



ANNOUNCEMENT

Regional Conference on Rural Advisory Services (RAS) in Central Asia and the Caucasus

Autumn 2014, Issyk Kul, Kyrgyzstan / Organisation - CACAARI and CAC-FRAS

Dear Sir, dear Madam, dear colleagues

With this letter, CACAARI and CAC-FRAS, in collaboration with GFAR and MEAS, would like to announce a Regional Conference on Rural Advisory Services in Central Asia and the Caucasus, taking place in autumn 2014 in Issyk Kul region in Kyrgyzstan. You find the objectives and a preliminary program on the following pages. We would appreciate if you share this announcement with other possibly interested persons.

For the moment, we would like to know from you the following:

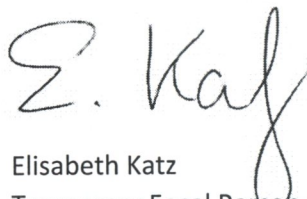
- **Are you interested in participating in this event?** How likely is it that you actually participate?
- **Do you need sponsoring from the organisers' side for your participation?** If yes, which part of the costs could you contribute yourself?
- **Is the planned time of the event (10-14 September 2014) suitable for you?** If not, which week in autumn 2014 would suit you better?
- **Are you willing to be a member of the organisational committee?** Most of the preparation work will be done through virtual interaction and on a voluntary basis, respectively on the working time of your institution. If funding is available, a 2-3 day face-to-face preparation meeting in KR or TJ will be organised in June or July.
- **Are you willing to contribute to the mapping / assessment of the rural advisory service system in your country and to presenting the results at the conference?** If you are interested, let us know, and we will provide you information on what work this involves. Note that this work will also be mostly on a voluntary basis.
- **Do you have any comments, suggestions and ideas concerning the objectives, preliminary program, duration, venue etc. of the conference?**
- **Do you have advice to the organisers on potential sponsors of participants which cannot participate without financial support?**
- **Would your organisation be able to contribute financially or in-kind to the conference, for example by sponsoring participants?** So far, limited budget is available from GFRAS. Some others indicated that they might be able and willing to contribute.

Looking forward to your reply (if possible until May 12, 2014) and to any questions you may have to the following addresses a.tashmatov@cgiar.org or eka.rdconsulting@gmail.com.

With best regards



Dr. Alisher Tashmatov
Executive Secretary, CACAARI



Elisabeth Katz
Temporary Focal Person for GFRAS in Central Asia



Regional Conference on Rural Advisory Services (RAS) in Central Asia and the Caucasus Autumn 2014, Issyk Kul, Kyrgyz Republic

Introduction

Poor linkages between researchers, advisory services systems, farmers, especially women farmers, private sector stakeholders and policy makers are a common issue in the countries in the Central Asia and the Caucasus (CAC) region. The unsystematic level of interaction undermines the ability of farmers to access and introduce innovative technologies and practices on their farms, and thus deprives them of innovation-based opportunities to improve their productivity, profitability and their livelihoods. In view of this challenge, CACAARI (Central Asia and the Caucasus Association of Agricultural Research Institutes) and CAC-FRAS (Central Asia and the Caucasus Forum for Rural Advisory Services), a still informal regional platform of GFRAS (Global Forum for Rural Advisory Services), have decided to join efforts and undertake joint actions towards strengthening Rural Advisory Service Systems in the region. The goals are to learn from each other, develop common approaches, and coordinate efforts to strengthen agricultural innovation systems in the region.

In autumn 2014 (most probably from 10-14 September) CACAARI and CAC-FRAS, in collaboration with GFAR (Global Forum on Agricultural Research) and MEAS (Modernising Extension and Advisory Services) and possibly other partners, will organise a joint Regional Conference on Rural Advisory Services in the Issyk Kul region of the Kyrgyz Republic.

Objectives

The objectives of the joint Regional Conference on Rural Advisory Services are the following:

Concerning Rural Advisory Services:

- Establish a common understanding on status, strengths and weaknesses of the rural advisory services systems in the CAC region by sharing and discussing the results of a mapping of the RAS systems in the different countries, and prepare the ground for a comprehensive assessment of the rural advisory service systems in the CAC region.¹
- Share evidence of the effectiveness and importance of rural advisory services through the presentation of a number of case studies.
- Discuss models of government policies and support for rural advisory service systems and their advantages and disadvantages in different frame conditions, and provide recommendations to the governments in the region.

