

Information. for Agricultural and Rural Development in ACP Countries: New Stakeholders, New Media and Priority Themes

Synthesis on the CTA Seminar

Paris, June 2000



Information for Agricultural and Rural Development in ACP Countries: New Stakeholders, New Media and Priority Themes

Synthesis on the CTA Seminar

Paris, June 2000

Technical Centre for Agricultural and Rural Cooperation

The Technical Centre for Agricultural and Rural Cooperation (CTA) was established in 1983 under the Lomé Convention between the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) States and the European Union Member States.

CTA's tasks are to develop and provide services that improve access to information for agricultural and rural development, and to strengthen the capacity of ACP countries to produce, acquire, exchange and utilize information in these areas. CTA's programmes are organized around three principal themes: strengthening facilities at ACP information centres, promoting contact and exchange of experience among CTA's partners, and providing information on demand.

PO Box 380, 6700 AJ Wageningen, The Netherlands

Table of Contents

The Major Changes	5
A New Environment	5
Four Sweeping Changes	5
Globalisation and the Risks of Marginalisation – The New Context	5
The Need for Better Regulation	6
The New ACP–EU Agreement: Goals and Priorities	6
A Renewed and Broadened Mandate for CTA	7
New Development and Communication Strategies	8
Help Stakeholders Adapt to the New Evolutions in Context	8
Tardy Institutional and Political Reforms often Provoked by External Pressure	8
Rural Development Policies and Strategies to be Redefined	9
The Stakeholders: A Complex Definition	9
New Roles	10
New Information Needs	10
More Information Available, but Very Little from the South	11
Prepare More for the Introduction of New Technologies	11
Networks and Partnerships – A Renewed Concept and Decentralised Management	12
A Few Basic Principles	12
Typologies	14
Typology of Stakeholders and their Information Needs	14
Producers	14
Support Organisations	15
Needs	15
Researchers	16
The Private Sector: Traders	16
Decision-Makers: The Public Sector	17
Other Decision-Makers	18
Typology of the Media and their Uses	18
Traditional Media	18
Written Supports	19
Community Media	20
Audiovisual Media: Radio and Television	20
Internet	21
Cellular Telephones	21
Priorities and Recommendations for CTA	22
Three Priority Axes for Intervention suggested to CTA	22
Stakeholders define priority communication programmes	22
Networking	22
Appropriate information	23

Recommendations and Suggested Activities	24
Strengthen the ability to define, implement and manage information programmes	24
Produce and make available information that meets specific needs using appropriate tools	24
Develop exchanges, networks and partnerships	25

THE MAJOR CHANGES

A New Environment

Four Sweeping Changes

ACP countries have been marked by four sweeping changes over the past 10 years:

- ◆ Economic globalisation that modifies the relationships between the international, national and local scales, as well presenting challenges for production and commercialisation, and access to markets, capital and information.
- ◆ The development of new technologies, notably in the information sector and in biotechnology.
- ◆ Economic liberalisation which has led to a marked reduction in the state hold on management of rural development. Planning logic is progressively giving way to market steering of development. The role of the private sector is thus considerably strengthened.
- ◆ Political democratisation, seen in the possibility for different civil society stakeholders to participate in the debate on the orientation of rural development.

These changes correspond to a major transformation in the environments of rural development stakeholders in African countries.

Globalisation and the Risks of Marginalisation – The New Context

The liberalisation of international trade being pursued by the World Trade Organization affects each country differently, and even more so the different communities within countries. Small-scale producers, especially of agricultural commodities, for example, face a real risk of exclusion, marginalisation and impoverishment.

The reduction in trade barriers, customs duties and national farming subsidies has been very beneficial for countries whose agricultural production and food-processing sectors were already well developed. However, many developing countries, in particular those African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries whose economies depend heavily on agriculture, are placed in difficulty by the increasing liberalisation of international agricultural product markets.

Cheap, imported products flood national markets to the detriment of lower-performance national products. At the same time the expected increase in the export of ACP countries' products has not taken place, in part due to the difficulties producers and entre-

preneurs have in conforming to the quality norms required by the world market. Without access to technologies and, above all, to information on technological and commercial opportunities, ACP countries risk falling further and further behind.

