GLOBAL FORUM FOR RURAL ADVISORY SERVICES – GFRAS

Davis K.

Executive Secretary, GFRAS, Eschikon 28, 8315 Lindau, Switzerland
kristin.davis@g-fras.org

GFRAS evolved out of a series of discussions at international meetings (primarily the annual meetings of the Neuchâtel Initiative) over several years where several stakeholders discussed issues of rural advisory services. They soon recognized the need for a formal structure to more pro-actively promote RAS (Research and Advisory System) development and various options were considered. Finally in a meeting in 2010 in Santiago, Chile, GFRAS was installed in its present form. The GFRAS mission is to provide a space for advocacy and leadership by a variety of stakeholders on pluralistic, demand-driven rural advisory services within the global development agenda. GFRAS plays a catalyzing role, promoting and stimulating interactions between and within the global policy level and the regional and national levels. This space allows regional actors to present their perspectives in global development forums and processes. Similarly, it provides a mechanism for interaction and dialogue between the global and the regional levels. This two-way flow should lead to a strengthened role of advisory services within the broader agricultural development arena. To achieve its vision and mission, GFRAS focuses on two target stakeholder groups:

- **The RAS community** institutions working directly in RAS from the public, private, and civil society sectors. GFRAS fosters leadership, particularly at the regional and national level of the RAS community, by providing a forum for stakeholders to interact to strengthen individual, organizational, and institutional capabilities in RAS. Moreover, the forum supports the development and synthesis of approaches and policies that improve RAS and help the RAS community to better advocate.

- **The international development institutions** involved in rural development (institutions that need to work more effectively with RAS to achieve overall rural development goals). GFRAS
provides a space for RAS advocacy efforts primarily at the
global and policy level. Through the GFRAS space,
stakeholders can help to provide a voice, enable dialogue, and
promote a supportive environment for investment in RAS.

The mission can only be achieved if these target stakeholder groups
develop more appropriate, sustainable, and effective policies,
practices, and approaches. This constitutes a change in behavior
that GFRAS seeks to achieve through its functions and activities.

Several partners support GFRAS financially including: the Bill and
Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF), the European Commission
(EC), the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD),
the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), and
the United States Agency for International Development. The
International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) and the Swiss
Association for the Development of Agriculture and Rural Areas
(Agridea) provide staff. Agridea in Switzerland hosts the GFRAS
secretariat.

The following document was produced in a participatory way over
the second half of 2012. It was discussed and adapted on several
occasions (e-discussion, GFRAS Annual Meeting 2012) and
finalized after discussions at the Global Conference for
Agricultural Research for Development GCARD2 in Uruguay last
October 2012, where it was used as the key paper for a session led
by GFRAS.
The “New Extensionist”: Roles, Strategies, and Capacities to Strengthen Extension and Advisory Services

Summary and Recommendations

(FINAL, 26 November 2012)

Extension and advisory services (EAS) play an important role in agricultural development. However, these services need new capacities to address the current challenges in agriculture and to contribute better to agricultural innovation – a process that requires interactions and knowledge flows among a wide range of actors in the agricultural innovation system (AIS). The extension landscape has become more pluralistic with increasing participation of the private sector (agro-inputs, agri-business, financial services), non-governmental organisations (international and local); producer groups, cooperatives and associations, consultants (independent and those associated with agri-business/producer associations), and ICT-based services. To better contribute to agricultural innovation, EAS should collectively perform a wide range of roles. These include developing networks, organising producers, facilitating access to credit, inputs and output services, convening innovation platforms, promoting gender equality, and disseminating new knowledge through training and demonstrations. To perform these roles, EAS need new capacities at the individual, organisational, and enabling environment (system) levels.

