



Assessment of Achievements of the GFRAS Operational Plan 2016-2020

Draft Assessment Report

by:

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Acronyms

AFAAS	African Forum for Agriculture Advisory Services
AESA	Agriculture Extension in South Asia
APEN	Australasia-Pacific Extension Network
APIRAS	Asia Pacific Island Rural Advisory Services
CAC-FRAS	Central Asia and Caucasus Forum for Rural Advisory Services
CAEPNet	Caribbean Agricultural Extension Providers Network
CFS	Committee on Food Security
CoP	Community of Practice
DLEC	Developing Local Extension Capacity
EUFRAS	European Forum for Farm and Rural Advisory Services
GDPRD	Global Donor Platform for Rural Development
GFAR	Global Forum for Agriculture Research
GFRAS	Global Forum for Rural Advisory Services
IALB	Internationale Akademie für ländliche Beratung
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
IFPRI	International Food Policy Research Institute
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MEL	Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning
MELA	Mekong Extension Learning Alliance
MENA	Middle East - North Africa RAS Network
NELK	New Extensionist Learning Kit
NIFA	US National Institute for Food and Agriculture
PIRAS	Pacific Islands Rural Advisory Services Network
RAS	Rural Advisory Services
RELASER	Red Latinoamericana para Servicios de Extensión Rural
ReSAKKS	Regional Strategic Analysis and Knowledge Support System
RICKI	Rural Innovation Centre for Knowledge and Investment
SARFAAS	Southern Africa Regional Forum for Agricultural Advisory Service

SAFIN	Smallholder and Agri-Food SME Finance and Investment Network
SDC	Swiss Development Cooperation
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SEASN	South Eastern Europe Advisory Service Network
ToC	Theory of Change
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WFO	World Farmers Organisation

Contents

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	4
1 INTRODUCTION	9
1.1 THE GLOBAL FORUM FOR RURAL ADVISORY SERVICES (GFRAS).....	9
1.2 GFRAS TEN-YEAR STRATEGIC PLAN (2016-2025).....	10
1.3 ASSESSMENT OF THE OPERATIONAL PLAN 2016-2020	11
1.4 THE CHANGING CONTEXT OF RURAL ADVISORY SERVICES.....	12
2. ASSESSMENT FRAMEWORK AND METHODS.....	15
2.1 ASSESSMENT FRAMEWORK.....	15
2.2 ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS.....	17
2.3 ASSESSMENT METHODS	17
2.4 LIMITATION OF THE ASSESSMENT.....	18
3. FINDINGS OF THE ASSESSMENT	20
3.1 EVALUATION QUESTION 1.....	20
3.2 EVALUATION QUESTION 2.....	34
3.3 EVALUATION QUESTION 3.....	39
3.4 EVALUATION QUESTION 4.....	41
4. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	48
4.1 CONCLUSIONS	48
4.2 RECOMMENDATIONS	48
REFERENCES.....	<u>5554</u>
ANNEX A – TOR	<u>5857</u>
ANNEX B – KEY INFORMANTS INTERVIEWED	<u>6059</u>
ANNEX C – DETAILED ASSESSMENT FINDINGS.....	<u>6160</u>

Executive Summary

The Global Forum for Rural Advisory Services (GFRAS) aims to enhance the performance of agricultural advisory services in order to improve the livelihoods of farm families and rural producers and contribute to the sustainable reduction of hunger and poverty. GFRAS is a member-based organisation with a Secretariat in Lausanne, Switzerland, and 17 regional and sub-regional networks located in most of the geographical regions in the world. The networks provide support to country forums which are the main link with smallholder farmers. GFRAS has a ten-year strategic framework (2016-2015) with three 'strategic fields' covering advocacy, professionalisation of rural advisory services and knowledge exchange among members and the wider community of actors in rural advisory services. The implementation of activities is framed by a five-year operational plan covering the period 2016-2020.

As the period of the operational plan is nearing completion, GFRAS commissioned an external assessment of progress towards achieving its objectives. The assessment is also expected to identify lessons that can inform the preparation of the next five-year operational plan (2021-2025). Following a competitive process, a team from the Natural Resources Institute (NRI), University of Greenwich, UK was selected to carry out the assessment. The approach used in the assessment was based on the GFRAS strategic framework in which the three strategic fields were viewed in relation to four research questions. These questions concerned (i) achievements arising from GFRAS actions during the period 2016-2019 (ii) constraints to success (iii) future expectations of the GFRAS constituency and (iv) lessons learned. The primary methods used in the assessment were a review of GFRAS documents and relevant literature, an online survey of 24 GFRAS stakeholders and interviews with 35 key informants. The assessment was carried out between June and November 2019 and an Assessment Working Group provide guidance to the NRI team.

Main findings:

The main findings of the assessment are summarised below under the four research questions, in line with the structure of the report. Based on the findings, some conclusions are drawn and recommendations for future action by GFRAS are then outlined.

Achievements

GFRAS has undertaken a variety of **advocacy** activities at global, regional and national levels. At least two Country forums in Africa are engaged in formal processes contributing to policy change and regional and sub-regional networks have held a series of policy dialogues. GFRAS stakeholders consider that the biggest impact has been at the global level. When GFRAS was established in 2010 one of the expectations was that it would provide a global voice for rural advisory services and raise its profile as a vital component of agricultural innovation systems. Many stakeholders consider that it has made considerable progress towards achieving this, although they acknowledge that this has not yet translated into significant increases in funding for rural advisory services. This is attributed, in part, to the lack of evidence of the impact of rural advisory services.

Nevertheless, GFRAS regional and sub-regional networks have been successful in obtaining a significant amount of funding to support their operations. Data collected by the Secretariat indicate that during the period 2016-2019 the networks have attracted a total of US\$5.2m in direct funding and in-kind contributions equivalent to US\$1.6m. These figures exclude an investment of US\$2.7m in the African Forum for Agricultural Advisory Services (AFAAS) through a World Bank Multi-Donor Trust Fund as this is not considered to be directly leveraged through GFRAS.

The New Extensionist Learning Kit (NELK) has made an important contribution to the **professionalisation** of rural advisory services. The NELK was published in 2017 as a set of 13 modules to support learning and is being used by organisations in several countries for training staff in rural advisory services. It is also being incorporated into the curricula of some universities. The capacities of nine regional networks in the professionalisation of rural advisory services were assessed as part of the wider assessment of their capacity needs conducted in 2016. This revealed that capacities in professionalisation were the lowest of the various criteria that were measured, highlighting the need for GFRAS to review how the networks can best be strengthened in the future.

GFRAS has generated a considerable number of knowledge products. The global Secretariat has coordinated the publication of a set of 30 Global Good Practice Notes; two issues papers on topics of current concern (migration and youth); the NELK; an updated Policy Compendium; and a library on the links between agriculture and nutrition. In addition, member networks have produced a wide range of publications. Stakeholders value these publications but suggested that, at the global level, future efforts should have a stronger emphasis on facilitating **knowledge exchange**, especially between the regional and sub-regional networks.

Constraints to success

The constraint most frequently mentioned by GFRAS stakeholders was a lack of resources to enable them to carry out all of their planned activities. There was an awareness of the need to develop sustainable funding strategies for GFRAS at all levels, from the global Secretariat to the country forums. The absence of a functioning Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning system was recognised by several key informants as an important gap for GFRAS. This has implications for the quality of reporting, the capturing of evidence of impact and the opportunities for learning within the GFRAS community.

Future expectations

There was a broad consensus among GFRAS stakeholders that the current strategic areas were still relevant, especially related to advocacy and resource mobilization and knowledge management. In line with comments mentioned above there were suggestions for a stronger knowledge management function and observations that efforts should be made to make information and knowledge more accessible to different users. This would involve clear targeting of audiences for particular purposes and appropriate packaging of information and choice of media channels. In the response to the question "What should change in the next operational plan?" the most common response of online survey respondents was that they would like to see decision-making devolved more to the regions.

Lessons learned

1. *A strong need has emerged for demonstrating a business case for investments in RAS and for the continued existence of GFRAS.* An enhanced awareness of the importance of rural advisory services has not translated into an increase in resources. The narrative needs to change to one in which the crucial contribution of rural advisory services to addressing key issues in the agricultural sector is shown.
2. *To effectively deliver the GFRAS agenda, a range of partnerships are needed based on strategic function.* GFRAS has sought to develop new partnerships, including with private sector organisations. However, the current status of some of the partnerships is not clear. A review of these partnerships is needed and an approach to partnerships should be adopted that is based on strategic functions and defined objectives.
3. *The GFRAS vision needs to be better conceptualised and conveyed through a theory of change.* The changes that GFRAS wants to see and the means for achieving these can be articulated more sharply. A draft Theory of Change (ToC) has been prepared but not widely shared. It is now timely to develop a new ToC through a participatory process with stakeholders to develop a shared vision with strong ownership.
4. *Effective steering of GFRAS agenda would require an effective Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning System.* The absence of a Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) System has implications for the quality of reporting, the gathering of evidence and the capacity for learning in the GFRAS constituency. A MEL System that is practical to implement and adequately resourced would benefit members at all levels of GFRAS.
5. *A range of contemporary issues demand strong attention from GFRAS and its constituents.* There are emerging issues that require an urgent response from the rural advisory services. The most prominent of these issues is climate change and there has been a step change in recognition of the severity of the problem, even within the past twelve months. Other notable developments include widespread adoption of Food Systems frameworks in the policy arena and, within this, a strong emphasis on improved nutrition. There is an expectation that GFRAS can take a leading role in guiding the response of rural advisory services to these issues.
6. *The judicious use of new ICT tools can help GFRAS strengthen its communication and knowledge management functions.* GFRAS can now launch a new communication and knowledge management initiative, in which it uses a range of ICT tools to facilitate dialogue and shape discussion around a range of contemporary and emerging themes.
7. *While shaping its agenda for next five years, GFRAS can learn from other global networks and membership-based organisations.* Membership-based global networks in the agricultural sector such as the World Farmers Organisation, Crop Life International, and the ISEAL Alliance provide useful organisational and operational models for GFRAS to learn from.
8. *Capitalise on new opportunities for improving RAS through digital agriculture.* Digitalisation is already changing the way that farming is being done in some areas and is opening up opportunities for rural advisory services to enhance their impact. There is an opportunity for GFRAS to facilitate sharing of information and experiences from new initiatives and to identify capacity needs that will guide curriculum development in further and higher education.
9. *A stronger focus on gender issues would enhance the GFRAS strategy and vision.* GFRAS has conducted several activities on gender and co-organised a workshop which led to a useful

publication on Gender Mainstreaming in Agricultural Value Chains. However, the capacity assessment exercise revealed that capacity in gender is weak at all levels of GFRAS should be strengthened. Peer learning among networks would contribute to capacity strengthening in gender.

Conclusions and recommendations

GFRAS has set up a global network structure, raised the profile of rural advisory services, and developed useful knowledge products and training resources. It is on the way to achieving many of the targets in its operational plan. There is general satisfaction within the GFRAS constituency with what it has done in the past four years. Nevertheless, there are areas that can be strengthened and decisions to be made on the direction to be taken during the next five-year operational plan. We have six recommendations as follows:

Recommendation 1: Engage in collective reflections with the constituency and partners for determining the future strategic orientation of GFRAS and deciding priorities. The preparation of a new operational plan for 2020-2025 is an opportunity for GFRAS to reflect on its strategy and to prioritise key activity areas (see section 4.2 for details). We have identified some options for future strategic pathways and consider that the most appropriate route for GFRAS is to prioritise areas within the current strategic framework and to develop an action agenda based on constituency demands.

Recommendation 2: Review and reframe GFRAS governance arrangements and management systems. The acquisition of a legal status and the new Board structure provides an opportunity for strong representation of GFRAS members in decision-making. Consideration should be given to using Working Groups for very specific tasks and to establishing Communities of Practice to enhance knowledge sharing on priority issues.

Recommendation 3: Develop a theory of change-based monitoring, evaluation and learning system. A Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning System is needed to document outcomes, improve the efficiency of operations and support learning. A ToC can provide a broader strategic understanding of the impact pathways and therefore could be useful tool for designing the MEL system.

Recommendation 4: Develop a knowledge management strategy and a communication agenda. This will guide the proposed shift in emphasis from the generation of knowledge products to the facilitation of knowledge exchange and information sharing.

Recommendation 5: Review existing partnerships and establish new partnerships. Strategic partnerships will be crucial in enabling GFRAS to deliver its objectives. This involves stronger linkages with institutions that are leading the rural innovation agenda, including representatives from the private sector.

Recommendation 6: GFRAS as an apex has a continued role and relevance and so development agencies should continue to support GFRAS. GFRAS has set up a global network structure, raised the profile of rural advisory services, and developed useful knowledge products and training

resources. There was a broad consensus among GFRAS stakeholders that the current strategic areas were still relevant, especially related to advocacy and resource mobilization and knowledge management. Achieving the GFRAS vision can potentially contribute to achieving several SDGs (in particular SDGs 1, 2 and 5). Therefore, GFRAS has a continued role and relevance which continues to need support from development agencies and partners.

1 Introduction

1.1 The Global Forum for Rural Advisory Services (GFRAS)

The Global Forum for Rural Advisory Services (GFRAS) was established in 2010 in response to a perceived need to raise the profile of rural advisory services and provide a collective voice at the global level. The *vision* of GFRAS is for rural Advisory Services to effectively contribute to agricultural innovation systems for sustainable development worldwide. Its *mission* is to provide advocacy and leadership on pluralistic and demand-driven rural advisory services for sustainable development.

GFRAS is a member-based organisation with a Secretariat in Lausanne, Switzerland, hosted by the Centre for Agricultural Advisory and Extension Services (AGRIDEA). Members comprise 17 regional and sub-regional networks from most of the geographical regions in the world. Some of these network pre-date GFRAS but many were set up at the same time or during the period following its establishment. Governance of GFRAS is through a Steering Committee which includes representatives from the regions and other stakeholders, including development partners. The Steering Committee provides strategic direction and oversees the activities of the Secretariat. Working groups are convened to address specific themes of interest to GFRAS, with participants drawn from members and associated organisations. An annual general meeting is held, with the location rotating between regions, at which networking, knowledge sharing, and review and planning activities take place.

During the first five years of its existence a major focus of GFRAS activities was to build and consolidate a global network structure, including country forums for rural advisory services which are the link with smallholder farmers. In parallel with this, efforts were made to strengthen the capacity of member organizations through a variety of initiatives. Knowledge products such as Global Good Practices Notes were developed and disseminated; training resources were prepared which were designed to respond to the changing requirements of staff working in the field of rural advisory services; and support was given on policy engagement with resource materials made available through an online Policy Compendium¹.

