes in the development community. They are also means to inform the World Bank of other programmes that Community members are executing and that complement the World Bank's work. In 2013, these discussions focused on ICT enabling rural financial services and micro-insurance for smallholders.

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.

3.3. ICT improving access to agricultural research information

The major partners in the CIARD (Coherence in Information for Agricultural Research for Development)[9] Movement held a global consultation and revised the direction of the initiative beyond the areas of agricultural research and innovation towards the broader domain of "Open Agricultural Knowledge for Development". The partners are now working to adapt various elements of the CIARD framework to reflect this new approach, including the Checklist of good practices and the Pathways, and they will revisit the Manifesto. New case studies have been documented to show how national networks in various regions have adopted open technical standards and public domain ICT tools for interoperability of agricultural information systems. The global registry of open content, the CIARD-RING, now maps the knowledge resources of more than 450 organizations worldwide.

Access to Global Online Research in Agriculture (AGORA)[10] is a public-private partnership programme that continues to provide free or low-cost internet-based access to more than 6,000 major scientific journals in agriculture and related biological, environmental and social sciences provided by around 60 publishers to over 2,500 institutions in 107 of the poorest countries.

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[7] http://ictupdate.cta.int/%28issue%29/73

[8] http://www.ictinagriculture.org

[9] http://www.ciard.net/home

[10] http://www.aginternetwork.org/en/

4. 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 Community's online platform, and through other major participating institutions in support of capacity development. The Community has begun to specifically look at the post 2015 scenario through various channels.

In 2014 FAO will also try to link the follow-up to WSIS action line C7 to other relevant initiatives in the field of Communication for Development that will promote inclusive rural communication services and improved access to information for rural people (e.g. XIII UN Roundtable on Communication for Development – Rome, May 2014; and International Forum on Communication and media for Family Farming, September 2014).