



ELKANA/FAO Workshop

on

**EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION AND INFORMATION MANAGEMENT
AMONG
AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH- EXTENSION AND FARMERS
FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT IN GEORGIA**

organized by

the Biological Farming Association "ELKANA"- Georgia

and

the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

**1-3 February 2005
Tbilisi- Georgia**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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The workshop on "Effective communication and information management among agricultural research, extension and farmers for rural development in Georgia" was jointly organized by the Biological Farming Association (ELKANA), Georgia and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and held 1-3 February, Tbilisi, Georgia. The workshop was a follow-up to the study "Georgia: ICT Infrastructure and Use in Agriculture, Agricultural Policy, Research, and Education Organizations" (Temel, T., and Maru, A., 2003), commissioned by the Sustainable Development Group (REUS) of the FAO Regional Office for Europe (REU). Thus in follow up to this study and in response to current developments in the IC sector this workshop was needed to bring together not only stakeholders from the research institutions but also their constituents and clients, including farmer organizations; the objectives were to discuss the study, assess the IC needs of the participant organizations, formulate recommendations for the improvement of the information and communication system to better serve farmers' needs and rural development and, based on the gaps identified, draft a project proposal aiming at the improvement of communication and information systems in the agrarian sector.

Altogether 40 representatives of 22 local organizations, including agricultural research, education, extension, non-governmental and farmer organizations, and media, participated in the workshop. Ten representatives provided papers on information and communication systems of their respective organizations. Ms Mariam Jorjadze and Ms Ketil Nemsadze from ELKANA, Ms Karin Nichterlein, Research and Technology Officer, and Mr Riccardo del Castello, Communication Officer, from FAO moderated the workshop and carried out an analysis

of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT analysis) of information and communication of the represented organizations.

Some of the strengths identified were the availability of databases, technologies and information technologies on the institutional level. However the limited ability to disseminate these information and technologies on the local level to the benefits of farmers was also identified as the major weakness.

According to the workshop participants, there is an urgent need to improve the information and communication system among rural institutions and organizations. This will increase farmer participation in developing appropriate agricultural policies, bring scientists, extension workers and farmers closer together, improve relevance of research and quality of extension and advisory services, thus contributing to the development and the sustainability of the agricultural farms in Georgia.

An outline of a draft project proposal entitled "Improvement of information and communication system for agricultural sector development in Georgia" was developed by the workshop participants. Its goal is to improve market access and agricultural production through improved ICTs. The major objectives of the proposal are: strengthening the consultation centres through information supply and retraining of staff at district level; improvement of information and communication systems at all levels through advanced technologies; and the establishment of a platform for discussion of agricultural issues to influence state agricultural policies.

A project formulation team, consisting of representatives of research and education institutions, as well as farmer organizations, has been nominated by the workshop participants and requested to further elaborate the project proposal with the involvement of representatives of the Ministry of Agriculture.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The excellent organizational support from the Biological Farming Organization (ELKANA) is greatly appreciated, especially the excellent efforts made by Ms Mariam Jorjadze, Director of ELKANA, and her team, who compiled the current report. Moderators facilitating the workshop were Ms Karin Nichterlein and Mr Riccardo Del Castello from FAO, and Ms Mariam Jorjadze and Ms Ketis Nemsadze from ELKANA. The FAO officer involved in the workshop preparation and editing of the report was Karin Nichterlein.