The Need for Better Regulation

Situations vary greatly from region to region and country to country, but for most ACP countries two key questions arise:

- which types of production systems could ensure increased productivity without steamrolling small producers?
- which agricultural policies could facilitate the progressive entry, under good conditions, of ACP productions onto the world market?

In the face of the rapid changes demanded by globalisation, rural development policies in ACP countries no longer seem effective enough or sufficiently coordinated. Supply-side trade control leads to over-competition and falling prices for most tropical products. The regulation of supply in order to reduce over-production and maintain export sales prices could be one response. But strategies of this type depend on national policies and, above all, cooperation between countries.

Most problems cannot be solved by each country individually. ACP countries need to join together in order to increase their influence during international trade negotiations.

The New ACP–EU Agreement: Goals and Priorities

In the framework of the **Lomé** Convention, ACP countries and the European Union (EU) had signed specific agreements on the trade of certain agricultural products. Preferential tariffs and compensation systems had been set up so that ACP countries could consolidate certain priority production sectors and progressively stand up to global competition.

The new ACP–EU agreement has kept some of the advantages offered to ACP countries under the **Lomé** Convention, but others have been lost, such as preferential access to the European market for bananas and rum from the ACP zone.

The new partnership agreement between ACP states and the European Community includes three main goals: poverty elimination; sustainable development; and progressive integration of ACP states in the global economy. One requirement for achieving these goals would be the adoption of more equitable rules for international trade.

In the Agreement, rural development is considered in its broadest sense. It encompasses following aspects:

- **politics**: improving the state of law in the framework of an open democracy that allows rural society to evolve in an egalitarian context;

O organisation: favouring the development of public and private institutions that are efficient and responsible;

● **economics:** developing an environment favourable to the improvement of competition and productivity through an ensemble of measures that reduce fiscal charges, encourage investment, and improve infrastructure, services, information, vocational training, etc.;

● **social:** improving basic education and health systems by increasing the most fragile and poorest populations' access to these services (taking gender into account);

● **environment:** improving sustainable natural resource management.

Regional integration is also a major focus of cooperation, and is aimed at the creation of regional markets and the regional integration of production.

Finally, the EU wishes to strengthen coordination with other partners in order to ensure increased coherence among programmes.

A Renewed and Broadened Mandate for CTA

CTA's first mandate as it appeared in the Lomé Agreements I, III and IV led it to develop information products and services oriented towards meeting demand. The emphasis was on seminars and working visits to facilitate contact and exchange; publications; a question-and-answer service; documentary endowments; and information management training for libraries and agricultural institutions in ACP countries.

From 1995, CTA modified its orientation, devoting itself even further to consolidating stakeholders' skills in designing and managing information systems. Beyond scientific and technical information, account was taken of the economic, social, political and cultural information needs of populations in ACP countries.

From this date, CTA also broadened the scope of those interested in its intervention to include new development stakeholders – producers' organisations, food-processing businesses, associations, local governments, etc.

CTA's new mandate strengthens these orientations, reaffirming its role in strengthening the skills of stakeholders in ACP countries. The agreement specifies that CTA must support national and regional decentralised information networks.

More specifically, CTA's mandate includes strengthening ACP information strategy and system development capacity in order to:

- improve access to technologies for increasing productivity, commercialisation, food security and rural development;
- improve the formulation, management and implementation of agricultural and rural development policies and strategies;
- promote decentralised information and communication management at local and national levels.

The new ACP–EU agreement broadens CTA's role. The Centre must now develop information mechanisms on rural development policy at national and regional levels. In the framework of this agreement, CTA is also entrusted with evaluating the impact of these policies.

Finally, the importance of CTA's role in developing access to, and use of, new communication technologies by ACP countries is emphasised.

New Development and Communication Strategies

Help Stakeholders Adapt to the New Evolutions in Context

Access to the global market requires traditional systems of rural production to perform better. This includes the improvement of production sectors through better collaboration between farmers and industry; the supply of specific, up-to-date information on production techniques and markets; and the development of marketing techniques.

Identifying new, more commercially favourable production niches; adopting sanitary and quality norms based on international standards; modernising production systems and techniques; strengthening commercial strategies – these goals cannot be implemented in a few months, and cannot be implemented in isolation.

Many agricultural producers cannot currently adapt their supply because they are on their own when it comes to finding the right answers, and do not receive sufficient advice, information, guidance and political protection.