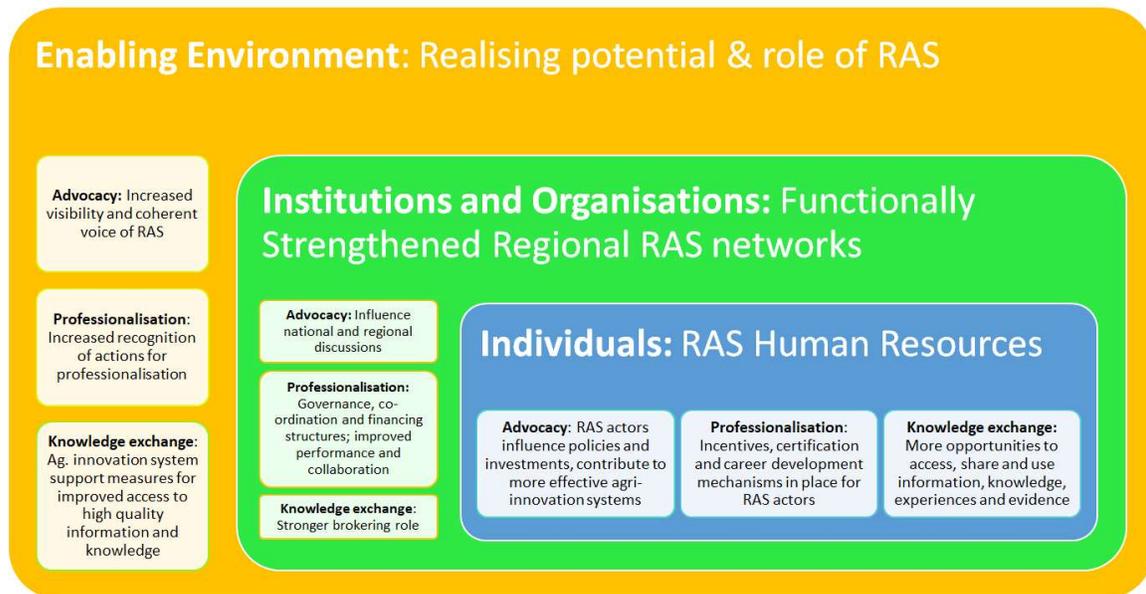
¹ These activities are summarized in the publication 'The Global Forum for Rural Advisory Services: The first five years 2010–2015'

These activities were implemented under a five-year operational plan which covered the period 2011-2016.

1.2 GFRAS ten-year strategic plan (2016-2025)

In 2016, GFRAS developed a new ten-year strategic plan (2016-2025). This was done using a participatory process in which views from different stakeholders were solicited. A central tenet underpinning the strategy is that rural advisory services are one of several components of the wider agricultural innovation system. This implies that rural advisory services should have clearly-defined linkages with other innovation 'actors' so that their respective contributions are understood, and synergies are maximised. One of the recommendations of a mid-term review of the first operational plan carried out in 2013 was that GFRAS should make more concerted efforts to engage with organisations from civil society and the private sector. It was noted that, although GFRAS members and stakeholders were aware of the aim of promoting demand-driven and pluralistic rural advisory services, achieving this in practice remained a challenge. The synopsis of the GFRAS strategic framework is captured in Figure 1 below:

Figure 1: GFRAS Strategic Framework 2016-2025



Source: Developed based on the GFRAS Strategic Framework document

At the same time there was a recognition that in order to assist rural advisory services to enhance their performance and deliver beneficial outcomes for smallholder farmers, capacity strengthening at different levels is needed. The emphasis of the strategy was placed on strengthening the regional and sub-regional networks so that they are better able to support

Assessment of Achievements of the GFRAS Operational Plan 2016-2020

the country forums to achieve impact. The primary functions of GFRAS identified in the initial strategy were retained and characterised as three strategic fields; namely, undertaking advocacy for an enabling policy environment and appropriate levels of investment in rural advisory services, enhancing the professionalisation of advisory services and facilitating knowledge sharing.

1.3 Assessment of the operational plan 2016-2020

An initial five-year operational plan (2016-2020) was developed to implement the strategy. The plan was designed to reflect the stated primary aim of GFRAS during the five-year period which is *to support and establish stronger regional networks that enhance and strengthen RAS, and provide guidance, leadership, and advocacy for RAS at the global level.*² At the time the plan was formulated there were eleven regional and sub-regional networks. Six more have been added subsequently and so the total number of networks currently stands at seventeen. The plan sets out six goals with associated indicators and a results framework in which activities and targets are specified. An outline Monitoring and Evaluation plan and an indicative budget and timeline of activities are also included. The allocation of funds between the three strategic themes was broadly similar with a slightly larger proportion of the overall budget of US \$10,990,000 assigned to Strategic Theme 1: 'Advocacy and support for an enabling policy environment and appropriate investment in RAS.'

As the period of the operational plan is nearing completion, GFRAS has commissioned an external assessment of progress towards achieving its objectives. The assessment is also expected to identify lessons that can inform the preparation of the next five-year operational plan (2021-2025). Following a competitive process, a team from the Natural Resources Institute, University of Greenwich (UK) was selected to carry out the assessment. The assessment team was guided by the GFRAS Operational Plan Assessment Working Group and two online meetings were held to review the draft assessment findings and discuss the preliminary findings. Details of the assessment framework and methodology are provided in Section 2 of this report.

² GFRAS Five-Year Operational Plan 2016-2020 (page 1)

1.4 The changing context of rural advisory services

GFRAS was established at a time when there was renewed recognition of the importance of the agriculture sector in achieving global food security and contributing to economic growth and development, especially in low- and middle-income countries. There was debate among stakeholders about whether rural advisory services should have their own separate organisational structure or whether they should be integrated into a platform with a wider remit such as the Global Forum for Agricultural Research. The rationale for having a specific entity for rural advisory services was that they perform a critical function and that there was a need for greater awareness of the key role they play. It was argued that a forum solely dedicated to rural advisory services would be better able to promote their activities, lobby for increased investments and changes in policies, and support practitioners through capacity strengthening and knowledge sharing. In addition, the funding climate was favourable as several international development partners indicated that they were interested in supporting such a mechanism.

Since 2010, there have been various developments which have influenced the environment in which rural advisory services operate. During the last decade the concept of agricultural innovations systems involving multiple actors participating in line with their interests and capacities has gained broad acceptance. At the same time, the innovation systems concept has not been widely applied as an overall framework for viewing and coordinating agricultural activities. It has tended to be used in the context of specific value chains, usually for high value commodities in which the private sector has a strong incentive to engage. This has implications for the vision of developing pluralistic, demand-led rural advisory services as this is not easy to achieve across a wide range of agricultural sub-sectors. Nevertheless, rural advisory services are playing an important role in agricultural value chains by linking farmers with other actors in the value chain and increasingly by acting as knowledge brokers (Rigourd and Dugue, 2019.).

Service providers need an extended range of skills in order to be able to function effectively in this changing institutional environment (Davis & Sulaiman, 2012). The traditional training curricula for staff working in rural advisory services did not equip them for the new role they were required to play. This was recognised at an early stage by GFRAS and the development of the New Extensionist Learning Kit (NELK) was one of its first initiatives. Meanwhile, new information and communication technologies have created opportunities for rural advisory services to reach larger numbers of farmers and to provide information in a timely manner. Similarly, the recent developments in the 'digitalisation' of agriculture have huge potential to

increase the efficiency of farming; for example, by enabling tailored recommendations to be given to specific groups of farmers based on analyses of large volumes of data that were not previously available. Whilst, there is tremendous scope to enhance the effectiveness of rural service providers this adds to the challenge of how to equip them with the skills required to take advantage of these new tools.

For many years rural advisory services were geared towards supporting the uptake by farmers of productivity-enhancing technologies. These were expected to lead to increased yields and, in some regions, greater food security. Now greater attention is being paid to the diversity and quality of food being produced and made available to consumers. Moreover, the way in which food is being grown and processed is coming under increased scrutiny. There is growing awareness of the need to use production methods which maintain soil fertility, minimise pollution from agrochemicals and at the same time generate sufficient food for rapidly growing numbers of people. This is against a background of variable and changing climates which may require changes in farming practice to address challenges or, sometimes, to take advantage of emerging opportunities. In many regions, young people do not see farming as an attractive occupation and are seeking other ways to earn a living. There is a continuing movement of young people from rural to urban areas where there may be more better prospects for employment. A large proportion of these young people are men, and this is leading to a situation where women are carrying a greater burden of work on farms.

These developments mean that rural advisory services are operating in an increasingly complex environment. This raises questions about how service providers should prioritise their efforts, how their capacity to address emerging issues can be strengthened and how resources can be found to support their activities. This is also occurring at a time when public funding for rural advisory services at national level is declining in many countries and is not being adequately compensated by increases in private funding. Similarly, there appears to be less appetite among international development partners than there was ten years ago to fund coordination and support activities by networks of rural advisory services. The reasons for this are unclear but a contributing factor may be the difficulty of quantifying the impact of advisory activities in terms of increased agricultural productivity or improved livelihoods in farming communities.

The challenging funding environment raises the question of how GFRAS can support its members to address the increasing number of issues that rural advisory services are being called on to engage with. Advocating for increased resources for rural advisory services solely on the basis that they perform a critical function in agricultural systems will not be sufficient to attract support. It is necessary to demonstrate how rural advisory services are helping farmers to adapt to climate change, implement sustainable management practices and

contribute to improved nutrition; and to document and communicate how their activities are leading to beneficial outcomes at the community and household level. It is now timely for GFRAS to reflect on how it can add value to activities being undertaken in member countries; and to review how it can best meet the varying needs of its members in different geographical regions.

2. Assessment Framework and Methods

2.1 Assessment Framework

The purpose of the assessment is address both 'accountability' (to the second phase of funding from SDC) and 'learning' requirements of GFRAS. Therefore, the assessment is designed to both review the past performance as well as be 'forward-looking' in terms of guiding the future strategies and actions of GFRAS.

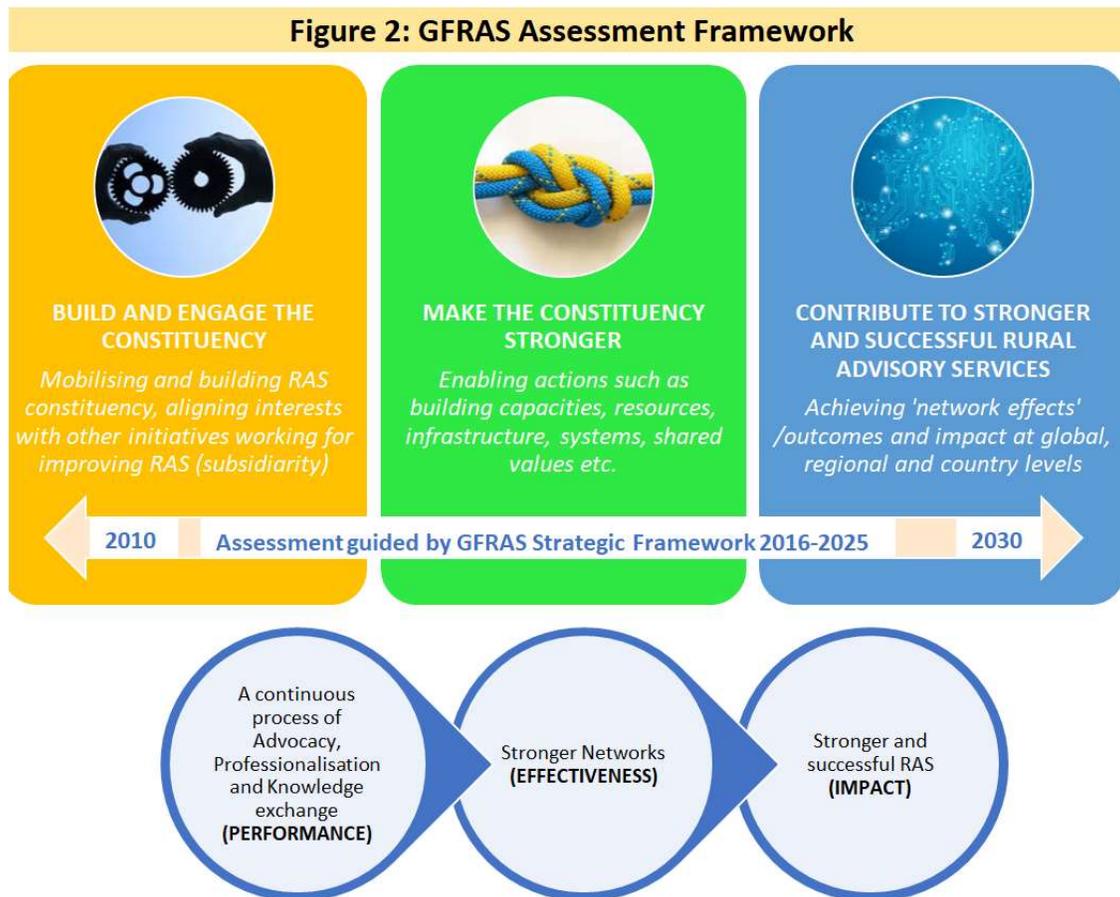
To design the assessment framework, we took the GFRAS Strategic Framework 2016-2025 (see figure 1) as the prime source for designing the assessment framework as this document served as the guide for the operational plan (2016-2020). The GFRAS strategy is rooted in two theoretical frameworks. The first is the innovation systems concept in which innovation is viewed as a process which involves the interaction of different actors within an innovation system. The premise is that networks of rural advisory services engage and interact with other key actors in agricultural innovation systems to improve agricultural performance. The second framework is one of capacity development, using the approach developed by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 2009). In order to function effectively the capacities of rural advisory services need to be strengthened at three levels; individual, organization and enabling environment. It is envisioned that the three strategic fields of action will be implemented at each of these three levels. Our understanding of how these elements relate to each other is illustrated in Figure 1 (see section 2.2). To achieve this strategic vision, GFRAS is working continuously towards advocacy, professionalization and knowledge exchange in the belief that this will lead to stronger regional /sub regional networks and by extension country forums. This involves mobilization of the constituency³ and alignment of interests with those who are working for improving RAS. This also involves facilitating enabling actions such as building capacities, resources, infrastructure, systems and shared values in terms of strengthening the constituency. These actions can then potentially lead to stronger and successful RAS. The assessment framework, therefore, looks at how well GFRAS has done (during 2016-2019) in terms of:

- Building and mobilizing the constituency, and at the same time aligning interests with other ongoing initiatives for improving rural advisory services (subsidiarity)

³ In discussion with the GFRAS core group and the Secretariat, the evaluation team arrived at this definition of the GFRAS 'constituency': GFRAS constituency is the global stakeholders (Secretariat, Core group, others), regional networks and country forums that are integral to design, delivery and management of RAS at different levels. Donors in this set up are considered as partners to GFRAS rather than part of the GFRAS constituency.

- Strengthening the constituency, through professionalization, knowledge exchange and advocacy related activities
- Achieving results related to stronger and successful RAS.

As stated in the GFRAS strategic framework, this is a vision and a long-term agenda until 2030. This assessment has analysed the **Performance, Effectiveness and Impact** of GFRAS so far while bringing forth perspectives for future progression on the strategic framework. While doing this assessment, we were cognisant of the fact that progress is never linear, especially when working in networks and alliances. Reversals can well be seen during this trajectory (notice the double arrows as shown in Figure 2). The assessment framework is captured in Figure 2 below.



Assessment methods: Doc. review, In-depth interviews, Online survey, Analysing contributions, validation w/s

In designing the assessment framework, we have understood that GFRAS encompasses the constituent parts of its network structure at different geographical scales. GFRAS is a global platform and seeks to bring together a range of stakeholders and catalyse actions for

Assessment of Achievements of the GFRAS Operational Plan 2016-2020

strengthened RAS at global, regional and country levels. The assessment team, therefore, has not viewed GFRAS only from the perspective of the activities carried out by the Secretariat. The convening power of GFRAS and its ability to influence RAS were considered. In essence, the assessment of GFRAS is inclusive of the actions of its constituents especially if GFRAS has played a direct or indirect role in mobilizing and strengthening its constituents.