At the individual level, EAS need staff with good understanding of technical knowledge plus skills to manage social processes. At the organisational level, EAS should have capacities to put in place systems and procedures to manage human and financial resources, institutions to facilitate partnerships and learning, and frameworks to deal with institutional, legal, and regulatory issues. At the enabling environment level, capacities for interaction, learning, and adaptation are important. Similarly, reform strategies should explicitly address institutional and policy changes that enhance the ability of the different actors in the AIS to work as a system. At all levels there should be mechanisms to look at gender representation and equal access to services by both men and women; mechanisms to promote the involvement of youth in agriculture; and
opportunities to apply ICTs to enhance the performance of EAS. To develop new capacities in EAS, actions must be initiated at the national, regional, and global levels by different actors. These actions and actors are suggested below.

**NATIONAL LEVEL**

**Diagnosis and Reforms**
N1. Diagnose roles and functions in the agricultural innovation system and synthesise and share existing studies (action by: specialist agencies/consultants in consultation with different stakeholders)

N2. Undertake survey of EAS providers in the country and analyse existing models of EAS provision and undertake further research to support evidence-based reforms and policy advocacy on EAS (action by: Government through the Ministry of Agriculture; EAS platforms and networks, Universities, research councils and other policy research centres, farmer organisations, FAO and CGIAR)

N3. Undertake capacity self-diagnosis of EAS (action by: EAS management, country EAS networks; EAS fora and platforms supported by facilitator)

**Partnerships and Networks**
N4. Create innovation platforms, undertake needs assessments and initiate pilot projects to experiment with new approaches and promote learning from these (action by: EAS and other actors in the AIS especially universities and research centres)

N5. Establish collaboration and partnerships with different actors in the AIS, as well as actors in the commodity value chains in action research and learning by doing (action by: Research and extension councils, training centres in collaboration with EAS)

N6. Support establishment of national networks of EAS providers at different levels and look for synergies among networks (action: Extension division in the Ministry of Agriculture, EAS providers, professional societies in extension, regional networks of EAS, and private foundations (e.g. Syngenta Foundation for Sustainable Agriculture)
Technical backstopping
N7. Strengthen technical backstopping to EAS by organisations involved in research through joint research-extension initiatives (action by: Research councils, universities, private sector, NGOs)

N8. Focus on farmer institutional development by working through producer organizations at various levels (action: Extension Division in the Ministry of Agriculture, EAS providers)

Monitoring and Learning
N9. Create mechanisms for regular monitoring, reflection, learning, and evaluation; review of systems and processes; create arrangements for coordination and collaborative action among EAS (action by: EAS platforms and networks supported by facilitator)

Training and Education
N10. Establish and strengthen training centres; contract in specific competencies required for supporting capacity development; encourage management training centres and business schools to organise tailor-made capacity development programmes for EAS on coaching, facilitation, leadership, vision building (action by: Ministries of Agriculture and EAS in collaboration with training/management institutions)

N11. Develop curriculum for vocational and continuing education and skill up-gradation of individuals in EAS and farmers and undertake curriculum revisions at least once every five years (action by: Universities, research centres, training centres and NGOs (e.g.: CRS, EWB) in collaboration with EAS, FOs and organisations such as FAO, GIZ)

Funding
N12. Enhance public funding for promoting EAS providers (action by: national, provincial, and local governments, EAS networks)

REGIONAL LEVEL
R1. Support establishment of regional and sub-regional networks and engage them in design, implementation, and evaluation of EAS interventions; strengthen similar existing networks at the regional and sub-regional levels (action by: Regional lending organisations
such as ADB, AfDB, IADB, EBRD etc.; regional economic groupings such as regional economic communities e.g. SADC in Africa, ASEAN in Asia and Pacific, SAARC in South Asia)

R2. Collect and synthesise evidence on different aspects of EAS in the region and support the development of synergies and partnerships (action by: Regional EAS networks; FAO; CGIAR; regional university, education and research networks e.g. ANAFE, RUFORUM in Africa, AGRINATURA/Agreenium in Europe, APAARI, and FARA; regional farmer organisations)

R3. Develop policy briefs and position papers to influence policy process to support EAS (action by: Regional networks of EAS in collaboration with regional policy bodies, regional farmer organisations, researchers in the region in universities and research centres)