¹ The mapping will be conducted in collaboration with MEAS (Modernizing Extension and Advisory Services; project of USAID and University of Illinois), IFPRI (International Food Policy Research Institute) and possibly other interested stakeholders. The preliminary mapping is planned to be followed by comprehensive assessments of RAS systems in the participating countries in later in 2014 and 2015.

Concerning CACAARI:

- Define foresight mechanisms for agricultural development in the CAC region.
- Agree on regional actions towards the implementation of the GCARD Roadmap based on national reviews and a joint synthesis.
- Present and discuss results of CACAARI governance review and decide on ways forward.

Concerning CAC-FRAS:

- Determine the future form of CAC-FRAS.
- Agree on actions leading up to the global GFRAS Annual Meeting 2015, which will take place in the Kyrgyz Republic.

Participants

Advisory service professionals, government policy makers concerned with advisory services, representatives of national agricultural research systems, other professionals in agricultural innovation systems, and clients of advisory services from the region, are the core target participants. In addition, participants from GFRAS, GFAR and international organisations (e.g. CGIAR Research Programs in the region, FAO, IFPRI) dealing with rural advisory services will be attracted.

Preparation and organisation

1. An organisational committee of interested and motivated RAS stakeholders in the region will take the responsibility for the contents and the methodology of the conference, and provide guidance to the management and logistics team. Two facilitators, most probably from the region, will be part of this committee.
2. A management and logistics team comprising the Rural Advisory Services (RAS) in Kyrgyzstan and the CACAARI secretariat in Tashkent will take the lead in the practical organisation of the conference.
3. Country teams of 3-4 RAS professionals in each country will conduct basic mapping of the advisory service systems in their countries and prepare a presentation of the findings at the conference.

Financing

It is expected that the majority of the participants will finance their participation themselves. Sponsoring for a limited number of participants should become available.

Preliminary program

Topics	Comments
DAY 0	
Arrival of participants	
Opening, goals, mutual introduction	Evening
Day 1	
Overview concerning the status of advisory services in the region	Plenary presentation

Current status of advisory service landscape in the countries of the region	Market place presentations of the results of the mapping exercise by country teams
Evidence of advisory service effectiveness on productivity and income of farmers	Presentation of case studies
Conclusions on the effectiveness of advisory services and the frame conditions for this effectiveness	Group work and plenary discussions
Gender issues in Agricultural Innovation Systems	Optional evening session (after dinner)
DAY 2	
Field visits around lake Issyk Kul	Examples of advisory service organisations Visit to advisory service client farmers
Review of insights from the field visits	Group presentations and plenary discussion
How to make better use of ICTs in Agricultural Innovation Systems? E.g. database with agricultural information	Optional evening session (after dinner)
DAY 3	
Comparison of government role in advisory service provision in the region	Work in country groups, presentations and plenary discussion
Examples of government roles concerning advisory services from around the world	Presentation by an international advisory service specialist (t.b.d.)
Panel discussion on public-private partnerships and other models of government role for advisory services	Selected participating government officials and AS professionals, invited politicians
Discussion, conclusions and recommendations on effective government roles and policies concerning advisory services	Group work and plenary discussion
Joint dinner party	
DAY 4	
Parallel sessions:	
A) CAC-FRAS Discuss future organisational form of CAC-FRAS Plan steps and actions in preparation for global GFRAS meeting 2015 Determine messages to bring into the 5 th GFRAS Annual Meeting	Specific CAC-FRAS participants
B) CACAARI Foresight action program Pre-GCARD-3 face-to-face discussions CACAARI governance review	Specific CACAARI participants
Ways to address advisory service issues in CGIAR Research Programs (CRPs on Dryland Systems and on Policy Institutions and Markets)	Research stakeholders with contributions by selected advisory service specialists
Joint wrap-up session	
Departure of participants	