Tardy Institutional and Political Reforms often Provoked by External Pressure

Faced with the upheavals introduced by globalisation and liberalisation, decision-makers in ACP countries have run into difficulties in correctly reorienting development strategies. Agricultural policies have often focused solely on improving the competitiveness of exports.

For several years, production for the sake of production and export often took the place of agricultural policy. The tendency to expand farms in the name of efficiency has marginalised many rural groups, worsening the rural exodus and making the cultural identity of rural communities more fragile.

The necessary institutional reforms lag behind – such as modifying relationships between the public and private sectors; promoting social dialogue between stakeholders; or organising strategy support services for decision-makers and producers. This has limited the benefits that these countries could have received from the major international or regional agreements on trade liberalisation.

Often, Ministries of Agriculture have launched reorganisation only when forced to do so. In the meantime change continues to take place, and emerging stakeholders mark out their territory and, in some cases, their political base of support.

The process of democratisation initiated a decade ago brings the hope that the vice constricting freedom will open up, and that civil society will be able to participate in the definition of rural development orientations. If the participation of rural populations is to be effective, it must come hand-in-hand with the decentralisation of state power.

The governments of ACP countries – often under external pressure – had begun to withdraw from their previous roles as primary agents in national economies. This was followed by the dismantling of a large part of the rural development support services. However, rural populations and their professional organisations are often ill prepared for the new rules of the game.

The ‘new’ stakeholders need means, skills and information in order to fulfil their new responsibilities. Yet responsibilities are often delegated rapidly, without any transfer of financial means, without training, and without the necessary information being made accessible.

Rural Development Policies and Strategies to be Redefined

In the face of insufficient action from the state, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have increasingly occupied the field of strategic reflection – to the point of becoming the main source of the development ideologies that are circulating in the rural world and that, despite itself, structure its actions.

Development thought and strategy seem very far behind in relation to the dynamics of change in rural zones. This lag emphasises the necessity of devoting more effort to redefining appropriate development strategies in ACP countries in relation to the specificities of the different zones.

Today, ACP decision-makers appear to hesitate over the orientation and content to be given to rural development strategies. Development specialists’ reasoning is out of step, because they have not sufficiently integrated ongoing and future changes.

ACP countries need to design and implement new agricultural policies that meet the current major challenges – the balanced distribution of land; the need for jobs and for increasing resources; mastery of the flow of capital; increasing income for poor populations; improving skills management in state institutions; and, finally, better prediction of and reaction to natural disasters.

The Stakeholders: A Complex Definition

Situations vary greatly from region to region, from country to country, and even within countries. They are also mobile and dynamic – stakeholders belong to different groups, change roles, and often fulfil several functions at once (production, consumption, decision-making, etc.).

Agricultural and food-processing activities, as well as tourism, have thus become closely interdependent. The borders between public and private, rural and urban, food-processing and non-food-processing businesses have become blurred, and fluctuate.

Clearly defining the stakeholders is increasingly complex. For example, farmers were traditionally divided into subsistence and commercial farmers (plantations), with little between the two. Private businesses traditionally corresponded to agricultural traders, buying from and selling to farmers, and occasionally exporting products. Ministries of Agriculture concentrated principally on the development of commercial crops and export crops, in particular by offering training to young farmers.

New Roles

The situation began to evolve in the 1970s, and this change gathered speed in the **1990s**. It has led to a more complex layering of farmers and private businesses, and to strengthening of the role of producers' associations, NGOs and local authorities.

The increase in the number and variety of stakeholders is reflected in the number of producers' organisations, and in the growing role they play within the sector concerning research, extension, production and marketing.

The withdrawal of the State from direct management of rural development has led professional associations to take on:

- an *ensemble of support services* both prior to and after agricultural production: improving and diversifying production, processing activity development support, and organising collective products and services;
- the *negotiation of rural development policies* with the state: prices and taxes, credit for farmers, land issues, and public investment in **rural** areas.

Territorial authorities have begun to ensure the joint definition of development plans and the supervision of their implementation, as well as the decentralised management of investments and producer support services.

New Information Needs

This evolution in the role of development stakeholders has created new information needs.