2.2 Assessment Questions

This assessment of GFRAS operational plan 2016-2020 answers the following four questions:

1. What has been the **performance of GFRAS** against its operational plan (2016-2020) and other key internationally accepted best practice? What is done well and what is done not so well? What performance curve has this been for GFRAS in the last 10 years? To what extent has GFRAS managed to meet expectations from its constituency.
2. What are the **factors and circumstances** that have restricted GFRAS from being more successful? Is there a genuine will to change among GFRAS constituencies? What obstacles does the GFRAS agenda face at different levels (global, regional and country)? To what extent have actions at global and regional level contributed to effects at country level in terms of demand-driven, pluralist rural advisory services aligned with other initiatives and following subsidiarity?
3. What are the **future expectations** of the constituency? How aligned are these expectations with the strategic framework? Can the strategic framework be implemented in different ways than in the past?
4. What are the **main lessons** from the second phase and what are the **recommendations** on the agenda for the remaining period (2020-2025) of the strategic framework, including some priorities? What improvements on the network management and institutional parameters (such as the theory of change, funding strategy, Monitoring & Evaluation framework etc.) are needed?

2.3 Assessment Methods

The following methods were used in carrying out the assessment.

1. An **orientation meeting** was held on 24-25 June at the Natural Resources Institute in Chatham. The Executive Secretary of GFRAS, Dr Carl Larsen, met with the assessment team and the background to the assessment and the parameters for the approach were discussed.
2. A **review of documents and data** from GFRAS and from published literature was undertaken. This provided an initial overview of GFRAS activities and achievements in the

context of emerging issues affecting rural advisory services. An online discussion was then held with the GFRAS assessment working group in which the assessment framework, methods and data collection tools were presented and subsequently refined.

3. An **online survey** was developed which was designed to gather feedback from members of the GFRAS constituency and their partners on the key issues identified in the assessment framework. Perceptions of respondents were measured using an evaluative scale (6-point or 4-point ordinal scale). Qualitative remarks on each of the criteria of the assessment framework were also gathered. The survey was sent to a total of 60 people who had registered to attend the GFRAS annual meeting held on 30 September to 4 October in Jamaica. Twenty-four people completed the survey, representing a 40 percent response rate, and they identified themselves with the following categories (more than one answer was possible): members of GFRAS regional or sub-regional networks (14); academia (11); country forums (6); service providers (5); not defined (4); agri-business (3); funding agencies (2); policy makers (2).
4. **Online interviews** were held with **key informants** who were known to have an interest in rural advisory services. Some of these persons were familiar with GFRAS and had varying degrees of involvement with the organisation. They were identified from a list provided to the assessment team by the GFRAS Secretariat. In order to ensure that the perspectives of persons who were not so familiar with GFRAS were captured, other key informants were identified using the snowballing technique. In total, interviews were held with 36 key informants out of the 43 persons contacted 20 of whom were outside the GFRAS network. These were associated with the following stakeholder categories: regional and sub-regional networks (9); Steering Committee co-Chairs (2); members of the Global Secretariat (4); consultants (3); development partners (2); private sector (including 1 global farmer organisation) (5); research (6); youth network (1); funding agencies (4).
5. Data from the three primary sources (secondary data review, online survey and key informant interviews) were analysed against the assessment framework and assessment questions. A summary of the preliminary findings was submitted to the assessment working group. Based on feedback obtained a revised version was prepared for consideration by participants at the annual general meeting in Jamaica. Comments and suggestions from participants and from the Steering Committee were then incorporated into this report.

2.4 Limitation of the Assessment

The assessment was designed to analyse performance and capture constituency feedback on the activities of GFRAS during the period from 2016 to 2019. Against each strategic field,

GFRAS has developed specific activities, targets and indicators for 2016-2020. Limited quantitative data was available through the GFRAS reporting system and so it was not possible to measure progress towards achieving all activities, targets and indicators. This was because GFRAS does not have a monitoring and evaluation framework or data collection system, although efforts have been made to develop them. We will discuss this issue later in the report but note here that this limited the scope of the assessment. Nevertheless, useful insights have been generated on the extent to which GFRAS has achieved different aspects of its operational plan and on factors that have restricted progress in some areas.

Note: We use the term 'rural advisory services' throughout this report. We consider this to be interchangeable with the terms 'extension', 'agricultural advisory services' and 'extension and advisory services' which may be used elsewhere in the literature.

3. Findings of the Assessment

In this section we present the results of the assessment under each of the four evaluation questions and for each strategic field.

3.1 Evaluation Question 1

What has been the performance of GFRAS against its operational plan (2016-2020) and other key internationally accepted best practice?

Strategic Field 1: Advocacy and support for an enabling policy environment and appropriate investment in rural advisory services

The mission of GFRAS is to *provide advocacy and leadership on pluralistic and demand-driven rural advisory services for sustainable development*. Hence the advocacy function is central to what GFRAS seeks to achieve. At the time GFRAS was established there was limited recognition of the importance of rural advisory services in global debates on agriculture. The central role of rural advisory services in supporting farmers and in providing a bridge between farmers and the research community was not adequately reflected in global frameworks and policy documents. There is now a perception among GFRAS stakeholders that this has changed and that GFRAS has made a strong contribution to this.

"GFRAS has harnessed a common voice on rural advisory services. It now has legitimacy and convening power. The regions look to GFRAS for that voice." Key informant.

Advocacy is viewed by its stakeholders as a critical activity for GFRAS. Respondents to the online survey were asked the question "What do you think is the GFRAS contribution to addressing constraints to actions for improving rural advisory services?" Fifty percent (12) of the respondents answered by stating that GFRAS is an effective mechanism for raising

awareness of the importance of rural advisory services. Two key informants considered that GFRAS influenced the inclusion of a statement on the need to increase investment in rural advisory services in the text for target 2.A of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 2: End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture (see box below). This is plausible as GFRAS contributed to discussions on the formulation of the targets for SDG2. During the assessment period a conscious effort was made by the GFRAS Secretariat to participate in high profile events on agricultural development. For example, GFRAS organised a side event at the Annual General Assembly of the Global Donor Platform

for Rural Development (GDPRD) held in Brussels on 1–2 February 2017.

Later in the year, the GFRAS Secretariat attended the 44th session of the United Nations Committee for Food Security (CFS) in Rome and displayed GFRAS publications in the information market.

In addition to providing a voice for rural advisory services at the global level, GFRAS undertakes to support its member networks and country forums to advocate for policy reform and greater resources. An important step forward was taken in the 2016 assessment of capacity needs in the Secretariat and in nine networks. This revealed that advocacy performance was greatest at the global level (Lamm & Lamm, 2017). Networks were rated as having low to moderate levels of overall capacity with a fairly narrow range of variation among networks. The findings did show, however, that networks are engaging in policy processes. GFRAS reports show that policy dialogues have been conducted in most of the regions since 2016. There are also examples where country forums have been active in advocating for policy change. In Malawi, the Malawi Forum for Agricultural Advisory Services has advocated for changes in policies on subsidies and on increased funding for rural advisory services although it has had limited impact to date. Another example from Africa comes from Uganda where the Uganda Forum for Agricultural Advisory Services has been invited by the Ministry of Agriculture to assist it to draw up a national policy on agricultural extension.

Increase investment, including through enhanced international cooperation, in rural infrastructure, agricultural research and extension services, technology development and plant and livestock gene banks in order to enhance agricultural productive capacity in developing countries, in particular least developed countries.
Target 2.A of SDG2

These are positive developments, but the capacity needs assessment also found that the approaches and results are not being systematically assessed and documented. This omission is significant because a common thread in the comments of survey respondents and key informants was that evidence of the impact of rural advisory services is lacking and that this is needed to support advocacy activities. A recommendation from the capacity needs assessment was that GFRAS should document and share case studies of successful advocacy approaches. Several key informants echoed this suggestion and stated that GFRAS should highlight successes in countries where extension is weak and poorly funded and share these across the networks. Similarly, they recommended that experiences in improving extension at a large scale in countries such as Nigeria or Kenya should be documented and disseminated. We are aware that GFRAS is planning to carry out a set of impact case studies in the near future and that earlier this year it launched a survey to solicit suggestions on what might be included.

It is interesting to note that 33 percent (8) of survey respondents considered that the main contribution of GFRAS was in addressing challenges and constraints for rural advisory services at the organization and individual level. This may reflect general appreciation expressed by GFRAS stakeholders for its work in expanding the network structure and in establishing and supporting country forums. There are currently seventeen member networks in GFRAS and, although some gaps in geographical coverage remain, it can now claim to be a truly global organisation. This expansion also brings challenges as there are large variations in capacity and resources among the networks with some new members having limited capacity to function effectively. Stakeholders consider that the country forum model is relevant and that it is a suitable mechanism for bringing together the different actors engaged in rural advisory services. As with the regional and sub-regional networks, there are significant differences between country forums. The differences include variations in mandates, structure and function as well as in capacity and resources. The characteristics of networks and country forums, and the implications for GFRAS, are discussed further in Section 3.2.

One of the activities in Strategic Field 1 to 'Develop new and strengthen existing strategic partnerships.' In recent years GFRAS has been active in seeking new partners. However, the current status of some of these initiatives is not very clear and it is now timely for GFRAS to review the purpose of its partnerships and how these operate. Different categories of partners may be envisaged based on strategic function. One category of partners is that of investors; organisations which support the mission of GFRAS and are willing to provide funding or contributions in kind to help it to achieve its objectives. Funding received by the Secretariat to support core functions has reduced, as has the number of organisations providing these funds. This has not necessarily translated into an overall decline of funds for the wider network as some investors have chosen to allocate funds for projects or other specific activities such as training events. Nevertheless, it is important for GFRAS to know some time in advance the amount of funds it has available for staff salaries and office costs and how much can be allocated to network activities such as meetings, training events, workshops and publications. At present this is proving to be a challenge. Some of the Secretariat salaries are being supported through project funding but this is less predictable and probably not sustainable in the longer term.

Another category of partners is organisations with shared interests and objectives to GFRAS. This includes networks such as the Global Forum for Agricultural Research (GFAR). GFAR and GFRAS are represented on each other's Steering Committees and this is useful for information sharing, although there have not been any recent joint activities. An issue raised by many key informants is the need for GFRAS to engage more systematically with the private sector,

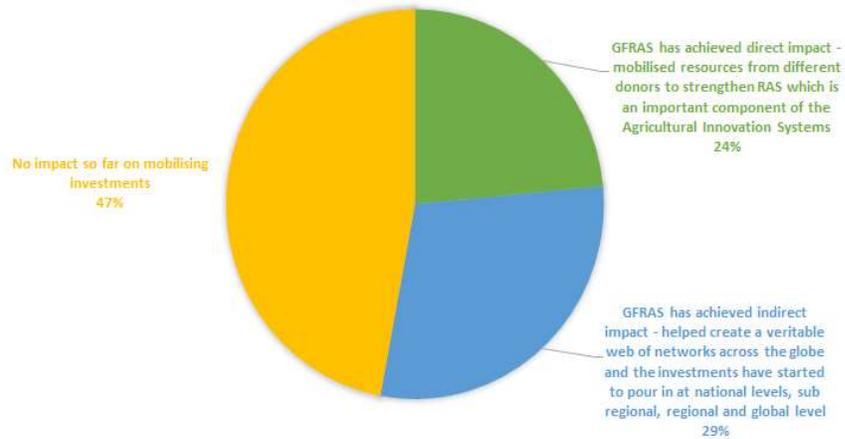
primarily to encourage the development of more pluralistic rural advisory services. GFRAS has made efforts in this direction. For example, GFRAS joined the Smallholder and Agri-Food SME Finance and Investment Network (SAFIN). It held a meeting with the Private Sector Mechanism of the Committee on World Food Security (CFS) to discuss ways for GFRAS to collaborate with the private sector. These interactions have not yet been translated into any concrete actions.

A third category of partners is those involved in specific project-type initiatives to which GFRAS contributes. This is exemplified by the Developing Local Extension Capacity (DLEC) project led by Digital Green in collaboration with the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) and consortium partners such as GFRAS. The project, which is funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), works in selected countries to identify capacity gaps in extension and advisory systems; undertakes action research to strengthen local capacity and generate evidence on ways to improve these systems; and engages stakeholders to advocate for scaling our promising approaches. This type of project-based partnership is appropriate and productive for GFRAS where the objectives align closely with its own aims. GFRAS has benefitted from its involvement in DLEC through access to information and evidence arising from project activities and also through direct support for designated activities such as the Master trainer workshops for promoting the uptake of the New Extensionist Learning Kit (NELK) in Africa.

Networking is one of the core functions of GFRAS and stakeholders consider the annual general meetings (AGM) to be valuable for this purpose. The AGM provides an opportunity for representatives of GFRAS members and the wider constituency to exchange information, share experiences and review and plan activities. Participation of stakeholders is necessarily limited by resources and by the availability of participants at the time the meeting is held. Therefore, networking needs to continue through other channels throughout the year. One way in which this happens is during annual meetings of the regional networks and country forums, sometimes with support from the global Secretariat. Some stakeholders commented that Cross-regional networking outside the annual general meeting is limited and could be enhanced. The global Secretariat should examine ways in which this can be done. The GFRAS Newsletter 'GFRAS Update' can make a contribution to information exchange, as can the GFRAS website and social media channels. The level of activity in these media has reduced during the past year as Secretariat staff try to balance the various demands placed on their time.

An online survey of 17 respondents provided following feedback on GFRAS role in mobilising investments that contribute to effective agri-innovation systems. This is captured in the figure 3 below.

FIGURE 3. GFRAS CONTRIBUTION IN MOBILISING INVESTMENTS THAT CONTRIBUTE TO EFFECTIVE AGRI-INNOVATION SYSTEM (17)



The GFRAS Secretariat recently conducted an exercise of collecting financial data on investments mobilised and leveraged by regional and sub-regional networks, especially where GFRAS has had some influence. The data was consolidated by the Secretariat and provided to us. It suggests that leveraging power of GFRAS has helped its regional /sub-regional networks to mobilise investments to the tune of 10 million USD from various partners /donors. This figure includes estimated in-kind contributions and unpaid inputs from volunteers of about 1.3 million USD from regional /sub regional networks. It also includes the sum of 5.2 million USD received by AFAAS through the World Bank Multi-Donor Trust Fund over which GFRAS has little influence. Therefore, deducting AFAAS level leverage, the total estimated leverage of GFRAS is ~3.5 million USD.

A summary of progress towards achieving the targets in the current operational plan for Strategic Field 1 is given in Table 1 below. We have rated all activities as 'B' (some aspects achieved). This is what would be expected at this stage of the operational plan with more than one year still to be completed.

