

Towards Inclusive Rural Communication Services – Informing Policy

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Abstract: Evidence demonstrated in the 19 cases in the GRI-RC study presented in the first presentation of this panel showed increasing trends towards the policy, communication and information needs of rural populations. A policy focus on rural development revolves around investing in technological interventions or communication services that are believed to improve rural livelihoods. Based on the evaluation of the 19 cases, there is an imbalance in terms of how these initiatives are planned, implemented and evaluated. Policy commitment and funding possibilities are often limited beyond the implementation phase of most Rural Communication Services (RCS) initiatives. It is common to see that the evaluation of the initiatives are left in the hands of external consultants, with focus on generating information that specifically accounts for the value of money invested in the initiatives. What this study has further shown is that project evaluations are equally important at the planning and implementation stages. In particular, evaluations that are configured to facilitate adaptive or social learning processes involving project stakeholders. It shows that only when evaluation approaches are configured in this way, then the possibility of participation, effective communication and access to equitable information and knowledge becomes a true reality of RCS.

This paper will review the policy implications of the GRI-RC study on evidence based approaches for Rural Communication Services and present some recommendations that were formulated to instigate a dialogue on how suitable evaluation processes can better inform policy towards effective and sustainable RCS.