Economic liberalisation requires different stakeholders to be able to respond rapidly to market changes, and to make the right choices when it comes to investments, production techniques and commercialisation. The accessibility, fluidity and rapidity of the circulation of information are becoming crucial.

The development of information systems – in both quantity and quality – is an integral part of good governance. Decision-makers need rapid access to precise information and rigorous quantitative data in order to make their choices. They need permanent access to up-to-date reports on local, national and regional situations and their evolution.

The necessary transparency and communication between governments and civil society can hardly be imagined without the development of telecommunications and

information and communication systems between the state and groups of citizens. More generally, information and communication form the basis for all the mechanisms of cooperation between rural development stakeholders.

Currently, the main challenge is not so much improving information content as it is the acquisition by stakeholders of the skills needed to manage information – gathering, analysing and disseminating information.

More Information Available, but Very Little from the South

The information offered, and its accessibility for stakeholders in ACP countries, have been greatly improved in recent years. The quantity of information available and the speed at which it circulates have increased considerably.

Satellites have multiplied, and broadcasting has increased a great deal in ACP countries. The number of radios and television sets is growing exponentially. Telephone communication networks have also developed quickly in some ACP countries, even in small rural centres, notably with the opening of numerous private telephone services and stores (standard and mobile telephones).

Finally, Internet communication networks have greatly grown in ACP countries, even if they remain far behind northern countries. At the same time, private and associated media (press, radio, television) have multiplied.

Furthermore, users have much more direct access to information from available sources: electronic databases, e-mail, foreign radio and television stations, etc.

Yet on the global scale, the production of information by ACP countries remains a small proportion of the whole, and in these countries the production of information is still far from sufficient to meet the need. Furthermore, the production of rural information is very often a minority area within national productions. Users are often obliged to seek information from the North, which is often not appropriate to their needs.

Prepare More for the Introduction of New Technologies

The diversity and large number of possible applications possible of new communication technologies are very promising. They permit the emergence of global trade networks, a boom in online trade on the Internet, and the convergence of telephone, radio, television and Internet.

The stakeholders in national farming systems in ACP countries will be confronted very soon with the decision as to whether to join the food-processing industry's world network, or to use other applications of these new technologies to reduce production costs and improve the quality and reach of their services.

Unfortunately, ACP countries still play third wheel in the development of these technologies, and the large majority of ACP countries are far from meeting the conditions and achieving the preparation needed for their widespread use.

A series of international workshops and conferences have reduced the 'information technologies and communication for development' policy agenda to the use of a limited range of applications. At the same time, the international community has limited its support to 'proximity' access (essentially community telecentres), to online initiatives for collaboration in networks and to online information services.

It is time to start broadening the content of this policy agenda. Farming systems stakeholders would benefit from adopting an 'activewaiting' approach with respect to future Web developments.

If the stakeholders in ACP countries do not actively prepare their organisations for the introduction of these new technologies, they risk being pushed aside from the major developments of a global network society.

Being ready to use information and communication technologies means much more than just adopting some relevant applications – it implies changes in organisational structures and ways of working. Making this type of application work is not only a question of technical difficulties; above all, it is a question of readying personnel and creating an environment that makes the optimal use of these technologies possible.

Networks and Partnerships – A Renewed Concept and Decentralised Management

The size of the current challenges imposes the best use of available means, pooling rare expertise and resources, and cooperation between complementary stakeholders.

Networks and partnerships are based on creating contacts between stakeholders using a sustainable, non-hierarchical and voluntary mode of organisation. Modern means of communication facilitate their operation and development.

Networks and partnerships are a flexible and operational form of information exchange and joint work. They are often more efficient than cumbersome institutional systems, and have multiplied in recent years.

Network members are very diverse – governments, institutions, NGOs, research centres, farmers, processors, traders, etc. Networks can be organised thematically (by sector or product), or professionally (researchers, journalists, rural producers' associations, etc.).

Networks and partnerships are forming on international, regional and national scales. A new network concept is emerging, giving more responsibility and autonomy to each partner organisation rather than concentrating activities around one central point.

Nevertheless, the considerable development of international and regional networks has not yet found a correlation in the development of national and local networks. The need to strengthen local **and** national communication between stakeholders is very important.