Table 1 Summary of progress in the GFRAS operational plan: Advocacy and support for an enabling policy environment and appropriate investment in rural advisory services (Strategic Field 1)

Activity/target	Achievements	Gaps	Rating ¹
1. Develop new and strengthen existing strategic partnerships.	Engagement of new partners: There are currently 17 member networks in GFRAS and, although some gaps in geographical	This expansion also brings challenges as there are large variations in capacity and resources among the networks with some	B

Assessment of Achievements of the GFRAS Operational Plan 2016-2020

Activity/target	Achievements	Gaps	Rating ¹
<p><i>Inventory existing partnerships, supportive communication material; at least 5 influenced; 5 new partners in GFRAS activities.</i></p>	<p>coverage remain, it can now claim to be a truly global organization.</p> <p>Example of FAO. Overall monetary investments in GFRAS have reduced but new projects funded by IFAD and EC.</p> <p>Stakeholders consider that the country forum model is relevant and that it is a suitable mechanism for bringing together the different actors engaged in rural advisory services.</p>	<p>new members having limited capacity to function effectively.</p> <p>Deficiencies identified in resource mobilization at all levels in the network.</p> <p>Limited private sector involvement.</p>	
<p>2. Facilitate capacity around evidence-based advocacy with regional networks and country forums.</p> <p><i>Advocacy learning material, policy ambassador programme, advocacy capacity needs for at least 8 regional networks</i></p>	<p>Advocacy capacity needs assessed in nine networks. Considerable achievement to establish the network structure (now with 17 members).</p> <p>Some examples of country forums (e.g. Uganda, South Africa) and RAS regional networks (AFAAS, AESA) having some influence on the discussions around extension reforms</p> <p>Developing Local Extension Capacity (DLEC) project - This type of project-based partnership is appropriate and productive for GFRAS where the objectives align closely with its own aims</p>	<p>Much work remains to strengthen the capacities of some members.</p> <p>Capacity needs assessment found that the approaches and results are not being systematically assessed and documented. This omission is significant because a common thread in the comments of survey respondents and key informants was that evidence of the impact of rural advisory services is lacking and that this is needed to support advocacy activities.</p> <p>Limited stories of successes in countries where extension is weak and poorly funded and support and share them broadly.</p>	B
<p>3. Create and participate in spaces for dialogue and engagement with key actors.</p> <p><i>At least 10 dialogues to engage key actors, 5 annual meetings integrating advocacy discussions.</i></p>	<p>Policy dialogues organized with seven country forums by RELASER in 2017.</p> <p>GFRAS global apex supports dialogues taking place in the regions, especially at formal meetings of the member networks.</p>	<p>Cross-regional networking outside the annual general meeting is limited.</p> <p>Limited mechanisms for sharing innovations/opinions etc. amongst regional networks.</p>	B

Activity/target	Achievements	Gaps	Rating ¹
<p>4. Coherently advocate for RAS in international dialogues.</p> <p><i>15 policy dialogues in regions or countries facilitated.</i></p>	<p>Positive assessment of GFRAS as a platform for raising awareness of the value of RAS.</p> <p>Appreciation of the role of GFRAS in promoting the Country Forum model.</p> <p>GFRAS influenced the inclusion of a statement on the need to increase investment in rural advisory services in the text for target 2.A of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 2: End hunger.</p>	<p>Stakeholders perceived limited visibility of the GFRAS constituency at regional policy making events and forums.</p> <p>Currently limited evidence of real impact of extension.</p> <p>Limited communication from GFRAS to all the network affiliates.</p>	B
<p>5. Transparently create and share evidence of RAS impact on relevant, contemporary issues.</p> <p><i>At least one research study on evidence of impact of RAS on a relevant contemporary issue.</i></p>	<p>Several knowledge products on RAS role in contemporary issues (Note: this also addresses a target under SF3).</p> <p>GFRAS has mobilized resources from different donors to strengthen RAS.</p>	<p>The thematic working groups, including gender and MEL working groups, have had mixed success.</p> <p>Limited participation of GFRAS at high profile events (FAO, IFAD, ISHS, regional extension events, etc).</p>	B

¹ A = most aspects achieved; B = some aspects achieved; C = only limited aspects achieved

Strategic Field 2: Professionalisation of rural advisory services

Strengthening the capacity of the regional networks and country forums is one of the primary objectives of the current GFRAS operational plan. In order to establish a baseline against which future progress can be measured a capacity assessment was undertaken in 2016, led by a consultancy firm, LR Brand, Inc. The capacity areas to be assessed were identified through a participatory Delphi process in which representatives from each of the regions were involved. These capacity areas were general networking, organisational and institutional functioning, knowledge management, use of information and communication technology, advocacy and professionalisation of rural advisory services. Two methods of assessing capacity were used; perceptions of capacity using a Likert-type scale and an objective assessment based on available evidence. Four regional networks, one-sub-regional network and four country forums (all in Africa) participated. It was anticipated that the results would be used to make the networks and country forums more self-sufficient and to help them strengthen their degree of professionalisation. The approach and methodology were detailed in a resource document

Assessment of Achievements of the GFRAS Operational Plan 2016-2020

which is intended to serve as a guide for networks to conduct follow-up assessments in the future.

Five factors were included in the assessment of professionalisation of rural advisory services (details are provided in the synthesis report). When averaged across these factors, professionalisation of rural advisory services had the lowest level of capacity amongst all the capacity areas examined. Each of the factors was considered to be in the 'overestimated' or 'underdeveloped' categories (as opposed to 'performing' or 'hidden strength'). The results of the objective assessment of capacity revealed that none of the dimensions were rated above the level of 'basic capacity'. These finds led the consultants to suggest that GFRAS should consider whether professionalisation of rural advisory services should continue to be a strategic priority; and that, if it remains a priority, *'it should consider creating and implementing a monitoring, evaluation, and learning plan focused on professionalisation.'*

Many stakeholders made positive comments on the capacity assessment. One key informant described the capacity assessment as a key initiative which had a strong influence on thinking in the region. Several key informants indicated that a challenge with the exercise is the limited capacity to act on the findings and implement the recommendations. The new 'Last Mile' project funded by the International Fund for Agricultural Development and other development partners provides an opportunity to strengthen selected regional networks and country forums. This initiative has been welcomed by many stakeholders who support the idea of GFRAS making strong efforts to strengthen country forums. One key informant highlighted the need to avoid reverting to the traditional model where "one person in the Ministry decides on policy and actions". A concern raised by many stakeholders is how to extend the benefits accruing to selected networks and country forums through initiatives such as the Last Mile project to the wider membership within GFRAS.

"The capacity needs assessment was a turning point'. The analysis changed us a lot. It allowed us to see our capacities and compare them across regions." Key informant.

The consultants acknowledged in their report that the promotion of the New Extensionist Learning Kit (NELK) did have potential for positive impact on the professionalisation of rural advisory services. The NELK is one of the flagship initiatives of GFRAS and was published in 2017 as a set of 13 modules to support individual learning. It is based on the view of the New Extensionist elaborated by GFRAS in which rural advisory services have a key role within agricultural innovation systems and that persons working in this arena need to acquire an expanded set of skills. A working group was set up to guide the development of the Kit and subject matter specialists were commissioned to produce individual modules which are

presented in a form that may be used for self-study or in a more structured group situation. The Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) financed the bulk of module development through its Green Innovation Centre programme. The United States Agency for International Development co-funded the preparation of modules on The Role of Extension in Supporting Value Chains (Module 10) and on Gender in Extension and Advisory Services (Module 12). Additional funds were sourced for the translation of selected modules into French.

A systematic process was used for the development of the kit from initial testing, through sensitisation, training in its use and finally mainstreaming - integrating by institutions into their teaching or training programmes. There has been a challenge in obtaining funds for training and mainstreaming activities but some regional networks, notably the African Forum for Agricultural Advisory Services (AFAAS) and the Caribbean Agricultural Extension Providers Network (CAEPNet) have been able to mobilise funds. In Cameroon the country forum organised a training event on its own initiative. There is evidence that the Kit, or selected material within it, is being utilised in formal teaching in Higher Education Institutes. In the University of Africa in Zambia the whole kit has been incorporated into a new teaching programme. In South Africa the University of the Free State has accredited the modules and uses them as short learning courses. In India, Agricultural Extension in South Asia (AESA) has used NELK to provide content to support reforms in curricula in training agricultural extension officers. In Latin America, the NELK is being used by rural advisory services.

Many GFRAS stakeholders view the NELK positively and believe that it will have a beneficial effect on strengthening the capacity of rural advisory services. One key informant stated that the NELK “is helping to develop more pluralistic RAS although this remains a considerable challenge” and “is an example of a global effort cascading down to the countries”. At the same time, some key informants considered that it can be improved. Some suggestions for improvements relate to the content, which was considered by some to be rather academic. Other suggestions concern the presentation of the modules and the delivery mechanisms. In the view of one key informant the NELK “needs to adapt, introduce a more accessible format and bring in case studies”. These observations reflect the difficulty in meeting the needs of a diverse group of users and show that the kit needs to be adapted for different target audiences. Feedback from some key informants suggests that learning materials are already being adapted for different situations. Experiences and lessons on how the kit is being used are essential so that others can learn from the process. Aside from evaluating how the kit is used by different target audiences it is important to understand the relevance of the content to users in different regions. In Europe, for example, the International Academy of Rural Advisers offers the Certificate for European Consultants in Rural Areas, with certification provided by

the European Forum for Farm and Rural Advisory Services. It is important to understand the extent to which the NELK adds value to the current provision. It had been planned to monitor the use of the NELK in the regions, but this has not been implemented due to a lack of resources.

Overall, stakeholders gave a positive assessment of the work done by GFRAS to support professionalisation of rural advisory services. Sixty-three percent (15) of survey respondents agreed with the statement that GFRAS contributed a lot on all fronts of professionalisation. One-fifth (5) of respondents felt that the main contribution of GFRAS has been in providing a networking platform for peer learning, while a small minority considered that the GFRAS contribution was not effective as a limited set of actors were involved in its activities. A summary of progress towards achieving the targets in the current operational plan is given in Table 2 below.

Table 2 Summary of progress in the GFRAS operational plan: professionalisation of rural advisory services (Strategic Field 2)

Activity/target	Achievements	Gaps	Rating ¹
1. Facilitate regional network engagement in policy dialogue on professionalization by providing evidence of the benefits of professionalization	<p>Professionalization capacity needs of RAS was identified within each of nine regional networks. The capacity needs assessment was considered a valuable exercise. One network coordinator described it as a turning point in their thinking.</p> <p>The new 'Last Mile' project funded by the International Fund for Agricultural Development and other development partners provides an opportunity to strengthen selected regional networks and country forums</p>	<p>Professionalization of rural advisory services had the lowest level of capacity amongst all the capacity areas examined. The main challenge is the limited capacity to act on the findings and implement the recommendations.</p> <p>A concern raised by many stakeholders is how to extend the benefits accruing to selected networks and country forums through initiatives such as the Last Mile project to the wider membership within GFRAS.</p> <p>Opportunities available but less utilized for learning within regional networks on participatory, transparent, pluralistic, and strong leadership model.</p>	B

Activity/target	Achievements	Gaps	Rating ¹
2. Strengthen the capacity of regional networks to support professionalization activities within countries.	<p>Action plans developed by several networks following the capacity needs assessment.</p> <p>New Extensionist Learning Kit (NELK) launched in 2017 and now has 16 modules. NELK materials are being used in RAS training and Higher Education in several countries.</p> <p>Good Practice Guidance Note on professionalization of RAS.</p>	<p>Aside from evaluating how the kit is used by different target audiences it is important to understand the relevance of the content to users in different regions. The NELK “needs to adapt, introduce a more accessible format and bring in case studies”.</p>	B
3. Provide guidance for organizational efficiency and effectiveness of regional networks.	<p>Most (two-thirds) of the respondents agreed that the greatest accomplishment of GFRAS has been the building up and then supporting the regional networks. GFRAS contributed a lot to building capacities, resources, infrastructure, systems and improving governance of regional network /country forums.</p> <p>GFRAS through its guidance, wider contacts and limited direct funding support has contributed to the emergence of AESA (Agricultural Extension in South Asia) Network.</p>	<p>More accountability to be built across networks. More hands-on support to networks is expected.</p> <p>Stakeholders expressed the need for a better alignment with institutions that are leading the rural innovation agenda.</p>	B

¹ A = most aspects achieved; B = some aspects achieved; C = only limited aspects achieved

Strategic Field 3: Knowledge generation and exchange

During the first five years of its existence GFRAS invested a considerable amount of time and effort in developing knowledge products and facilitating knowledge exchange between its members. This process has continued in the current phase with the publication of a set of 30 Global Good Practice Notes; two issues papers on topics of current concern (migration and youth); the NELK; an updated Policy Compendium; and a library on the links between agriculture and nutrition. In addition to these resources which have been produced with the coordination of the global Secretariat, many other publications have been produced by GFRAS members and affiliates. Some of the regional networks have also been very active in knowledge generation and exchange activities. AFAAS has a knowledge management strategy and a virtual platform to serve its members and the wider regional advisory services community in Africa. AESA places a strong emphasis on knowledge exchange and makes many information resources available on its website, including blog postings on a wide range

Assessment of Achievements of the GFRAS Operational Plan 2016-2020

of subjects. Other regional networks such as APIRAS, RELASER and EUFRAS also provide access to information on their websites although the amount of content is more limited, reflecting constraints in capacity and resources for knowledge management activities.

There is potential for the global secretariat and the regional networks to do more to support knowledge exchange both within and between their networks (Lamm *et al.*, 2018). This was noted by several key informants who thought that the role of GFRAS as a knowledge broker has been largely confined to activities during annual meetings. There are good opportunities for useful flows of information and knowledge upwards from country forums as some of the national platforms have a lot of interesting material to share. Feedback on the publications generated by GFRAS was positive and some stakeholders thought that there was scope for them to reach a wider audience. In certain cases, GFRAS members and affiliates were aware that a particular publication had been released but were unsure whether they were relevant for their own situation. Conversely, interesting studies that had been carried out and documented in one country or region were not necessarily deemed to be of interest elsewhere. For this reason, they were not disseminated beyond the area in which they were conducted.

The Last Mile project now presents an opportunity for GFRAS to review its knowledge management function and develop an overall strategy for the whole network. In component 2 of the project there is a commitment to develop a global communication and knowledge management framework. The global dimension is important as this will enable regions and countries which are not covered by project activities to be involved. A critical aspect will be to identify and establish structures and standards that will ensure digital resources can be transferred across boundaries. The idea is not that every organisation has to operate the same system but that autonomous systems can be easily integrated. The philosophy underlying the plans is that GFRAS should act as an aggregator of information and knowledge and facilitate sharing and learning. Content should be supplied primarily from knowledge institutions and other sources, including farmers. The approach being used in the Last Mile project implies that GFRAS is primarily a knowledge broker rather than a knowledge generator. This has a conceptual logic and is also pragmatic as GFRAS does not have the human or financial resources to continue to generate a large volume of knowledge products or to update databases of information.

There are several ways in which GFRAS can increase the effectiveness of its knowledge

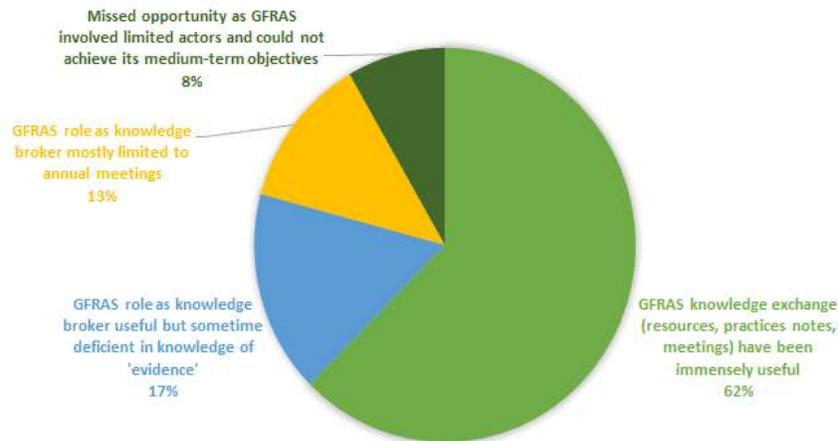
"If GFRAS and AFAAS are to make a real change in information and knowledge sharing it has to be through information and communication technologies". Key informant.

exchange activities. More use could be made of knowledge platforms such as the Tropical Agriculture Platform in which GFRAS is a partner. Publications could be uploaded to strategic sites such as the

website of the Global Donor Platform for Rural Development where there are few GFRAS documents at present. By using new digital tools, including webinars, GFRAS can make information more accessible and available in a timely manner.