R4. Develop and promote new knowledge, frameworks and methodologies related to EAS and support up-scaling and out-scaling these (action by: regional EAS networks in collaboration with farmer organisations, researchers and practitioners/regional universities and academic centres (e.g.: RUFORUM in Africa; SEARCA in South East Asia, UWI-CARICOM in the Caribbean)

R5. Organise regional and sub-regional consultations and training programmes to share experiences and influence conditions in the enabling environment (action by: regional networks of EAS supported by other actors in the AIS)

GLOBAL LEVEL

G1. Support GFRAS and other international actors to lead and guide networking and capacity development and policy advocacy for EAS at the global level (action by: donors and intergovernmental bodies engaged in agriculture and rural development such as World Bank, EU, FAO, CTA, GIZ, IFAD, MEAS, World Farmers Organization, GCHERA, GFAR, and others; universities and training centres)

G2. Strengthen, support, and coordinate regional networks of EAS to achieve their respective goals (action by: GFRAS, FAO, CTA, MEAS, international and regional development agencies)
G3. Develop frameworks, tools, training modules, investment source books, discussion papers to shape the evolution of EAS and share these outputs widely (action by: GFRAS in collaboration with donors, researchers and practitioners linked to EAS; FAO, World Bank, CTA, MEAS, CABI, CRS)

G4. Liaise with donors at the global and regional levels engaged in EAS (action by: GFRAS, GDPRD)

G5. Conduct policy advocacy on strengthening the role of EAS in agricultural development and poverty reduction, enhanced funding support, and institutional and policy reforms in AIS (action by: GFRAS in collaboration with regional networks and other bi-lateral and international development agencies, international research and development organizations, G8 and G20)

G6. Promote inter-regional sharing of experiences with reforms and new approaches in EAS (action by: GFRAS in collaboration with regional networks, FAO, World Bank and other development partners)

G7. Provide long term financial and technical support to EAS to manage change and develop new capacities; use new investments to experiment with new approaches and promote institutional reforms (action by: Donors and intergovernmental bodies engaged in agriculture and rural development such as World Bank, FAO, IFAD and others)

G8. Develop a research programme on extension and capacity strengthening (action by: AIAEE, GCHERA, TAP, GFAR, CGIAR and universities).
EAS consist of all the different activities that provide the information and services needed and demanded by farmers and other actors in rural settings to assist them in developing their own technical, organisational, and management skills and practices so as to improve their livelihoods and well-being.

An AIS – Agricultural Innovation System is a network of organisations, enterprises and individuals focussed on bringing new products, processes and new forms of organisations into social or economic use, together with the institutions and policies that affect their behaviour and performance.

Acronyms.
AfDB  = African Development Bank
ADB   = Asian Development Bank
AIAEE = Association for international Agricultural and Extension Education
ANAFE = African Network for Agriculture, Agroforestry and Natural Resources Education
ASEAN = Association of Southeast Asian Nations
APAARI = Asia-Pacific Association of Agricultural Research Institutions
CARICOM = Caribbean Community
CGIAR = Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research
CRS   = Catholic Relief Services
CTA   = Technical Centre for Agricultural and Rural Cooperation
EBRD  = European Bank for Reconstruction and Development
EWB   = Engineers without Borders
EU    = European Union
FAO   = Food and Agricultural Organisation of the United Nations
FARA  = Forum for Agricultural Research in Africa
FOs   = Farmers' organisations
GCHERA = Global Confederation of Higher Education Associations for the Agricultural and Life Sciences
GDPRD = Global Donor Platform for Rural Development
GFAR  = Global Forum on Agricultural Research
GIZ = Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit = German Society for International Cooperation
IFAD = International Fund for Agricultural Development
IADB = Inter-American Development Bank
MEAS = Modernizing Extension and Advisory Services
RUFORUM = Regional Universities’ Forum
SAARC = South Asia Association for Regional Cooperation
SADC = Southern Africa Development Community
SEARCA = Southeast Asian Regional Center for Graduate Study and Research in Agriculture
TAP = Tropical Agricultural Platform
UWI = University of the West Indies