A Few Basic Principles

Some basic principles must be respected for networks and partnerships to function efficiently:

- each partner must be interested in them and benefit from them;
- networks or partnerships must be founded on specific goals and a clear vision shared by all members;
- a transparent programme of activities accepted by all, and which specifies the roles of each, must be established;
- relationships between members must be based on mutual respect and trust;
- relationships between national, regional and international scales must be based on the principle of subsidiarity and decentralisation of responsibilities and activities;
- operating modes must be easy and flexible;
- information must not circulate according to a top-down (vertical) model, but in all directions and among all members.

TYOLOGIES: STAKEHOLDERS AND THEIR NEEDS; COMMUNICATION TOOLS

Typology of Stakeholders and their Information Needs

Producers

Producers remain the key stakeholders in rural development and therefore in CTA's activities. Rural women are essential in production and commercialisation, yet their role is still too often neglected.

This category includes the agricultural businesses that sell their productions or initially process them, and cooperatives and farmers' organisations that bring together small rural producers.

Characteristics

The group of family producers is changing. Educated youths are returning to the countryside, as are former civil servants. These producers are developing the ability to negotiate, form groups, and function in several spheres at once. Structure building under different forms of organisation – from village groups to syndicate-type groups – is becoming a new characteristic of the farming milieu. Still-hesitant networks of producers are being created in response to a need for exchange and for greater effectiveness.

Role

The evolution in the role of producers is a consequence of these characteristics and the new environment in which they work. The priority preoccupation is not only production, but also the need to adapt supply to demand and to commercialise and process. Producers' associations are taking on more and more responsibilities – managing support services and defending and preserving their interests and their professions with regard to economic practitioners and public services.

Rural populations and their organisations are increasingly led to negotiate policy choices.

Needs

The information sought pertains to the production and initial processing of this production, and to the market (prices, quantity, quality, mandatory norms, etc.). This tech-

nical information is tied to production systems, and priorities change with the functions of the region.

Information on natural resources and their management is not sufficiently available.

It is appropriate to work on farmers' abilities to evaluate their own information needs and turn them into communication strategies and activities.

Limitations

Many limitations must still be lifted in order to make it possible to meet these needs efficiently – illiteracy, poor communication networks (deficient or non-existent infrastructures), and inappropriate support from service providers. Finally, producers and their professional organisations are still not thought of as partners often enough.

Support Organisations

Characteristics

Support organisations are either local state services (such as extension services or administrators) or NGOs. The former are seeing their activities lessen and change due to state withdrawal, which benefits local authorities and, above all, NGOs.

The role of NGOs has been considerably strengthened. They are entrusted with the implementation of numerous projects. However, a large number of NGOs still lack expertise, independence with respect to donors, and sometimes even professional ethics. In addition, it is necessary to take account of the political dimension of their activities, and they are not always prepared for this.

Role

NGOs play a support role in highly diverse fields: technology, economics, commerce, institutions, society, etc. They have a strong influence on the economic, social and cultural structures of the rural world, and in some ways take the place of deficient public services.

Needs

NGOs and support organisations need information relative to their activities in support of grassroots producers.

They all need to acquire the expertise necessary to know how to find information, analyse it, and present it without imposing it. Local information centres might be a good starting point to respond to this need.

Finally, NGOs and support organisations must learn to capitalise on the experiences and results of development work, and direct this information back into the field.

Researchers

Characteristics

Researchers are beginning to work in closer collaboration with other development partners in the framework of national agricultural research systems, in which research centres, universities, NGOs and farmers' organisations have joined forces. Agricultural research has organised itself on a global scale, with a system for work carried out through regional and international networks, and with the creation of a global forum on agricultural research for development.

Role

Researchers are often assimilated with service providers. They need to be able to respond to demands from the field, as well as to the methodological preoccupations of grassroots stakeholders and support organisations. They must help these stakeholders improve their technical production systems, in order to take better account of the economic dimensions of sectors, and of institutional aspects.

Needs

Researchers are still poorly equipped with scientific reference documents, and often lack the tools to respond to the needs of rural populations and their associations.

They need information on work undertaken in their fields of expertise, both internationally and sub-regionally. They need better access to the results obtained and innovations perfected in other developing countries.

The Private Sector: Traders

Characteristics

Their numbers and interventions have increased in recent years with economic liberalisation. The small food-processing business sector hides a considerable potential for expansion which is partially underexploited. Innovations (new processing techniques, new products, etc.) are few in relation to needs and potential. Finally, some have short-term strategic outlooks and poor understanding of the value of adopting a policy of quality.