The online survey of 24 respondents provided the following feedback on the role of GFRAS as a knowledge broker:

FIGURE 4. GFRAS CONTRIBUTION AS A 'KNOWLEDGE BROKER' (24)



Sixty-three percent (15) of respondents to the online survey indicated that GFRAS knowledge exchange activities have been immensely useful. Nevertheless, some respondents identified gaps in knowledge provision; in particular, a lack of evidence about the effectiveness of rural advisory services. Progress towards achieving the targets in the current operational plan is shown in Table 3. Most targets are on the way to being met. The only target for which very limited progress has been made relates to the preparation of knowledge management guidelines for regional networks. It is expected that these will be developed through the Last Mile project.

Table 3 Summary of progress in the GFRAS operational plan: knowledge generation and exchange (Strategic Field 3)

Activity/target	Achievements	Gaps	Rating ¹
1. Create and package evidence on effective RAS. <i>20 knowledge products, assess knowledge mgt</i>	Global issues papers issued. 13 Global Good Practice Notes added and a compilation made. Policy Compendium launched. The output of knowledge products is impressive. Some respondents have noted the positive impact this has had, especially in helping young	Some key informants said they were not very familiar with the knowledge products. Global Good Practice Notes and Issues papers are appreciated but could be more widely used.	B

Activity/target	Achievements	Gaps	Rating ¹
<i>capacity needs of networks</i>	<p>extension professionals to understand and appreciate the role and importance of RAS.</p> <p>Some of the regional networks have also been very active in knowledge generation and exchange activities</p>	<p>As noted by several key informants who thought that the role of GFRAS as a knowledge broker has been largely confined to activities during annual meetings.</p> <p>Need to tap opportunities for useful flows of information and knowledge upwards from country forums as some of the national platforms have a lot of interesting material to share.</p>	
<p>2. Develop and share knowledge management guidelines for regional networks (strategies and assessment).</p> <p><i>Develop knowledge mgt guidelines, facilitate implementation in at least 3 regional networks</i></p>	<p>Assessment of knowledge management capacity/needs done in nine regional networks. Other knowledge products such as the AESA manual on good practices in extension research and evaluation have been produced by the networks.</p>	<p>A knowledge management strategy is needed.</p> <p>Need to explore, find and share good examples of delivering improved rural advisory services at scale in countries with weak governance and limited capacity.</p>	C
<p>3. Coordinate spaces to facilitate knowledge exchange (face-to-face meetings, online environments, etc.).</p> <p><i>5 annual meetings integrating knowledge mgt, 10 RAS peer exchanges</i></p>	<p>GFRAS has opened up opportunities for regional affiliates to expand within the region e.g. CACAARI engaged 8 NARS experts in its regional events.</p> <p>The annual general meeting is considered by many online survey respondents to be interactive and educational.</p>	<p>More emphasis should be placed on facilitating the exchange of information and knowledge between networks. Some interviewees perceived a regional bias in support. The annual general meeting is valuable but needs to be complemented by other actions to improve the work of regional networks and country forums.</p> <p>Need for a balanced approach to support both the strong and not-so-strong regional networks and country forums.</p>	B
<p>4. Improve upon existing, further develop, and test knowledge management platforms/tools.</p> <p><i>Assess annually and address GFRAS online</i></p>	<p>GFRAS has helped to create a veritable web of networks across the globe and the investments have started to flow in at national levels, sub regional, regional and global level.</p>	<p>Scope for Knowledge management to improve GFRAS as an aggregator of information and knowledge, primarily a knowledge broker rather than a knowledge generator.</p>	B

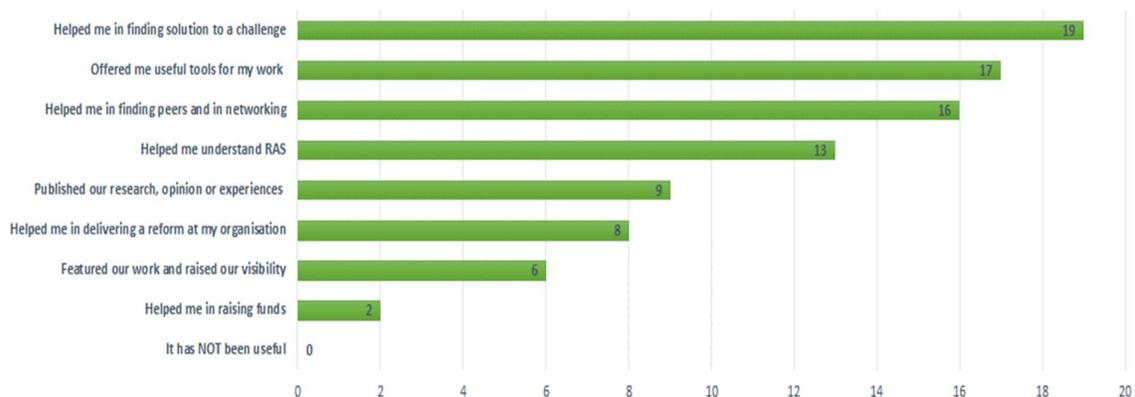
Assessment of Achievements of the GFRAS Operational Plan 2016-2020

Activity/target	Achievements	Gaps	Rating ¹
platform/tool needs of regional networks.		The website needs updating. Limited use of social media tools and IT tools (such as webinars) to share information and enhance visibility of activities.	

¹ A = most aspects achieved; B = some aspects achieved; C = only limited aspects achieved

Overall, the online survey sought feedback from the GFRAS constituency in terms of what they have gained from GFRAS and how useful they have found GFRAS over last four years. All respondents indicated that they have found GFRAS useful in one way or another. Many respondents said that GFRAS helped them to identify and understand a challenge or opportunity they face, in providing rural advisory services, and in finding a solution to or developing a response to a challenge or opportunity. GFRAS has offered useful tools to many of its constituency members. To many members of the constituency, GFRAS provided a medium to publish and share their research, opinions or experiences.

Figure 5. Usefulness of GFRAS to its constituency (24 responses)



3.2 Evaluation Question 2

What are the factors and circumstances that have restricted GFRAS from being more successful?

In considering factors which constrain what GFRAS seeks to achieve, we placed these in two categories. Firstly, we looked at 'internal' barriers which are specific to GFRAS and the way it

operates. Secondly, we examined 'contextual' barriers which are inherent in the environment in which GFRAS functions and which are more challenging for it to overcome.

Barriers to success – Internal

The most frequently mentioned factor inhibiting the performance of GFRAS is resources, both in terms of human capacity and finances. Linked to this is the view of some stakeholders (23 percent of survey respondents) that efforts at the national level to lobby for funds are insufficient. Funding is influenced by external factors but there is a strong feeling that funding strategies need to be developed at all levels of GFRAS to secure more resources. This has a short-term and a long-term dimension as there is a recognition that funds are needed to support current activities and also to ensure sustainability of operations in the future.

Some survey respondents (23 percent) perceived that the distribution of available funds within GFRAS was skewed, with a disproportionate amount allocated to the stronger networks and forums. This view was also expressed by some network coordinators in key informant discussions. They recognised that, to some extent, it was inevitable that the allocation of funds channelled through the global Secretariat would reflect donor priorities. But they argued that there is strong case for using more of these funds to strengthen weaker networks, especially those which find it difficult to attract support locally. This issue has wider significance because it also influences the extent to which network members consider they are part of a global community and how they act accordingly.

Some network coordinators said that funding limitations meant they were not able to engage the number of staff required to undertake all their activities. However, there are different views among networks on what is needed to function effectively. Some networks operate with few staff and low budgets believing that they can still carry out their core mandates of facilitating networking and knowledge exchange. Other networks have larger staff complements and engage in a broader set of activities which carry higher costs. It seems that the establishment of the global network structure created certain expectations in the minds of network staff regarding the amount of 'central' funding they would receive. In the early years of GFRAS more funds were available for networks to apply for in response to specific demands from their constituents; for example, to support a workshop or a training activity.

However, other key informants who were involved with GFRAS during this period stated that it was never intended that the networks would need to rely heavily on funding through the global apex to be sustainable. Some networks are exploring innovative ways to finance their activities. The Rural Innovation Centre for Knowledge and Investment (RICKI) is said to be experimenting with a social enterprise model although we were not able to obtain details of

how this model operates. The Central Asia and Caucasus Forum for Rural Advisory Services (CAC-FRAS) is developing a funding strategy to ensure that it is financially sustainable and is looking at a range of options including member subscriptions. Some networks already support their secretariat activities largely through subscriptions; for example, EUFRAS which also receives a small amount of funding through projects financed by the European Union.

There are also large variations among country forums in how they are set up and how they access resources. The majority are hosted by public sector or quasi-governmental organisations. This has the advantage that there is buy-in from ministries of agriculture and access to a basic level of resources, even if these are restricted to office space and some staff inputs. A drawback is that under this arrangement the country forum has less independence from the government. This may also make other actors less willing to engage if they feel the agenda is set by the government. There is no 'one' blueprint for establishing a country forum and it is doubtful whether this would be appropriate, given the diversity of conditions in different countries. AFAAS produced a document in 2011 which served as a guide to the process through which a country forum may be set up in Africa. A review of the experiences of setting up and running country forums in different regions would be valuable and would make a useful input to the Last Mile project.

One of the consequences of the networks having limited resources is that they are heavily dependent on staff contributing their time on a voluntary basis. This is a vital contribution and the commitment and goodwill of these volunteers is appreciated by other stakeholders. It has the advantage that there is continuity of representation in GFRAS as many of the network coordinators have performed this task for many years. However, some key informants have stated that the lack of new personnel coming into the system may reduce the potential for innovative ideas to emerge. Therefore, the networks need to be organised in a way that facilitates the active engagement of a critical mass of personnel so that responsibilities can be shared and a more dynamic process result.

By contrast, the global Secretariat has had a high turnover of staff since 2016. Some GFRAS stakeholders expressed the view that this has led to a lack of direction for the global network. However, they also acknowledged that this was mitigated to some degree by additional inputs from members of the Steering Committee and the important role played of the two co-Chairs was especially noted. Several stakeholders commented that the departure of several staff members in the global Secretariat resulted in less internal communication within GFRAS and that this risked affecting the cohesion and sense of community and common ownership. This situation is expected to change with the recent appointment of a new Executive Secretary which should allow all the staff members in the Secretariat to focus more fully on their core areas of responsibility.

GFRAS has also relied on the voluntary contribution of subject matter specialists to its working groups. In principle, the working group is a mechanism that is highly suited to a global network such as GFRAS. During the current operational plan several working groups have been active, and they have made a useful contribution. For example, the Policy Working Group made a significant contribution to policy work in GFRAS, including the compilation and subsequent revision of the Policy Compendium. The Gender Working Group played an important role in a workshop on Gender Mainstreaming in Value Chains organised in 2016 in Cameroon by the Green Innovation Centres for the Agriculture and Food Sector in collaboration with the Réseau des services de conseil agricole et rural d’Afrique de l’Ouest et du Centre (RESCAR-AOC). The publication which resulted from the meeting was a valuable contribution.

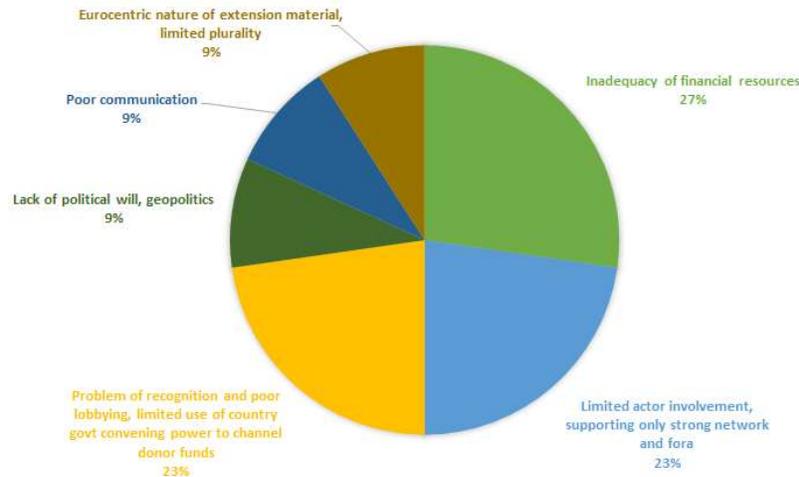
“Several topics never really worked very well: the topic of climate change never managed to take off with GFRAS, and the gender working group was dissolved in 2016 because there were no champions or resources to take it forward.” Davis et al., (2018)

However, a common experience reported by stakeholders who have participated in, or who have knowledge of, the working groups is that the level of activity has tended to fall away after an initial period of enthusiastic engagement. This has been attributed to a reduction in available resources to support meetings and other activities, and also to the inability of some members to commit the time needed to help the group achieve its objectives.

The absence of a functioning MEL system was recognised by several key informants as an important gap for GFRAS. This omission lowers the quality of reporting by the networks and there is a widespread view that many beneficial outcomes are not being captured. This affects the identification of evidence of impact which could be used for advocacy purposes and it also creates missed opportunities for learning within the GFRAS community.

The online survey results on factors and circumstances that have restricted GFRAS to be more successful are captured in Figure 6 below.

FIGURE 6. WHAT FACTORS AND CIRCUMSTANCES HAVE RESTRICTED GFRAS TO BE MORE SUCCESSFUL (24)



Barriers to success – Contextual

As already discussed, GFRAS has been successful in raising the profile of rural advisory services in the agriculture sector. Although there is increasing recognition by development partners of the importance of rural advisory services, they remain a low priority for funding. As a result, they continue to be under-resourced at national and regional levels. There is a clear need for GFRAS to demonstrate a business case for extension in general and for the relevance of an apex structure in particular.

GFRAS has been actively promoting the concept of pluralistic extension services. The concept is now widely accepted but many stakeholders acknowledged that its application has been slow. This is due to several factors. In some countries and regions rural advisory services are still largely delivered by the public sector. In Chile, the country forum has a diverse membership with 18 organisations and monthly organisations in which public and private sector organisations participate. In many other countries in Latin America, rural advisory services are largely provided by public institutions and it is not easy for other organisations to engage with them. A similar situation exists in a significant number of countries in other regions.

Another consideration is the perception that the private sector often does not see significant added value in engaging with public extension providers (Krell *et al.*, 2016). This may be partly due to different interests and different operational cultures between public and private sector service providers. According to one key informant from the private sector, it may sometimes be due to lack of awareness among private sector service providers of the existence of public sector service providers in the locations in which they operate.

3.3 Evaluation Question 3

What are the future expectations of the constituency? How aligned are these expectations with the strategic framework?

Stakeholders were asked about their expectations of GFRAS in the future and the type of activities they would like to see being undertaken. Most of the responses related to the current objectives and actions of GFRAS, suggesting that there was broad consensus on what GFRAS is seeking to achieve and how it is setting about this. There was little evidence to suggest that stakeholders believed a fundamental change is needed or that specific activities should be discontinued. Seventy-five percent of respondents to the online survey stated that GFRAS should do more of what it is currently doing. The 25 percent of respondents who wanted to see a change commented that decision-making should be less centralised. Overall, responses to the online survey can be placed in two categories. The first relate to 'what should be continued'. The second category relate to 'what should change' and areas of future emphasis and activities which can be strengthened both in terms of GFRAS constitution and its activities.