1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The workshop on "Effective communication and information management among agricultural research, extension and farmers for rural development in Georgia" was jointly organized by the Biological Farming Association, Georgia and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and held 1-3 February, Tbilisi, Georgia. The workshop was a follow-up to the study "Georgia: ICT Infrastructure and Use in Agriculture, Agricultural Policy, Research, and Education Organizations" (Temel, T., and Maru, A., 2003), commissioned by the Sustainable Development Group (REUS) of the FAO Regional Office for Europe (REU). The study assessed the needs of national agricultural research institutions and their relevant partners, altogether nine organizations, for innovative, appropriate, and efficient information and communication systems and linkages in Georgia. The study noted that there is an official recognition at the institutional level that the establishment and relevant use of an information and communication technology (ICT) infrastructure should be one of the country's critical tools in the promotion of economic development. However, for the agricultural sector, an ICT strategy has still to be developed and priorities need to be set. The ICT infrastructure and usage in most of the assessed organizations and the agricultural research system is very limited, with a few noticeable exceptions. Available scientific and technical information related to agricultural research and development is largely obsolete. Most of the organizations do not have electronic research data management system. Thus in follow up to this study and in response to current developments in the IC sector, this workshop was needed to bring together not only stakeholders from the research institutions but also their constituents and clients, including farmer organizations; the objectives were to discuss the study, assess the IC needs of the participant organizations, formulate recommendations for the improvement of the information and communication system to better serve farmers' needs and rural development, and based on the gaps identified to draft a project proposal aiming at the improvement of communication and information systems in the agrarian sector.

2. PRESENTATIONS

2.1 Participants

Altogether 40 representatives of 22 local organizations, including agricultural research, education, extension, non-governmental and farmer organizations, and media, participated in the workshop (see Annex 1 - List of Participants). Mr. Mamuka Meskhi, Assistant to the FAO Country Representative, took part from the local FAO office. Ms. Mariam Jorjadze and Ms. Keti Nemsadze participated as ELKANA Facilitators. Ten representatives provided papers on information and communication systems of their respective organizations. Ms. Karin Nichterlein, Research and Technology Officer, and Mr. Riccardo del Castello, Communication Officer, facilitated the workshop from FAO.

2.2 Programme of the workshop

1 February 2005 (Day One)

According to the agenda (see Annex 2 - Workshop Programme), the workshop was opened by Mariam Jorjadze, the Director of ELKANA, who welcomed the participants. She drew the attention to the study on the infrastructure of information and communication technologies and use in Georgian agriculture sector commissioned by FAO, from which a Georgian translation was distributed to the participants. She presented the workshop program to the participants and introduced the guests from FAO.

Karin Nichterlein spoke in her introduction about FAO's activities in the European region. In particular she mentioned the support given to the countries of Central and Eastern Europe to reduce poverty and contribute to food security during the transition period to market economies. Despite the information revolution, the majority of rural people has no or only limited access to information needed to improve their situation and develop the rural sector, due to the limited availability and use of information and communication technologies in rural areas. The Workshop would address this issue.

Riccardo Del Castello spoke about the role of information transfer in agricultural development. He noted that information and communications are two sides of one issue - exchange of information between people. He stated that for effectiveness of the workshop the exchange of ideas and experiences between participants played the most significant role.



Afterwards the participants briefly introduced themselves and shared their expectations from the workshop, which included among others getting new and closer contacts to colleagues during the workshop, share knowledge and experiences including on farmers needs, assess the current situation of ICT use in agriculture and identify new strategies (Annex 3).

This was followed by the election of chair persons and rapporteurs under the chair of Mariam Jorjadze. David Bedoshvili, David Maghradze, Rostom Gamisonia were elected as chairmen for the sessions when participants gave their presentations. Amiran Kvantaliani and Nana Zubashvili (day 1), Vakhtang Shelia, Nino Kishmarishvili (day 2) and Givi Mosashvili, Irma Babunashvili (day 3) were elected as rapporteurs, to summarize the workshop results.

Mariam Jorjadze presented the goals and objectives of the Workshop (Annex 4).

Karin Nichterlein reported on the needs assessments of agricultural research systems in information and communication technologies conducted by FAO in countries of Central and Eastern Europe, emphasizing on the results of the in-depth study conducted in Georgia (Annex 5). Riccardo Del Castello presented a paper on information and communication for agricultural and rural development, and FAO's experience to assist farmers in developing local communication processes through the use of media tools such as community radio, video and new ICTs (Annex 6).

Discussion: The presentation of FAO's study results and experiences were of special interest to the participants. The participant representing the management of the Georgian State Agrarian University found the evaluation of the ICT infrastructure of the university too negative. He said the results would not reflect the actual situation and the university has some up-to-date information facilities. FAO representatives stated that the results of the study were based on interviews with the employees of organizations and views of interviewed people, conducted in 2003, and one of the purposes of this workshop was to discuss the results, and update the information.