Role

Their role is evolving, inasmuch as grassroots producers and/or their associations are beginning to negotiate with the food-processing industry or with traders. Economic liberalisation leads them to take better account of market logic and the concepts of quality and marketing. Better organisation of production channels and the development of exports implies improving the relationships between producers, processors, traders and clients.

Needs

Private-sector stakeholders need to be better informed on technical innovations and improvements. They also need information that helps them respond to market demands. They would benefit from improved understanding of regulations and (sanitary and other) norms, as well as marketing techniques. Finally, communication with their partners, both before and after their activities, should be strengthened.

Decision-Makers: The Public Sector

Characteristics

The public sector is represented principally by Ministries of Agriculture. They must contribute to the formulation of agricultural development policies, provide guidance, and define a favourable working framework for stakeholders.

The withdrawal of the state from production activities and its retreat from direct support to producers calls into question its role as direct manager of development activities. However, its political role in the definition of strategies for development and for the improvement of the institutional environment should be strengthened. Democratisation imposes the debate and negotiation of policy and strategy choices with development stakeholders.

Local governments and decentralised state services are taking on greater importance due to national decentralisation policies. The latter are in charge of organising local economic and social development.

Regional and sub-regional organisations must also rethink their role, by strengthening regional cooperation activities without taking the place of national levels, and by more fully involving grassroots stakeholders from the private and associated sectors in their activities.

Role

Today it is up to the public sector – not alone, but along with the other stakeholders – to define rural development and information strategies and policies. It is up to the public sector to collect as much reliable data as possible, and to analyse and disseminate it. The public sector must be attentive to the needs of rural populations in order to promote the development of the communication infrastructures that they need, and to establish appropriate legal frameworks. It has an information duty with respect to the ensemble of rural development stakeholders.

Needs

Ministries of Agriculture and their local offices must acquire good understanding of their role in information, which requires appropriate institutional structures and the skills to ensure proper information management and effective decision-making.

The public sector needs information that facilitates the definition of new development policies and monitoring schemes in order to evaluate the measures taken, and to predict and manage difficulties.

Other Decision-Makers

Characteristics

The public services are no longer the only decision-makers. The private sector, NGOs, and service providers in general take part in decisions on rural development orientations. The newcomer among these decision-makers, now taking on increasing importance, is the farmers' and producers' associations, and their federations and unions.

Role

The role of each of these categories is important for the ensemble of decisions on policy or on the organisation of national agricultural systems. They could effectively participate in development choices nationally and locally if they have access to coherent and reliable information.

Needs

They have the same kinds of information needs as all those who participate in decision-making. In general, they need synthesised, up-to-date information – simple and dynamic indicators of changing trends and of policy impacts. They often lack information that would enable them to establish alternative scenarios.

Limitations

Many limitations remain to be removed in the area of defining and efficiently implementing coherent and operational information strategies: analysing needs, gathering information, assessing information quality, knowing how to translate the information into terms that can be understood by each category of stakeholders, and finally, choosing the tools and media with which to communicate and exchange the information.

Typology of the Media and their Uses

Traditional Media

These are theatre, *griots*, sketches, drums, exchange visits, etc.

Users

Development support organisations, farmers' organisations. The messages'

addressees are rural village communities. These tools are very close to people and are culturally appropriate to the context – they use languages and approaches that are familiar to the audience, and are low-cost. These tools are well adapted to social information.

Advantages

These means are generally affordable. NGOs and farmers' associations can master them with training. They match rural populations' listening or reading habits, and are culturally appropriate. They suit the audience's limited financial capacities, and use languages and approaches with which they are familiar. Innovative and free use of these conventional tools increases their attractiveness for users.

Inconveniences

Traditional tools have a limited range and field of action. Oral messages may be forgotten. They are excellent for raising awareness, but cannot be used as a support for highly specific information, such as technical information.

New experiments that make use of conventional media often depend on external funds and are thus not very sustainable, despite recent public willingness to pay for information.

Written Supports

They include newspapers, books, posters and magazines.

Users

Farmers' associations, development organisations, extension and research services, other support structures and decision-makers.