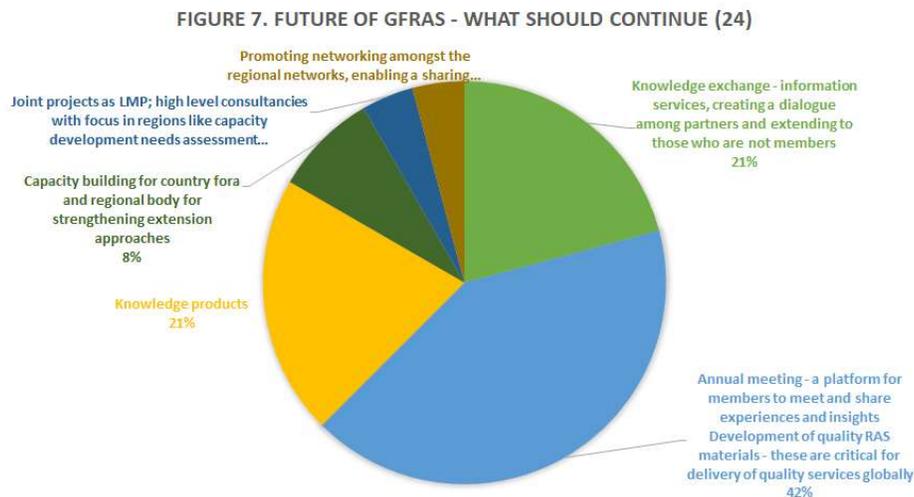
GFRAS – what should be continued?

The activities which online survey respondents valued most highly and which they would like to continue primarily concern networking and knowledge exchange. The annual general meeting was viewed as a key event for these activities with 45 percent of respondents making specific reference to it. However, this perspective needs to be qualified by comments made by several key informants. Whilst recognising the value of the annual general meeting they noted the high cost involved in organising it and some questioned whether it needs to be held each year. Other comments on networking focused on the need to strengthen it and to make better use of the opportunities offered by new information and communication technologies.

The function of knowledge exchange, which is closely linked to networking, was considered to be a key area of continued focus for GFRAS. A significant proportion of survey respondents also thought that the generation of knowledge products should remain as a priority activity in the future. Some key informants questioned whether GFRAS should invest a lot of time and effort in developing new knowledge products. They argued that the added value of GFRAS is to act as a knowledge broker in identifying and sharing lessons and experiences from outputs that are produced by knowledge centres and other organisations generating relevant materials. There was also a view that information and knowledge disseminated through GFRAS should be more accessible to different users. This requires a more systematic targeting of audiences for different purposes and identifying the most appropriate formats for packaging information and suitable media channels for communication.

Survey respondents and key informants stated that GFRAS should renew its efforts on advocacy and resource mobilization. Some suggested that GFRAS should develop policy linkages and connections with new partners in rural innovation. This suggestion reflects a widely held view that GFRAS should find ways to interact more directly with other actors in agricultural innovation systems. However, there were few suggestions on specific organisations which GFRAS might engage with.

The online survey feedback on ‘what should continue’ is captured in Figure 7 below.



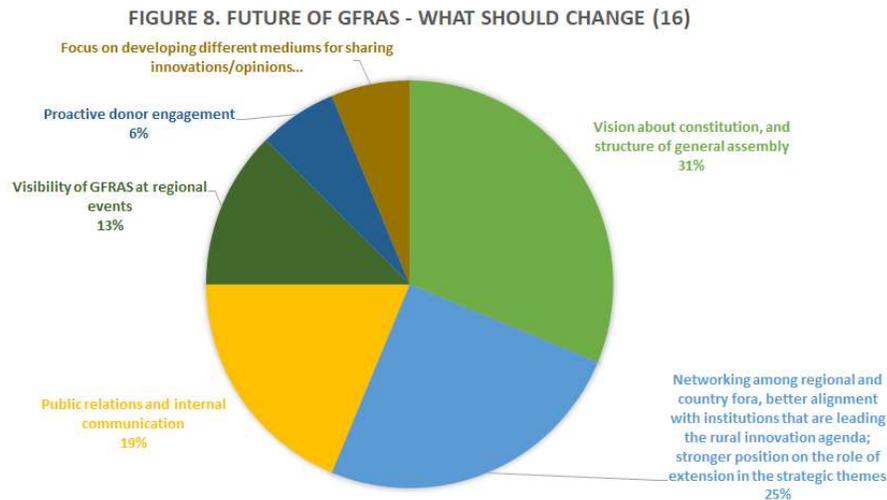
GFRAS – what should change?

The second category of responses concerned the way that GFRAS functions as a global network. There is a perception among some stakeholders that decision-making is heavily concentrated in the global apex and that regional networks should have a stronger voice. This is related, in part, to a feeling that there is an inequitable distribution of resources among member networks. But it also arises from a conviction that GFRAS should be more responsive to priorities identified within the regions. At the same time, staff in the regional networks recognise that there is limited capacity within their networks and that there is a continuing need to strengthen them as well as the country forums.

Most stakeholders support the strategy built into the Last Mile Project in which selected regional networks will be strengthened so that they can more effectively enhance the capacities of the country forums. It is inevitable that project activities need to be targeted towards a restricted number of regions and countries and this is understood by representatives of organisations that will be directly involved. A challenge for GFRAS will be how to ensure that learning from the project will be used to benefit the wider community and that there are

plausible mechanisms for achieving this. One of the steps is to develop a monitoring, evaluation and learning system that is participatory and owned by all the project partners.

The online survey (16 respondents) provided specific feedback (see Figure 8 below) on what should change in the way GFRAS works:



GFRAS stakeholders (key informants and online survey respondents) have suggested that GFRAS should do more of:

- Facilitation of policy linkages and connections with new partners;
- Networking using neural networks, innovative IT, etc. to better link RAS providers;
- Building self-sufficiency of regional networks /country forums;
- Sharing knowledge resources regularly.

3.4 Evaluation Question 4

What are the main lessons from the second phase and what are the recommendations on the agenda for the remaining period (2020-2025) of the strategic framework, including some priorities?

In this section, we present the main lessons from the second phase. Lessons presented in this section are a guide for framing recommendations for the remaining period (2020-2025) of the strategic framework, which are presented with some priorities in section 4.

Lesson 1: A strong need has emerged for demonstrating a business case for investments in RAS and for the continued existence of GFRAS

The current message being promoted by GFRAS in profiling rural advisory services was summarized by a key informant as “Rural advisory services are important, so they need resources”. One challenge which has been mentioned by many stakeholders is that there is a lack of well-documented evidence to support this assertion. As a result, national governments and development agencies do not attach a high priority to rural advisory services. If strong evidence was available, and if it was presented in appropriate ways, the message might become a more convincing one; for example, “The return on investment in rural advisory services is large and failure to fund it is costly”. However, there are methodological difficulties in demonstrating returns on general investment in rural advisory services. We suggest that it would be strategic for GFRAS to change the narrative from a focus on the importance of rural advisory services *per se* to one that illustrates the critical role they play in addressing the major global challenges in agriculture and associated sectors.

Lesson 2: To effectively deliver the GFRAS agenda, a range of partnerships are needed based on strategic function

The experience of the second phase of GFRAS suggests that different categories of partners are needed based on strategic function. The first category of partners is investors; organisations which support the mission of GFRAS and are willing to provide funding or contributions in kind to help it to achieve its objectives. The second category of partners is organisations with shared interests and objectives to GFRAS. This includes networks such as the Global Forum for Agricultural Research (GFAR). A third category of partners is those involved in specific project-type initiatives to which GFRAS contributes. This is exemplified by the Developing Local Extension Capacity (DLEC) project led by Digital Green in collaboration with the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) and consortium partners such as GFRAS. The private sector role can be seen across the three categories and therefore it could be an important partner in GFRAS endeavours. It might be an opportune time to review and steer a new partnership agenda of GFRAS in the remaining period of the strategic framework.

Lesson 3: The GFRAS vision needs to be better conceptualised and conveyed through a theory of change

GFRAS has a set of strategic objectives which reflect its primary operational functions and a set of principles which its members are encouraged to sign up to. What is not so clear is how these objectives and principles are applied to major global challenges and how beneficial impact results. GFRAS has developed some contours of a Theory of Change (ToC), however this needs to go through the same rigor of a consultative process as has been the case with the strategic framework. A ToC is a potentially powerful tool and a logical model for defining the vision and for tracking the trajectory of change over ten years of the strategic plan.

Lesson 4: Effective steering of the GFRAS agenda would require an effective Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning System

The absence of a Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) system was recognised by several key informants as an important gap for GFRAS. GFRAS does not have a functioning monitoring and evaluation framework or a data collection system. The MEL system developed by the Secretariat was very elaborately designed to track each aspect of the strategic plan. It was not possible for GFRAS to implement this MEL system due to various resource and time constraints as highlighted by this assessment. As indicated in Lesson 3, GFRAS and its constituents can conceptualise their vision through a ToC. Once that is accomplished, the MEL system can be conceptualized based on the agreed ToC as it could allow GFRAS and its constituents to better understand the extent of achievements, magnitude of change (using evaluative scales), causality of observed change to GFRAS interventions and also assumptions (factors outside GFRAS's sphere of control or influence) inherent in the process of change. The GFRAS ToC could provide a broader strategic understanding of the impact pathways and therefore could be a useful basis for designing the MEL system.

Lesson 5: A range of contemporary issues demand strong attention of GFRAS and its constituents

GFRAS has not had a strong focus on climate change although some of its networks have given it high priority. In 2011, AFAAS commissioned a study on its potential role in addressing climate change and how rural advisory services can become more 'adaptive' in their responses (Lamboll *et al.*, 2011). At a global level, the NELK module (13) on 'Risk Mitigation and Adaptation in Extension and Advisory Services' includes information on climate change, especially on approaches to adaptation. However, climate change has not featured prominently in GFRAS until the 10th Annual Meeting held in Jamaica on 30th September to 4th October 2019 with the theme 'Role of RAS in Climate Change & Disaster Risk Management'. This is an opportune moment to build on the discussions at the meeting. We understand that a GFRAS position paper will be prepared on the role of rural advisory services in Disaster Risk Management and that climate change issues will be discussed within this. This will be a useful document but the engagement of GFRAS with climate issues should go beyond this. Another key topic for GFRAS to address is how rural advisory services can function effectively within a Food Systems framework and respond to the emerging demand for guidance on improved nutrition.

Lesson 6: The judicious use of new ICT tools can help GFRAS strengthen its communication and knowledge management functions

The assessment has highlighted the need for a shift in emphasis in the role of GFRAS from developing knowledge products to facilitating the exchange of knowledge and information within and between networks. The experience of the second phase suggests that it is now timely for GFRAS to launch a new communication and knowledge management initiative, in which it uses a range of ICT tools to facilitate dialogue and shape discussion around a range of contemporary and emerging themes.

Lesson 7: While shaping its agenda for next five years, GFRAS can learn from other global networks and membership-based organisations

It is acknowledged that the role and functions of GFRAS as a global apex for RAS is unique and are distinct from other initiatives operating at ground level. Nonetheless, it would be instructive and may provide lessons to learn from the structure, mandate, and experiences of other global apex organisations operating in similar fields. Comparisons with other global membership organizations representing a specific stakeholder group may be informative. The World Farmers Organisation (WFO) lobbies for farmers to be placed at the centre of discussions and decision-making on critical issues affecting its members. In this respect it is similar to GFRAS. However, a parallel strand in its approach is that it identifies some key issues which are priorities for its members. The primary issue is climate change which WFO describes as a major threat, but one for which its members has solutions. WFO recently established a Climate Change Alliance with members from farmer organizations, the private sector and knowledge institutions including the CGIAR. It remains to be seen how the Climate Change Alliance will develop but the intention is to place itself in a central position in climate change debates regarding agriculture. Another significant global membership-based organization, which GFRAS could learn from, is ISEAL Alliance⁴. ISEAL is a global membership association for credible sustainability standards. It has strongly and effectively facilitated an agenda focused on credibility and impact of sustainability standards and has constantly innovated in developing new themes of its work such as living income community of practice and global living wage coalition. It has engaged its members and a wider community through various forums including a series of webinars. It has effectively functioning Working groups on various themes of sustainability standards. It has catalyzed innovations through an innovation fund which provided a facility for standard systems to practically test their innovations.

⁴ See <https://www.isealalliance.org/about-iseal>

Lesson 8: Capitalise on new opportunities for improving RAS through digital agriculture

Another area that presents a big opportunity for GFRAS is the digitalisation of agriculture. This has many facets, and these have been described in detail in a comprehensive recent review (CTA, 2019). The rapid expansion of mobile phones is already extending the reach of rural advisory services and enabling them to provide more timely information to farmers on topics such as weather forecasts, good practices and market prices. Equally important is the role that information and community technologies (ICT) plays in providing multiple channels of communication between actors in agricultural innovation systems. Thus, for example, information from farmers can give an early warning of a pest or disease outbreak or details of crop volumes available for purchase by traders. Rural advisory services are ideally placed to play a brokering role to connect farmers and other actors in agricultural innovation systems to knowledge and other services and ICTs can help to facilitate this role.

"As digital solutions justify upscaling, digitally-enabled human agent networks will play a critical role in linking farmers to inputs, finance and knowledge. We will move from a state in which we primarily have observational data to a state in which we can offer users real-time insights and predictive capabilities." CTA (2019).

At the moment there is low use of digital technologies even though more farmers can access them (CTA, 2019). Low use is attributed to the lack of willingness of farmers to pay for these services and this is presumably influenced by affordability and the perceived usefulness of the services. Many current initiatives are still supported by donors, but business models are beginning to become more viable. With real-time gathering of large amounts of data and advances in analytical and predictive approaches data-driven 'solutions' for farmers will become commonplace. This should enhance the value of the services and as economic returns to users increase more farmers will be interested to pay for them.

One of the risks of the expansion of digital services is that this will increase the digital divide.

"Efforts must also be made to increase the capacity of government workers – particularly in ministries of agriculture, livestock, forestry, fisheries and ICT – to understand how to use and deploy D4Ag solutions in various public initiatives." CTA (2019)

Rural advisory services will need to help farmers to use new digital services and so enhance digital literacy.

Attention will have to be given to women and other groups who might be disadvantaged if they have low levels of access to the new technologies. The

benefits to women of their participation in social networks around rural advisory services is highlighted in a recently published report by the Regional Strategic Analysis and Knowledge

Support System (ReSAKKS) (Quisumbing *et al.*, 2019). Other aspects of digital services such as stewardship of data and information provided by farmers need to be considered. Rural advisory services will need to have staff with the expertise required to support these functions and this has implications for the training needs of personnel. GFRAS can assist this process by raising awareness of the need for such training and by engaging with university networks in the regions to influence curricula and teaching and learning methods.

Lesson 9: A stronger focus on gender issues would enhance the GFRAS strategy and vision

The GFRAS strategic framework (2016-2025) states that '*GFRAS will support the engagement of regional and thematic advisory services networks and fora worldwide with their stakeholders, and with other sectors to address issues of: gender equality and engagement of women and youth in agriculture....*'. This statement is made in connection with the key role advisory services have in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, many of which are explicitly linked to gender equality. However, there is no further elaboration in the strategy on how the commitment will be achieved or measured. Gender does not feature in the current GFRAS operational plan, although there is a budget table which shows that US\$50,000 a year will be allocated to a working group on gender.

