

### Foreword

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We live in an era characterised by rapid technological advances in the telecommunication sector which affect all spheres of human activity. New communication tools, services and practices have emerged and information has become the most distinguishing trait of contemporary societies.

Knowledge and information can greatly impact on agricultural production and food security. Improved communication systems can help rural communities access relevant and timely information on agricultural and rural development issues. With the dramatic expansion of various forms of electronic interchange, including electronic mail and the Internet, unprecedented opportunities exist for knowledge and information sharing and dissemination among development agents, policy makers and the beneficiaries themselves. Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) can be effective means of providing development workers with huge amounts of relevant information on markets, technology, prices, successful experiences, credit facilities, government services and policies, weather, crop, livestock and natural resource protection.

However, in order to have a significant impact on development programmes, ICT services must be readily accessible and meaningful to broad segments of rural populations and the information they carry must be adapted and disseminated in formats and languages that they can comprehend. They must also serve people's needs for entertainment, cultural enlightenment, and human contact – needs which, despite being strongly felt by us all, are too often overlooked by development professionals.

The convergence of ICTs with rural radio can serve these purposes, providing a powerful support for harnessing and communicating knowledge for development, for ensuring wider access to information, and for permitting local cultural expression and development. This is especially true in rural areas, where radio is an important mechanism for the rapid diffusion of knowledge and information in a diversity of languages and formats and where its long history and time-tested participatory methodology make it the most widespread and popular communication medium. The combined use of the two media not only allows wider access to a wealth of information, but it also provides an effective mechanism for bottom up articulation of real development needs.

This publication provides an overview of the most significant experiences in combining radio and ICTs to sustainable development. It is a result of numerous attempts by FAO's Communication for Development Group to foster information exchange and collaborative partnerships in rural radio initiatives. We hope that the reader will find in these pages some useful insights for stimulating discussion and concrete action in the context of their own development work.

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