2.3 Summary of presentations and discussions

Chairmen: David Bedoshvili, David Maghradze, Rostom Gamisonia



Georgian State Agrarian University (GSAU) - Amiran Kvantaliani reported on the role of the university in training agricultural professionals and future plans to create an information and consultation centre (Annex 7).

Discussion:

With regard to the ICT infrastructure, information was provided that the university has about 60 computers available for the students, though contacts with the farmers and consulting services need improvement. Although, the university offers retraining for farmers, it has no training programme for extensionists.



Georgian Academy of Agricultural Sciences (GAAS) - Givi Mosashvili reported on the role and activities of the academy and plans to establish an information centre at GAAS (Annex 8).

Discussion:

The participants considered future plans of GAAS, in particular, the establishment of an information centre (on the third day of this Workshop, a presentation of the project for establishing this centre would be made). To the question how research results will be communicated to farmers, participants were informed that GAAS regional offices would be supplied with computers to deliver research results produced by GAAS institutes to farmers. It was emphasized during the discussion that there is need to translate scientific results in a format understandable to farmers. The Institute of Horticulture, Viticulture and Winemaking was given as example on how to do it, since the institute is currently developing a system for identification of farmers' needs and for the 'translation' of scientific information to information understandable by farmers.



Research Institute of Horticulture, Viticulture and Winemaking (RIHVW) - Vakhtang Shelia reported on the research priorities of the institute which has been reformed since 2002 as part of a World bank project that included research priority setting, reorganization, reduction of staff, and provision of research equipment; in this context a centre for planning, extension, consultation and training has been established and in future the establishment of a computer centre is foreseen (Annex 9).

Discussion:

The questions basically dealt with the centre of the institute responsible for extension and training. The centre provides paid services from which currently only large farmers and firms benefit. Expansion of the services is hindered by imperfect communication facilities and lack of finances for advertising.



Farmer Association 'Farezi' - Nana Zubashvili presented the strategies and activities of the association focusing on support to farmers in the Samtskhe-Javakheti region in the field of biological farming and conservation of traditional varieties and farming methods (Annex 10).

Discussion:

The activities of the farmer association attracted the interest of the participants, specifically the ability to have direct contacts with farmers and deliver consultation services.



Georgian Business University (GBU) - Nino Damenia informed on the main research priorities of the Institute of Globalistic and Strategic Development of Georgia that are focused on various aspects of development (Annex 11), and its search for research partnerships.

Discussion:

Nino Damenia informed on the main research priorities of the Institute of Globalistic and Strategic Development of Georgia that are focused on various aspects of development (Annex 11), and its search for research partnerships.



Ministry of Agriculture and Food of Ajaria (MAF Ajaria) - Vakhtang Goguadze presented current problems of the agricultural sector in Ajaria, plans of the ministry to provide services to farmers to assist them with the transformation to a market economy and informed on project proposals prepared for submission to donors (Annex 12).

Discussion:

The participants were interested in the problems of Ajarian farmers. The discussion centred about the problem of farmers who own land and often do not know how to manage successfully their farms. The establishment of local extension services would be required to provide farmers with information and training on new improved technologies and with management skills needed to become successful entrepreneurs.



Research Institute of Farming (RIF) - Zurab Jinjikhadze informed on the objectives of the institute which are focused on development of improved cropping systems and improved varieties of major field and vegetable crops, its activities, international cooperation, and constraints in receiving information on research and markets (Annex 13).

Discussion:

The presentation did not cause any discussions, just a question was asked to clarify the issues of yields and zoning of the new wheat variety - "Mtskheta-1".



Guria Agribusiness Centre (GAC) - Aleko Mameshvili informed on the two major activities of the centre, the support to farmer associations and the training of youth on agricultural issues during their school education through agrarian youth clubs (Annex 14)

Discussion:

The presentation raised interest and revealed the need of farmers for assistance. It was found that farmers should not receive financial support, without proper consultation through special extension services. Information systems need to be developed or strengthened, to make new approaches and technologies accessible to farmers.