Advantages

Information is permanent and sustainable, easily accessible, and easily duplicated and distributed. The results obtained – even when modest – allow rural producers to become aware that reliable, accessible and updated information tools that live up to their expectations do exist.

Inconveniences

The lack of literacy among rural populations, the rapid deterioration of paper supports, high transportation costs, and poor diffusion and distribution networks.

Community Media

These are essentially rural radio stations and magazines used by villagers.

Characteristics

The numbers of community media have increased considerably over the past 10 years. Magazines, newspapers and associated radio stations have multiplied. They often use local languages and address subjects of local interest. They further rural groups' feelings of cultural identity and belonging.

Advantages

These media give themselves the role of contributing to rural development via information. They are not commercial organisations and occasionally find it difficult to survive. Their success shows that they meet a need. They treat diverse themes pertaining not only to technical or economic questions, but also to social issues, the progress of women, democracy, etc.

Inconveniences

These media need better-targeted information and better knowledge of the public they wish to reach. Furthermore, their staff often lack skills and training.

Legal and regulatory frameworks are not always favourable to grassroots communication initiatives.

Audiovisual Media: Radio and Television

Advantages

Most rural households have a radio, and television ownership is spreading in rural areas after having conquered the cities. Information can be repeated frequently. Radio can be used to support field workers. The credibility of broadcast information is generally good.

Inconveniences

Radio cannot transmit all types of message. It can be used for stories, documentaries, debates or short, factual information. Listeners often lack concentration. Complex information or long periods of unbroken speech often lead listeners to tune out. The production of television programmes is still costly. Information is not permanent.

Internet

Users

Users of the Internet are mainly urban research and training centres, but it is also used by agronomic centres, farmers' associations, local radio stations and newspapers.

Advantages

It allows access to databases. Large quantities of information circulate rapidly. International communication costs are relatively low. The Internet allows near-instantaneous communication worldwide. If the user knows how to search well, the amount of information available on the Internet is considerable.

Inconveniences

The cost of the infrastructure needed for this means of communication is prohibitive for a large majority of rural development stakeholders in **ACP** countries. The lack of telephone lines and high-power cables limits Internet use to a few villages, and does not allow for acceptable transmission times. The Internet relies on the use of international languages, and is inaccessible for the majority of rural villages.

Cellular Telephones

Mobile telephones have multiplied considerably in recent years, even in rural areas. They fill the gaps in national telephone networks. They are easy to use and greatly facilitate direct communication between individuals and, possibly, institutions.

PRIORITIES AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CTA

Three Priority Axes for Intervention suggested to CTA

1. Stakeholders define priority communication programmes

CTA should develop priority programmes that support the definition and implementation of communication strategies and programmes by stakeholders themselves, and pay particular attention to farmers' organisations, women, and local service providers.

It is a question of helping stakeholders to set up operational answers to communication needs in specific contexts.

Decentralisation, adaptation to local realities, and strengthening skills are suggested as key axes. Interventions are prioritised at sub-regional, national **and** local levels.

In this context, **CTA** interventions must focus on the organisations that work directly in rural areas, that is, on producers themselves and their collective organisations – as well as on service providers – to improve their ability to support producers. Particular attention should be paid to the specific needs of rural women. **CTA's** primary role is to help these local organisations to manage information and communications efficiently.

2. Networking

The functions of methodological analysis and exchange, experience sharing, networking, and improving communication between stakeholders make up the second priority axis for intervention.

The dominant orientations are decompartmentalisation, horizontal structure, rapid circulation of information, sharing knowledge, partnerships, and direct collaboration between institutions and stakeholders.

Schemes for communication and working in networks must be developed on different scales in order to strengthen experience sharing, negotiation between partners, synergies and lobbying.

Supporting (national and local) horizontal exchange and partnership networks, and the organisation of ties between horizontal and vertical networks, are priorities. On regional and international scales, it is a question of favouring exchange **and** partnership networks between ACP countries and between ACP countries and the EU.

3. Appropriate information

The third axis pertains to the production and accessibility of information that meets specific needs using appropriate tools.

Stakeholders no longer expect ready-to-use information, but rather the elements that allow them to create locally the information that responds to local demands and contexts.