The limited attention paid to gender was said by some key informants to be due to the fact that gender issues are complex societal issues and that it is difficult to address them at global and regional levels. Other key informants took a different view and suggested that GFRAS should be doing more to address gender issues in rural advisory services. This perspective is more in line with the importance attached to gender in the strategies of other global organisations and in the priorities of development agencies. The ReSAKKS report provides detailed arguments for why gender issues need to remain high on the agenda for agricultural development (Quisumbing *et al.*, 2019).

In the New Extensionist position paper GFRAS recognised the role of gender in the context of the changing dynamics of agriculture (Sulaiman & Davis, 2014). The authors drew attention to the development and implementation of gender-sensitive extension approaches. A Gender Working Group was formed and a policy brief on Gender Equality in Rural Advisory Services was published. The policy brief described the relevance of gender in rural advisory services and provided examples of good practice. A Global Good Practice Note on gender and a NELK gender module were also developed. The workshop and associated publication on 'Gender Mainstreaming in Agricultural Value Chains: Promising Experiences and the Role of Rural Advisory Services' was an advance in thinking from the earlier policy brief. The document shows a deep understanding of gender and its role in rural advisory service and a convincing

case is made for gender integration with some promising practices summarised. However, as mentioned earlier the gender working group is now inactive. What should be done to ensure that gender issues remain part of the GFRAS agenda?

Gender was included as one of the criteria measured in the capacity assessment exercise. Gender equality was defined by two indicators: 'promotes gender equality' and 'promotes the role of women extension workers in RAS'. The indicators were not further elaborated in the

"In a world where research and innovation in agriculture are currently led by Governments, Research Institutions and Corporations, farmers ask to be involved in the research process from its inception, in order to narrow the gap between farmers' needs and research results."
World Farmer Organisation Declaration.

report and so it is not entirely clear how this dimension was assessed. Overall, gender was placed in the 'overestimated' category, but it is interesting to note that there were large differences in gender capacity between the networks. Capacity strengthening in gender issues is needed at all levels of GFRAS and peer learning among networks would be worthwhile,

with mentoring provided by networks which have greater experience and capacity in promoting gender-based approaches to service provision. This could be part of an agreed set of activities placed under a revisited gender objective to help GFRAS successfully deliver its gender-sensitive strategic framework.

4. Conclusions and Recommendations

4.1 Conclusions

GFRAS has built on the foundations established during the first five years of its existence. It has set up a global network structure, raised the profile of rural advisory services, and developed useful knowledge products and training resources. There is general satisfaction within the GFRAS constituency with what it has done. This is reflected in the answers given by survey respondents to the question on how useful GFRAS has been useful to them, as captured in the sections above. Although there were limitations in obtaining some relevant data, we were able to establish that GFRAS has undertaken many of the activities specified in the current operational plan and is on the way to achieving many of the targets. These achievements are highly commendable but, in the words of one key informant, “GFRAS is not yet the go-to place for rural advisory services”.

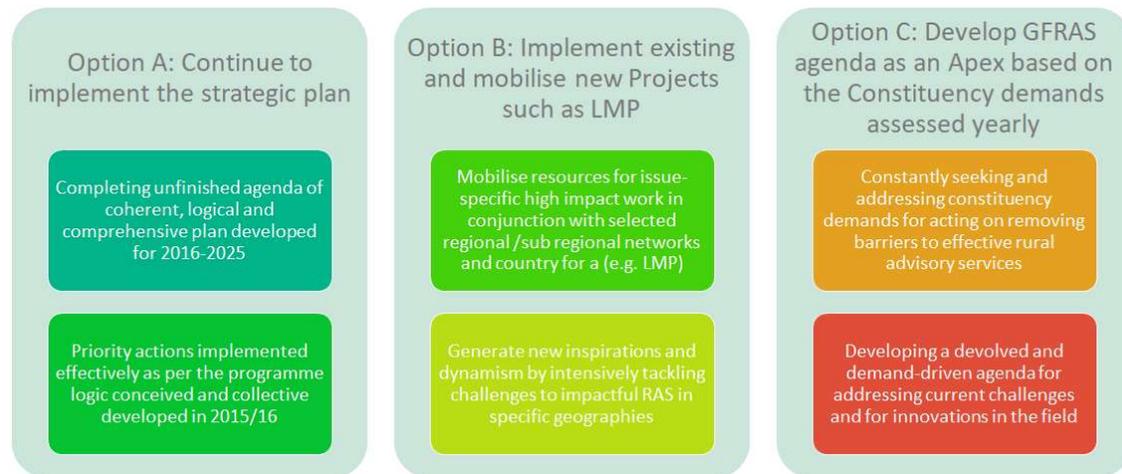
4.2 Recommendations

The assessment indicates that the mission of GFRAS can be better achieved by acting on the following recommendations:

Recommendation 1: Engage in collective reflections with the constituency and partners for determining the future strategic orientation of GFRAS and deciding priorities.

How can GFRAS continue to develop so that it becomes indispensable to the global agricultural system? Does this require a revision of its mandate and strategic objectives or perhaps a refocusing of priorities? Are the mechanisms which GFRAS uses to conduct its activities the most appropriate for achieving its objectives? How can the global network be resourced so that it is placed on a sustainable financial footing in the medium- to long-term? Finally, if changes are needed what processes should be used to introduce them so that there is a commitment among members to work together to implement the new agenda. These are some of the questions for collective reflections that GFRAS can engage in with its constituency and partners. It is now timely for GFRAS to reflect on future options; whether to attempt to deliver the strategic plan in its entirety or prioritise, or do something else which is more relevant and impactful. Based on the feedback obtained from the constituency and partners during the assessment, we present three possible future options.

Figure 9. Future strategic options for GFRAS



Option A is about continuing to implement the strategic framework for the next five years. The strategic framework is very ambitious and so it is recommended under Option A that GFRAS conduct a strategy session with its constituency and partners to prioritise activities. Based on the findings of this assessment, we recommend that activities related to strategic field 1 (advocacy) and strategic field 3 (knowledge exchange) should be prioritised as these are the expectations of the constituency and are likely to have knock-on effects on all three levels of RAS delivery – individuals, institutions and enabling context. Once certain activities are prioritised, then GFRAS should implement them with renewed vigor.

Option B is about mobilising resources to implement existing (LMP) and potentially new projects. Going down this route will not only provide injections of additional funding to GFRAS but also will generate new inspiration and dynamism in tackling frontline challenges to making rural advisory services more impactful in specific geographies.

Option C is about creating GFRAS as an apex which is more responsive to constituency demands and needs. Under this option, GFRAS will be able to cater to a devolved and demand-driven agenda and be more contemporary in its orientation and actions. Going for this option would require GFRAS to designate a separate pool of funds (which might be called an Innovation or Challenge Fund) which cater to annual needs of its constituency on a competitive basis. Taking this route has two advantages. First, GFRAS can potentially make a real contribution to addressing constraints to effective RAS delivery. Second, GFRAS can support innovation pilots in the field, which if found successful can be scaled up.

Each of these options have advantages that makes GFRAS stand out and gain prominence as a global apex while delivering its vision and agenda effectively. Each of these options also

places varying demands on the GFRAS Secretariat and constituency, which in the current state it is only partially ready to take on. A selection of suitable strategic options (or a combination of options) could be guided by this understanding of advantages and demands of various possible future scenarios as captured in Figure 10 below.

Figure 10. Advantage and options for future strategic pathways for GFRAS



Option A is not a *status quo* but a refreshed strategic framework, with priority actions identified and intensively implemented. But under this option, GFRAS runs the same risk of limited constituency involvement as has been highlighted by this assessment.

Option B has clear advantages of developing new collaborations and innovations. Under this option, GFRAS has a real opportunity of making ground-level impacts and is also likely to have greater flexibility to shape and steer its agenda on-course. However, taking this option has a high likelihood of diverting the attention of GFRAS to project-based operations and its role as global apex is likely to be compromised. A further challenge is that matching funding is often needed in projects and GFRAS has limited scope to contribute this.

Option C envisages GFRAS developing its agenda dynamically by listening to the voice of the constituency. It can potentially lead to a devolved and decentralised management of the collective, leveraging skills and capacities of the members. However, it can also lead to a high volume of demand which GFRAS under its present set up may not be able to meet. From a financial perspective, this option would need to involve the secretariat in the headquarters receiving a proportion of its funding through member subscriptions or payment for specific services. This should be a medium- to long-term aim but may not be realistic in the short-term.

The choice available for GFRAS is to either take one single strategic option or take up a combination of options. If GFRAS chooses a combination of options /multiple pathways, then it could be A+B+C or A+B or A+C etc. It can realistically be stated that GFRAS has a higher likelihood of achieving the intent of its strategic framework (2016-2025) if it chooses a combination of options. Our assessment and constituency feedback indicate to us that GFRAS should take up a combination of Option A and Option C. Option B is not the most strategic pathway in the long-term as it is likely to divert GFRAS attention from its role of being a global apex. Taking on multiple pathways of option A and option C would demand collective reflection and planning of 'what it takes' in terms of time, commitment and resources to steer and execute this agenda.

Recommendation 2: Review and reframe GFRAS governance arrangements and management systems

As 'form follows function', GFRAS would need to decide on its structure and governance arrangements based on what it decides on the strategic options (or a combination of options) presented above. GFRAS can conduct a light review of its governance arrangements and management systems needed to effectively steer its agenda for the remaining timeframe (2020-2025) of the strategic framework. Some of the ideas in this regard are presented below:

Governance and organisation: from Steering Committee to Board

The Steering Committee has served GFRAS well and the contribution of members was especially important during a difficult period when the Secretariat lost several staff members. The transition to a Board structure creates an opportunity for stronger network involvement in decision-making and an injection of fresh ideas from new representatives.

Management Systems: from Working groups to Communities of practice

The GFRAS working groups have made important contributions in a variety of ways but a consensus has emerged that the groups now lack dynamism and are not fully functional. Either ways need to be found to re-energise them or different approaches should be explored to address the issues they cover. Working groups tend to be most effective when they are established to deliver very specific and relatively short-term outputs; for example, to identify options for a change in organisational structure or to develop and launch a new initiative. Communities of Practice (CoP) could be an alternative to Working groups. A CoP is a group of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better

as they interact regularly⁵. The ideas on key contemporary and relevant themes for establishing CoP can be developed by GFRAS in consultation with its constituency and partners. While the CoPs can be co-ordinated by the Secretariat, these can be devolved structures as specific CoPs can be led by regional /sub regional networks or country forums. One of the many advantages of the CoP way of working is that it will embrace a wider community fold based on their interest in the theme and can generate excitement and a 'movement' related to that theme. This approach would be an important contribution to a revised knowledge management function (see Recommendation 4).

From annual meetings to biannual meetings

GFRAS stakeholders appreciate the annual meeting and it is clear that a global face-to-face meeting is valuable, particularly for networking and knowledge exchange. On the other hand, the meetings are costly to organise and take up a considerable amount of Secretariat staff time. Holding the global meeting every two years would be more practical. This would release staff time for other core activities and re-allocate scarce resources without losing the benefits of the physical interaction.

Recommendation 3: Develop a theory of change-based monitoring, evaluation and learning system

A challenge for a global network is how to respond to the many and diverse needs of its members. One network coordinator described how the preoccupation of countries with their own particular concerns makes it difficult to encourage them to engage in regional forums. Nevertheless, there are high-level issues which are common for most countries, although they may affect them in different ways. Addressing these issues is the most direct way for a global network to show its relevance and its value to its constituency. GFRAS has a set of strategic objectives which reflect its primary operational functions and a set of principles which its members are encouraged to sign up to. What is not so clear is how these objectives and principles are applied to major global challenges and how beneficial impact results. It is recommended that GFRAS develops a robust theory of change using a similarly robust process as it has done for developing its strategic framework. The GFRAS ToC can provide a broader strategic understanding of the impact pathways and therefore could be a useful basis for designing the monitoring and evaluation system.

⁵ Source: <https://wenger-trayner.com/resources/what-is-a-community-of-practice/>

Recommendation 4: Develop a knowledge management strategy and a communication agenda

The assessment has pointed out the need for a shift of emphasis in the role of GFRAS from developing knowledge products to facilitating the exchange of information within and between networks. GFRAS can utilise available expertise within members and affiliates to generate the knowledge and can promote the use of ICT to extend the reach and encourage dialogue. Issues which can be explored are shared through such an approach include:

- Ways of delivering rural advisory services at scale in countries with weak governance and limited capacity.
- Exchanging experiences from different ways of structuring and organizing country forums: mandate and function; hosting arrangements; governance and management; membership.
- Identifying and documenting suitable case studies as impact stories.
- Engagement with higher education networks to influence training of rural service providers.

Several of these ideas can be captured in the knowledge management strategy based on which a strong and active communication agenda can be developed and acted on; making use of media channels such as webinars, blogs, vlogs (video blogs), short twitter videos, computer-based training modules etc. in addition to academic articles and publications.

Recommendation 5: Review existing partnerships and establish new partnerships

In recent years GFRAS has been active in seeking new partners. However, the current status of some of these initiatives is not very clear and it is now timely for GFRAS to review the purpose of its partnerships and how these operate. Better alignment with institutions that are leading the rural innovation agenda is needed. Consideration should be given to how stronger linkages with the private sector can be developed by regional networks and country forums.

Recommendation 6: GFRAS as an apex has a continued role and relevance and so development agencies should continue to support GFRAS

GFRAS has set up a global network structure, raised the profile of rural advisory services, and developed useful knowledge products and training resources. There was a broad consensus among GFRAS stakeholders that the current strategic areas were still relevant, especially related to advocacy and resource mobilization and knowledge management. Achieving the GFRAS vision can potentially contribute to achieving several SDGs (in particular SDG 1, 2 and

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Annex A – TOR

Context and Background

The Global Forum for Rural Advisory Services ([GFRAS](#)), established in 2010, provides advocacy and leadership on pluralistic, demand-driven rural advisory services.

The GFRAS vision is for rural advisory services to effectively contribute to agricultural innovation systems for sustainable development worldwide. The mission is to provide advocacy and leadership on rural advisory services within the global development agenda. To fulfil the mission, GFRAS has three strategic fields of action:

- advocacy and support for an enabling policy environment and appropriate investment in RAS
- professionalization of RAS
- facilitation and enhancement of effective and continuous knowledge generation and exchange

GFRAS is a forum consisting of individuals and organisations active providing advisory services and organised in regional, sub-regional and country-level networks. It is managed by the Steering Committee, which delegates operational functions to its Secretariat.

In the view of completing the Operational Plan 2016-2020, GFRAS wishes to acquire a comprehensive overview of its main achievements and capture the lessons learnt for the development of the subsequent Operational Plan 2021-2025. It is therefore looking for a consultant who carries out this assessment, delivers evidence of success as well as factors and circumstances that have restricted GFRAS to be successful, and make recommendations for the next operational planning 2021-2025.

Article 1 Scope of work and tasks

This assessment forms an important means of accountability of GFRAS' work towards its constituencies and supporters. At the same time, it shall serve as a policy and managerial tool for GFRAS Steering Committee decisions regarding the future and include forward-looking insights and practical recommendations regarding future options for GFRAS, within the existing strategic framework and beyond.

The assessment has to reference the GFRAS Strategic Framework, the Results Framework derived from the former, as well as the outcomes and outputs of the Operational Plan, and the SDC credit proposal. Its findings and conclusions shall reflect success in terms of outputs delivered, outcomes achieved, and impact contributed to, as well as factors and circumstances that have restricted GFRAS in achieving its objectives. Additionally, the

assessment should inform about the relevance of the achievements regarding broader developments and trends of RAS. In this respect the assessment will look at both direct and indirect effects of the actions undertaken by GFRAS.