Farmers Union of Georgia (FUG) - Irma Babunashvili spoke about the consultation and training activities and supply of seed and agrochemicals offered by the union and further plans to expand their activities. It has several information-consulting centres established and provides information through a monthly journal (Annex 15).

Discussion:

The discussion was centred on the identification of farmers needs for information and support. The union uses various methods of needs identification including contacts at information stands, face-to-face meetings during consultations, and surveys.



Research Institute of Plant Protection (RIPP) - - Eka Tabatadze presented the activities of the institute, which are focused on research on plant pests and their control in agro-ecosystems and forestry (Annex 16).

Discussion:

The questions and answers showed that the institute has lot of interesting and relevant information, but lacks an efficient information system, though it has no database yet and its website functions only for a week.



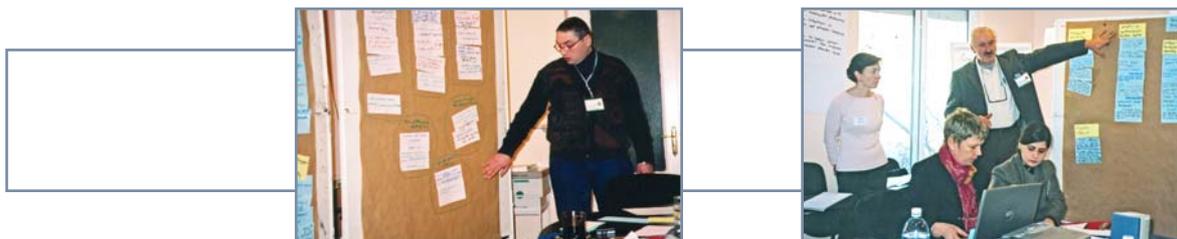
Radio 'Mtsvane Talgha' (Green Wave) - Ramin Meladze presented the objectives and activities of the association and radio 'Green Wave' paying special attention to promotion of the NGO sector and to raising awareness on environmental issues (Annex 17).

Discussion:

Participants showed great interest in the presentation and considered the opportunity to cooperate for the agriculture sector. The radio station representative expressed interest in agricultural issues, considers cooperating with professionals of various agro-sectors for the production of special casts, and using the radio for advocacy on agricultural issues. Participants requested an information meeting at the radio, to inform on and discuss rural issues.



Georgian Association of Professional Bee-Keepers (GAPB) - Temur Ghoghoberidze spoke about activities of the association involving 250 professionals, who meet monthly. The association issues quarterly a newspaper "Putkari da Meputkreebi" (Bees and Bee-Keepers), organizes biannually an exhibition, where tools for bee-keeping, honey, and queen-bees are exhibited. The association has also breeders, who produce queen-bees for local bee-keepers and export (Annex 18).



2.4 SWOT Analysis

Introduction of Methodology for SWOT Analysis

Riccardo Del Castello presented the methodology for SWOT analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats), as a flexible tool in strategic planning to stimulate new ideas and to enhance interaction between participants (Annex 19). At the end of the first day the participants were divided into two groups, for the next day's group work on identifying the SWOT issues. A description of the SWOT methodology was distributed to all participants.

End of day 2

2 February 2005 (Day Two)

Summary of previous day

Amiran Kvantaliani and Nana Zubashvili summarized main issues presented and discussed at the previous day.



SWOT Analysis - internal analysis of strengths and weaknesses (SW)

Karin Nichterlein emphasized the need to analyze the internal situation of the organizations and institutions by identification of strengths and weaknesses to develop strategies for their improvement. Participants should reflect on the questions: What can their organization do well or badly to provide support to agricultural development via communication and information management. Strength of one organization could cover weaknesses of another one, and collaboration of the various organizations can help to make better use of their potential strengths. If gaps remain and were identified, they could be addressed by a technical assistance project.

For the identification of their strengths, the organizations should answer the questions: What are their strong points? What are their strengths? For the identification of the weaknesses, it is important to apply a realistic and self-critical approach. Participants should evaluate their organizations using an external point of view, considering the claims of clients, are other organizations better, what could be improved?

The following team work (in two groups) and plenary sessions on the analysis of SWOT were facilitated by Mariam Jorjadze and Keti Nemsadze.