Three priority orientations are suggested:

- helping define a *strategy for the use of different communication tools*, in particular new media, according to the specific contexts and stakeholders;
- improving the *availability and use of new communication technologies* and anticipating and preparing their use in the future;
- facilitating the *combination and inclusion of both conventional and modern communication tools*.

The priority information themes depend on the specific context. Nevertheless, a few general priority themes can be distinguished.

- **Implementation of policies and strategies for rural development.** Relates to stakeholders' need for better understanding of rural development policies, and for information that facilitates their participation in debates and negotiations on these policies.
- **Production and marketing.** The goal is to improve the competitiveness of local production. It is a question of technical, economic (prices, markets and credit), and institutional (regulations, quality standards and norms) information.
- **Natural resource management.** Land issues are essential. This theme also includes issues pertaining to biodiversity and genetically modified organisms.
- **Support mechanisms for small farmers and grassroots organisations.** Relates to information that makes it possible to strengthen producers' decision-making and negotiation skills at local, national, regional and international levels. Implies paying particular attention to cooperation networks between local organisations in ACP countries.
- **Information and communication technologies.** Pertains equally to strengthening the use of and access to new technologies in ACP countries, and to improving traditional communication systems such as local information centres.
- **Risk and natural disaster management.** This new request leads to particular emphasis on early warning systems and database management aimed at reducing the risks for agricultural production – zones producing too much or too little, price variations, crop-destroying diseases and pests, weather, etc.

Recommendations and Suggested Activities

Strengthen the ability to define, implement and manage information programmes

- (i) Undertake an analysis of stakeholders and their needs, information themes, tools and partnerships, on the sub-regional level and in several countries, so as to produce a specific map of information needs and a typology of intervention activities to be implemented.
- (ii) Analyse the specific areas where information and communication management capacities need to be strengthened on the sub-regional level and according to the types of stakeholders.
- (iii) Train teachers and local stakeholders in communication – analyse ability to: define communication strategies; carry communication activities; moderate and manage networks; master the selection and use of communication tools, in particular new technologies.
- (iv) Train media professionals, in particular local radio stations, in treating rural development information. Strengthen production by local radio stations and programme exchanges between local radio stations (via electronic networks in particular).
- (v) Produce a practical methodology handbook (a ‘cook book’) on efficient information management in ACP countries.
- (vi) Produce a handbook on the different communication tools available, their advantages and disadvantages, and the conditions for their use, including practical advice.
- (vii) Provide support to local information management structures and centres.

Produce and make available information that meets specific needs using appropriate tools

- (i) Develop and decentralise the CTA address database and expand its functions, for example by including information on available institutional and individual expertise and professional interests at national and regional levels.
- (ii) Assist the implementation of databases that permit the circulation of information in standardised formats, notably in the field of commercialisation, processing and agricultural policies.
- (iii) Develop CTA’s Internet site, and bring online information produced in the framework of activities supported by the Centre. CTA and other European organisations should strengthen the digital production of information and facilitate local context-appropriate production and dissemination on ‘conventional’ supports, in local languages (local publication and distribution of information bulletins similar

in content and purpose to *Spore*).

- (iv) Improve the currently minimal place held by the rural sector in aid programmes for the development of new communication technologies, for example through ACP stakeholders' active participation in international and (sub-)regional fora on new information technologies.

Develop exchanges, networks and partnerships

- (i) Take an inventory of networks and organisations that intervene in the rural development sector in ACP countries. Based on this inventory, build bridges that permit fluid circulation of information between the different sectors and stakeholders.
- (ii) Create or strengthen horizontal communication networks and national fora. Particular attention must be paid to the participation of village communities and women in these networks.
- (iii) Strengthen the use of new information technologies in networks and, in particular, their use by grassroots stakeholders – accessibility and skills.
- (iv) Establish a group of networks specialising in the exchange of rural development practices and knowledge.
- (v) Facilitate partnerships between networks involved in the rural development sector, and those in other sectors such as trade, information, health, tourism, education, etc. (seminars, electronic fora, e-mail, etc.).
- (vi) Implement an ACP country rural development information portal, or strengthen the role of an existing portal, as a platform that can be used by the different stakeholders in ACP countries.
- (vii) Strengthen collaboration between CTA and the different international aid institutions that intervene in support of communication for rural development in ACP countries. Facilitate the coordination of activities between these institutions. CTA could, for example, assist in setting up a working group on this theme.