Tasks:

- Elaborate/refine the framework of the assessment specifying the outputs, outcomes, and impact to study for each of the key strategic domains and levels
- Develop the assessment methodology, tools, and timeline
- Collect, process, and analyse information relative to the achievements, critical factors for success and relevance for developments and trends in RAS
- Produce a report on the assessment and incorporate feedback from GFRAS

The tasks will involve elaborating proposals, drafting narratives on results, consultations with the Core Group and Secretariat, and consolidation of feedback to a final product.

Deliverables

- Refined framework for the assessment
- Agreed proposal for the assessment methodology and timeline
- Processed data as well as results of data analysis (digital data sets)
- Assessment report including methodology, main findings, conclusions and recommendations for enhanced achievements of the next 5 years

Implementation arrangements

The consultant will work closely with the GFRAS Core Group specifically established for this assessment. The consultant and the Core Group will discuss major methodological and organizational aspects of the assignment as well as its findings and conclusions. The Core Group will provide feedback on all deliverables and grants approval.

The consultant will mainly work at distant with the WG through email and virtual exchange. S/he will carry out an important part of its assessment and exchanges with the GFRAS stakeholders at distance. Opportunities for face-to-face exchange and field visits are to be examined. The consultant will work autonomously but in close contact with the GFRAS Secretariat for operational matters.

Annex B – Key Informants Interviewed

Francisco Aguirre	RELASER
Francesca Borgia	IFAD
Virginia Cardenas	APIRAS
Sanne Chipeta	Consultant
Delgermaa Chuluunbaatar	Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations
Pierre-André Cordey	Swiss Development Cooperation
Kristin Davis	International Food Policy Research Institute
Patrice Djamien	RESCAR-AOC
David Dolly	CAEPNET
Botir Dosov	CAC-FRAS
Samson Eshetu	Farm Radio International
Judith Francis	CTA/Tropical Agricultural Platform
May Hani	Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations
Richard Hawkins	International Centre for Research-Oriented Agriculture
Pius Hiwe	Young Professionals for Agriculture Development
Dan Kisauzi	NIDA consultants
Vasanth Kumar	Green Lifescience Technologies
Christophe Larose	European Commission
Carl Larsen	GFRAS Secretariat
Edgars Linde	EUFRAS
Jonas Mugabe	Forum for Agricultural Research in Africa
Roy Murray-Prior	APEN
Silim Nahdy	AFAAS
Rebecca Nelson	Cornell University
Hlami Ngwenya	Consultant
David Nielson	GFRAS co-Chair
Tharcisse Nkuzimana	European Commission
Ingrid Oliveira	GFRAS Secretariat
Max Olupot	AFAAS
Andrianjafy Rasoanindrainy	Farming & Technology for Africa
Florian Rudaz	GFRAS Secretariat
Joep Slaats	GFRAS Secretariat
Rasheed Suleiman	GFRAS co-Chair
Frank Tchuwa	Lilongwe University for Agriculture and Natural Resources
Luisa Volpe	World Farmers Organization
Andrew Ward	Crop Life International

Annex C – Detailed Assessment Findings

Rating scale used: A = most aspects achieved; B = some aspects achieved; C = only limited aspects achieved

N	Strategic field	Activity	Targets	Assessment	Achievements	Gaps	Points of Improvement
1	Advocacy and support for an enabling policy environment and appropriate investment in RAS	Activity 1: Develop new and strengthen existing strategic partnerships	Inventory existing partnerships, supportive communication material; at least 5 influenced; 5 new partners in GFRAS activities	B	Engagement of new partners: There are currently seventeen member networks in GFRAS and, although some gaps in geographical coverage remain, it can now claim to be a truly global organization. Example of FAO; Overall monetary investments in GFRAS have reduced but new projects funded by IFAD and EC (T3).	This expansion also brings challenges as there are large variations in capacity and resources among the networks with some new members having limited capacity to function effectively. Stakeholders consider that the country forum model is relevant and that it is a suitable mechanism for bringing together the different actors engaged in rural advisory services. Deficiencies identified in resource mobilization at all levels in the network. Need for increasing private sector involvement	In recent years GFRAS has been active in seeking new partners. However, the current status of some of these initiatives is not very clear and it is now timely for GFRAS to review the purpose of its partnerships and how these operate. NELK can be used to facilitate engagement with the private sector, it can also be an opportunity for creative common license, which everyone can use. GFRAS to engage more systematically with the private sector, primarily to encourage the development of more pluralistic rural advisory services.
		Activity 2: Facilitate capacity around evidence-based advocacy with regional networks and country forums.	Advocacy learning material, policy ambassador programme, advocacy capacity needs for at least 8 regional networks	B	Advocacy capacity/needs assessed in nine networks (T6). Some examples of country forums (e.g. Uganda, South Africa) and RAS regional networks (AFAAS, AESA) having some influence on the discussions around extension reforms Developing Local Extension Capacity (DLEC) project - This type of project-based partnership is appropriate and productive for GFRAS where the objectives align closely with its own aims. GFRAS	Considerable achievement to establish the 17 networks. But a lot more work is needed to strengthen the capacities of some members. These are positive developments, but the capacity needs assessment also found that the approaches and results are not being systematically assessed and documented. This omission is significant because a common thread in the comments of survey respondents and key informants was that evidence of the impact of rural advisory services	Highlight successes in countries where extension is weak and poorly funded and supporting and sharing them broadly. Stakeholders expressed the need to identify, study and share successes in improving extension at a large scale in countries like Nigeria or Kenya or Mozambique. A recommendation from the capacity needs assessment was that GFRAS should document and share case studies of successful advocacy approaches.

					has benefited from its involvement in DLEC through access to information and evidence arising from project activities and also through direct support for designated activities such as the Master trainer workshops for promoting the uptake of the New Extensionist Learning Kit (NELK) in Africa.	is lacking and that this is needed to support advocacy activities.	
		Activity 3: Create and participate in spaces for dialogue and engagement with key actors.	At least 10 dialogues to engage key actors, 5 annual meetings integrating advocacy discussions	B	Policy dialogues organized with seven country forums by RELASER in 2017 (T7). GFRAS reports show that policy dialogues have been conducted in most of the regions since 2016. There are also examples where country forums have been active in advocating for policy change. In Malawi, the Malawi Forum for Agricultural Advisory Services has advocated for changes in policies on subsidies and on increased funding for rural advisory services although it has had limited impact to date. Another example from Africa comes from Uganda where the Uganda Forum for Agricultural Advisory Services has been invited by the Ministry of Agriculture to	Cross-regional networking outside the annual general meeting is limited Limited mechanisms for sharing innovations/opinions etc. amongst regional networks.	Focus on developing different mediums for sharing innovations/opinions etc. amongst regional networks

					assist it to draw up a national policy on agricultural extension.		
		Activity 4: Coherently advocate for RAS in international dialogues	15 policy dialogues in regions or countries facilitated	B	<p>Positive assessment of GFRAS as a platform for raising awareness of the value of RAS. "GFRAS has harnessed a common voice on rural advisory services. It now has legitimacy and convening power. The regions look to GFRAS for that voice."</p> <p>Appreciation of the role of GFRAS in promoting the Country Forum model.</p> <p>GFRAS influenced the inclusion of a statement on the need to increase investment in rural advisory services in the text for target 2.A of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 2: End hunger. During the assessment period a conscious effort was made by the GFRAS Secretariat to participate in high profile events on agricultural development. For example, GFRAS organized a side event at the Annual General Assembly of the Global Donor Platform for Rural Development (GDPRD) held in Brussels on 1–2 February 2017.</p>	<p>Stakeholders perceived limited visibility of the GFRAS constituency at regional policy making events and forums</p> <p>Currently limited evidence of real impact of extension.</p> <p>Limited communication from GFRAS to all the network affiliates would help people identify more with the global apex.</p>	<p>Strong need felt for generating more evidence of real impact of extension. More communication from GFRAS to all the network affiliates would help people identify more with the global apex</p>

		Activity 5: Transparently create and share evidence of RAS impact on relevant, contemporary issues.	At least one research study on evidence of impact of RAS on a relevant contemporary issue	B	Several knowledge products on RAS role in contemporary issues (T11) (Note: also addresses a target under SF3). GFRAS has mobilized resources from different donors to strengthen RAS.	Could have done better on thematic working group (including gender working group), MEL	Having a higher profile at different events (FAO, IFAD, ISHS, regional extension events, etc) could help raise GFRAS' profile and efficacy
2	Professionalization of RAS	Activity 1: Facilitate regional network engagement in policy dialogue on professionalization by providing evidence of the benefits of professionalization	Assess status on professionalization of 11 regional networks, benefits of professionalization in at least 3 countries in 3 regions	B	Professionalization capacity needs of RAS was identified within each of nine regional networks (Target 1). The capacity needs assessment was considered a valuable exercise. One network coordinator described it as a "turning point in their thinking. The new 'Last Mile' project funded by the International Fund for Agricultural Development and other development partners provides an opportunity to strengthen selected regional networks and country forums	professionalization of rural advisory services had the lowest level of capacity amongst all the capacity areas examined. The main challenge is the limited capacity to act on the findings and implement the recommendations. A concern raised by many stakeholders is how to extend the benefits accruing to selected networks and country forums through initiatives such as the Last Mile project to the wider membership within GFRAS.	Lessons from participatory, transparent, pluralistic, and strong leadership model of CCRAS is worth learning and emulating
		Activity 2: Strengthen the capacity of regional networks to support professionalization activities within countries.	At least 5 evidence-based tools, test and disseminate NELK, activate one professionalization ambassador per region	B	Action plans developed by several networks following the capacity needs assessment (T8); The NELK is one of the flagship initiatives of GFRAS and was published in 2017 as a set of 13 modules to support individual learning. It is based on the view of the New Extensionist elaborated by GFRAS in which rural advisory services have a key role within agricultural innovation	In the view of one key informant the NELK "needs to adapt, introduce a more accessible format and bring in case studies". Aside from evaluating how the kit is used by different target audiences it is important to understand the relevance of the content to users in different regions.	Learn from modalities of working with country forums from regional networks such as AFAAS, CCRAS

					<p>systems and that persons working in this arena need to acquire an expanded set of skills. There is evidence that the Kit, or selected material within it, is being utilized in formal teaching in Higher Education Institutes (T4). In the University of Africa in Zambia the whole kit has been incorporated into a new teaching programme. In South Africa the University of the Free State has accredited the modules and uses them as short learning courses. In India, Agricultural Extension in South Asia (AESA) has used NELK to provide content to support reforms in curricula in training agricultural extension officers. In Latin America, the NELK is being used by rural advisory services; Good Practice Guidance Note on professionalization of RAS (T3).</p>
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	<p>Activity 3: Provide guidance for organizational efficiency and effectiveness of regional networks.</p>	<p>Support at least 3 regional networks, assess and support development of action plans, 5 peer exchange, 5 annual meetings</p>	<p>C</p>	<p>Most respondents agreed that the greatest accomplishment of GFRAS has been the building up and then supporting the regional networks. GFRAS contributed a lot on building capacities, resources, infrastructure, systems and improving governance of regional network /country forums (two-third of respondents in the online survey). They felt that GFRAS has helped to build the capacities of CF members and leaders in various key areas as well as provide support on governance issues. Some respondents (5) felt that GFRAS has contributed with funding for our regional network technical authorities/secretary, and has helped to connect it with the rest of the regional networks. GFRAS through its guidance, wider contacts and limited direct funding support has contributed to the emergence of AESA (Agricultural Extension in South Asia) Network.</p>	<p>more accountability to be built across networks. more hands-on support to networks is expected.</p>	<p>Global extension study and the role of the private sector and explore how stronger linkages with private sector can be tapped by regional networks and country forums. Overall better alignment with institutions that are leading the rural innovation agenda.</p>
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3	Facilitation and enhancement of effective and continuous knowledge generation and exchange	Activity 1: Create and package evidence on effective RAS.	20 knowledge products, assess knowledge mgt capacity needs of networks	B	<p>publication of a set of 30 Global Good Practice Notes; two issues papers on topics of current concern (migration and youth); the NELK; an updated Policy Compendium; and a library on the links between agriculture and nutrition. This has been one of GFRAS's great strength. Its publications (NELK, Issue Papers, Global Good Practice Notes, Policy Compendium etc) have inspired many especially young extension professionals to understand and appreciate the role and importance of RAS, world-wide.</p> <p>Some of the regional networks have also been very active in knowledge generation and exchange activities</p>	<p>Global Good Practice Notes and Issues papers are appreciated but could be more widely used. Some key informants said they were not very familiar with the knowledge products.</p> <p>As noted by several key informants who thought that the role of GFRAS as a knowledge broker has been largely confined to activities during annual meetings.</p> <p>Need to tap opportunities for useful flows of information and knowledge upwards from country forums as some of the national platforms have a lot of interesting material to share.</p>	Demonstrate business case for extension and why GFRAS is necessary.
		Activity 2: Develop and share knowledge management guidelines for regional networks (strategies and assessment).	Develop knowledge mgt guidelines, facilitate implementation in at least 3 regional networks	C	<p>Assessment of knowledge management capacity/needs done in nine regional networks (T2).</p> <p>Other knowledge products e.g. AESA manual on good practices in extension research and evaluation (T4)</p>	<p>A Knowledge management strategy is needed</p> <p>some respondents identified gaps in knowledge provision; in particular, a lack of evidence about the effectiveness of rural advisory services.</p>	Find good examples of moving extension forward at scale in countries with weak governance and limited capacity -- share these examples and approaches.

	<p>Activity 3: Coordinate spaces to facilitate knowledge exchange (face-to-face meetings, online environments, etc.).</p>	<p>5 annual meetings integrating knowledge mgt, 10 RAS peer exchanges</p>	<p>B</p>	<p>GFRAS has opened up opportunities for regional affiliates to expand itself within the region e.g. CACAARI engaged 8 NARS experts in its regional events. Annual meetings are reported by most members of GFRAS constituency (online survey respondents) as very educational and interactive</p>	<p>More emphasis should be placed on facilitating the exchange of information and knowledge between networks. Some interviewees indicated a regional bias. Annual meetings are good, but question is how much they contribute towards improving work of regional networks /country forums</p>	<p>A balanced approach to support both the strong and not-so-strong regional networks and country forums.</p>
	<p>Activity 4: Improve upon existing, further develop, and test knowledge management platforms/tools.</p>	<p>Assess annually and address GFRAS online platform/tool needs of regional networks.</p>	<p>B</p>	<p>GFRAS has helped create a veritable web of networks across the globe and the investments have started to pour in at national levels, sub regional, regional and global level.</p>	<p>Scope for Knowledge management to improve – GFRAS as an aggregator of information and knowledge, primarily a knowledge broker rather than a knowledge generator. The website needs updating. Limited use of social media tools and IT tools (such as webinars) to share information and enhance visibility of activities.</p>	<p>Scope for Knowledge management to improve. The Last Mile project now presents an opportunity for GFRAS to review its knowledge management function and develop an overall strategy for the whole network. A critical aspect will be to identify and establish structures and standards that will ensure digital resources can be transferred across boundaries. More use could be made of knowledge platforms such as the Tropical Agriculture Platform in which GFRAS is a partner. Publications could be uploaded to strategic sites such as the website of the Global Donor Platform for Rural Development where there are few GFRAS documents at present. By using new digital tools (including webinars) GFRAS can make information more accessible and available in a timely manner</p>