Team work - Identification and categorization of SW

All participants received cards of two colours (one for strengths, one for weaknesses) and wrote down what they considered to be the strengths and weaknesses of ICTs in their organization (one idea per card). With assistance of the facilitators, the team members categorized the cards.

Plenary Session - Presentation of team work results and their consolidation (SW)

Results of the team work were presented to the plenary, and a consolidated list of strengths and weaknesses was prepared with support of the facilitators (Annex 20).

Team Work - Identification and Categorization of Opportunities and Threats (OT)

As done for the SW, participants received cards of two colours (one for opportunities, one for threats) and wrote down what they thought to be the opportunities and threats for ICTs in their organization (one idea per card). Together with the team facilitator, the cards were categorized.



Plenary Session - Presentation of team work results and their consolidation (OT)

Results of the team work were presented to the plenary, and a consolidated list of opportunities and threats was prepared with support of the facilitators (Annex 20).

Plenary Meeting - Priority setting by categories

The workshop participants considered the results of the SWOT analysis and identified priorities by voting (Annex 21).

Mariam Jorjadze resumed the results and made brief comments. She emphasized that the availability of databases, technologies and information technologies, identified as priorities are indeed strengths, though if they serve the farmers or not, is an issue for separate consideration. This was clearly reflected in the voting of the weaknesses - the limited ability to disseminate information on the local level was identified as the major weakness. With regard to the external factors of the SWOT analysis (e.g. opportunities), it turned out that no one relied on the government assistance; organizations represented rather rely on own resources and foreign assistance. In connection with the threats, Mariam Jorjadze welcomed the approach of participants to the issue who did not regard financial problem as a major threat.

End of day 2

2 February 2005 (Day Two)

Before continuing with the workshop, participants paid their last respects to Mr. Zurab Zhvania, the deceased Prime Minister. They learnt the tragic news of his death in the morning.

Resuming of the Previous Day

Vakhtang Shelia and Manana Gigauri summarized the results of the previous day before the workshop continued with the next session.



Formulation of the List of Basic Strategies and Activities - Introduction

Riccardo Del Castello spoke about the formulation of strategies to improve the information and communication system for agriculture and rural development. He noted that the results of the SWOT analysis provided a good basis, to identify the main problems and formulate strategies to solve them.

Team Work: Formulation of the List of Basic Strategies and Activities

The team work was facilitated by Mariam Jorjadze and Ketil Nemsadze. Participants decided to continue the work in one team. First participants identified basic problems of poverty in rural areas (Annex 22). Then a discussion followed on how communication and information management can contribute to the poverty reduction through improvement and development of agriculture sector in Georgia. Basic strategies and actions discussed were used for the formulation of a draft project proposal during one of the parallel sessions.

2.5 Developing ideas for cooperation

Plenary Session: "Market place"

Karin Nichterlein explained to the participants the purpose of the 'Market place' session and its working methodology. She experienced during this workshop strong interest of participants in cooperation and relevant opportunities, and proposed as a first step to identify areas of common interest for possible cooperation and further follow-up after the workshop. Participants with interest in collaboration

and concrete service offers/proposals were requested to write this on a card and pin it on the board. Others interested to collaborate on these issues, were requested to write his/her proposal and place this card below the original one. Participants got actively involved in 'marketing' and eight institutions/organizations presented their service/collaboration ideas (Annex 23).

Parallel Sessions:

After the Plenary Session 'Market place', participants of the workshop continued their work at two parallel sessions.

2.6 Drafting a project outline

Session A. Drafting a project outline by group representatives

Participants of the workshop nominated five representatives from education and research institutions, and farmers associations, to work as a team on the formulation of a draft project proposal. The formulation team consisted of Amiran Kvantaliani (GSAU), Raul Babunashvili (FUG), Nana Zubashvili (FAREZI), Ekaterine Tabatadze (RIPP), and Mariam Jorjadze (ELKANA).



