

## **Towards Inclusive Rural Communication Services – Building Evidence**

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**Abstract:** Over the past decade, efforts in the agriculture and rural development sectors have seen the rollout of diverse communication initiatives, with a focus on building human capacity and increasing access to equitable information and knowledge. A good number of these initiatives have contributed to promoting rural livelihoods, family farming and resilience. The lack of reported evidence, however, limits the possibilities for convincing policy makers to invest in and institutionalise communication approaches and services that put in the metaphorical extra mile to establish the human and social capital required for sustainable change in rural areas.

A scoping study conducted for the Food and Agriculture Organisation by the Global Research Initiative for Rural Communication aimed at compiling existing evaluation cases with proven methodologies to assess and document evidence-based approaches in the field of Communication for Development that may be used for designing rural communication services as part of agricultural and rural development policies. It drew on a literature review and 19 cases across Africa, Asia-Pacific, Latin America and the Caribbean to compare, analyse and document convincing evidence of evaluative approaches, methods and outcomes of communication programmes and rural communication services.

The analysis showed marked inconsistencies in evaluative frameworks, approaches, methods and the corresponding reported outcomes. Cases that used linear or vertical approaches and methods trend towards documenting quantifiable evidence to demonstrate accountability of project outcomes to funders with less possibility for adaptive learning processes and long-term sustainability. Additionally, initiatives that cross pollinated approaches and methods reported mixed outcomes, making it difficult to determine the extent to which some initiatives support sustainable rural communication services.

Compelling evidence of rural communication service initiatives, however, emerged from cases that used solely horizontal, participatory evaluative approaches. These cases showed convincing outcomes for policy consideration such as increased participation of key stakeholders in design, implementation and evaluation of RCS initiatives. It also showed equitable information and knowledge access, social learning, and sustainable impact.

This paper will present the frameworks applied for evaluating RCS initiatives and discuss their advantages and disadvantages in building evidence.