Session B. Presentations of three participants

Facilitator: Tamaz Dundua

Three more participants gave presentations on their stakeholder organization:

- Biological Farming Association ELKANA - Zura Karbelashvili (Annex 24)
- Institute of Agricultural Information Sciences and Telecommunications - Leri Gigineishvili (Annex 25)
- Georgian Academy of Agricultural Sciences (GAAS) - Givi Mosashvili (Annex 8)



Presentation and consideration of a project proposal

Mariam Jorjadze presented the draft project proposal. She proposed that based on the workshop results, two project types could be developed - a project covering the whole country or a model project focused on one or two regions. Since the probability to find donor support for a large project is minimal, the formulation team proposed to prepare a model project version, which complies with FAO requirements. The project should address critical gaps ('white spots') of the ICS in agriculture and would have to be

submitted by the Ministry of Agriculture to FAO. Mariam Jorjadze presented the outline of the draft project proposal entitled "Improvement of information and communication system for agricultural sector development in Georgia". Its goal is to improve market access and agricultural production through improved ICTs. The objectives of the proposal are: strengthening the consultation centres through information supply and retraining of staff at district level; improvement of information and communication systems at all levels through advanced technologies; and the establishment of a platform for discussion of agricultural issues with the purpose to influence state agricultural policies (Annex 26). The presentation of the draft proposal did not cause any further discussion and participants agreed that the formulation team nominated by them would continue working on the preparation of a final version of the project proposal. In addition it was decided, to involve the representative of the Ministry of Agriculture as member of the formulation team.



2.7 Conclusions and Recommendations of the Workshop

According to the workshop participants, there is an urgent need to improve the information and communication system among rural institutions and organizations. This will support farmer participation in developing appropriate agricultural policies, and bring scientists, extension workers and farmers closer together. As a consequence the relevance of research and the quality of extension and advisory services will be improved, with positive impact on the development and sustainability of the agricultural farms in Georgia.

The participants agreed on the following recommendations for immediate action:

- the report of the workshop (English/Georgian version, deadline for preparation 31 March, 2005) should be disseminated among the workshop participants, the Ministry of Agriculture, the Parliamentary Committee on Agricultural Issues and FAO;
- the full project document for submission to FAO should be developed by the project formulation team nominated during the workshop with active consultation of other workshop participants and representatives of the Ministry of Agriculture;
- to inform the Ministry of Agriculture about the results of the workshop, and obtain its support for the involvement of their representatives in the formulation of the proposal and for the official submission to FAO by the Minister for Agriculture;
- information on the workshop objectives and results (press-release) should be disseminated through the information media of the participating organizations, mass-media and information network;
- the project formulation team should take into consideration ongoing agricultural projects and aim at achieving the maximum synergy among stakeholders;
- the project formulation team should consult the Land Cadastre Department for inputs of the proposal;
- the Government of Georgia should be requested to pay more attention to agriculture and to the organizations involved in the agricultural sector.

2.8 Evaluation and closing of the Workshop

For the workshop evaluation participants were requested to write down what they liked and what they thought could be improved (Annex 27). The evaluation was rather positive. It was found that the workshop was very well organized, the working atmosphere business-like, the subject actual and relevant, participants taking responsibility for active participation, and that actual results were achieved. It was criticized that the nominated representative of the Ministry of Agriculture was not attending the workshop. It was found that time allocated for team work was not sufficient, that the workshop materials should have been provided in advance and that presentation materials of participants should have been prepared better and more focused on the subject. It was proposed that in future, similar events should be held in one of the regions.

After the workshop evaluation participants expressed their gratefulness to FAO and ELKANA representatives for their high professional skills, good organization and benevolence.

FAO representatives made brief assessment. They cordially thanked the participants, organizers, translator, and the secretariat and noted that the issues considered at the workshop were timely and necessary. For the full three days of the workshop there was a very good working environment and in addition to the communication process initiated among the stakeholders a practical result - a draft project outline was in place. Work on this project proposal should be continued with the purpose to submit it for funding.

Mariam Jorjadze closed the workshop. She thanked all, who were present and she specifically pointed out FAO's role in organizing this workshop. She expressed her hopes that the cooperation, initiated during this workshop would be continued and yielded in results contributing to rural development.

The workshop was finished with the banquet, arranged for the participants by ELKANA.

A N N E X E S

