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# MINUTES OF THE VIRTUAL SFRAS MEETING ON E-EXTENSION ON 10<sup>TH</sup> DECEMBER 2020

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Host	Stefanie Kaegi, Senior Advisor Sustainable Agriculture, Helvetas; Virtual Meeting on Zoom
Technical guidance:	Antonia Does, Evaluation and Learning Advisor, Helvetas
Participants	Extended SFRAS member group (CUG of the SDC Agriculture and Food Security Network and global representation of member institutions)
Recipients	SFRAS members, SDC A&FS Shareweb
Minutes	Stefanie Kaegi

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## 1 Agenda

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9.15	Welcome	<b>Stefanie Kaegi</b> , Senior Advisor Sustainable Agriculture, Helvetas <b>Antonia Does</b> , Evaluation and Learning Advisor, Helvetas
9.25	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>➤ Impact and trends of digitization of RAS – insights from GFRAS discussions</li><li>➤ e-Extension for Extension Professionals – insights from the new extensionist learning tool</li></ul>	<b>Carl Erik Schou Larsen</b> , Executive Secretary of GFRAS <b>Dr. John James</b> , Founder and Director of <i>Enablers of Change</i> , Australia
9.40	Discussion	
9.55	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>➤ Learning on inclusive e-extension: Insights from the Agripath project and the Farmbetter tool</li></ul>	<b>Nicole Harari</b> , Research Scientist at Centre for Development and Environment (CDE), University of Bern <b>Benjamin Gräub</b> , Expert for digital training solutions at FiBL and Co-founder of <i>Farmbetter</i>
10.10	Discussion	
10.25	Brain break	
10.30	Peer exchange in groups on e-extension experiences <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Which digital tools did farmers use to access information when physical meetings were restricted?</li><li>• What did function well and what challenges appeared related quality and inclusive access to information?</li><li>• What are recommendations for future e-extension initiatives?</li></ul>	
11.00	Coffee break and individual peer review of results	
11.20	Highlights from group works	
11.25	News from members	
11.40	Next meeting: host and topic	
12.00	End of meeting	

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## 2 Participants

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Martin	Fischler	Helvetas
Nicole	Harari	CDE
Benjamin	Gräub	FIBL and Farmbetter
Carl	Larsen	GFRAS
Rahel	Wyss	Caritas
Stefanie	Kägi	Helvetas
Ueli	Mauderli	SDC
Wade	Jenner	CABI
Mustak	Khan	Partners in Prosperity, India
David	Bexte	Helvetas
Georg	Felber	Helvetas
David	Schwitter	World Vision
Piera	Waibel	Purpose; self-employed
Rima	Mekdaschi Studer	University of Bern
Sabrina	Würmli	Helvetas
Philipp	Staudacher	Eawag
Shachi	Gurumayum	AgBiTech and Agrimayum GmbH
Sara	Imbach	Vétérinaires Sans Frontières Suisse
Christina	Aebischer	Swissaid
Sarah	Mader	Swissaid
Johannes	Brunner	HAFL / BFH
Valérie	Cavin	Agridea
Shruti	Patel	Biovision
Joep	Slats	GFRAS
Stefanie	Kaegi	Helvetas
Antonia	Does	Helvetas
Ernst	Bolliger	Independent consultant
Sandra	Fürst	SKAT
Dominique	Guenat	HAFL /BFH

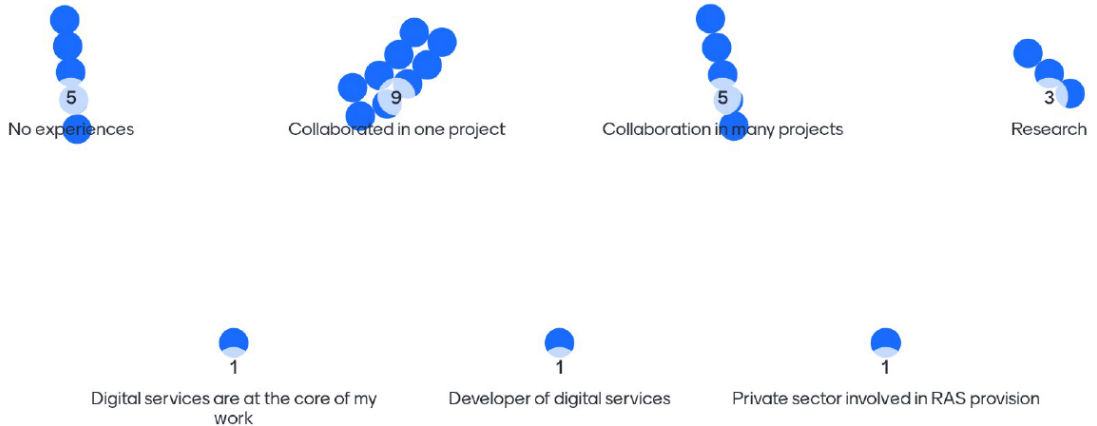
Excused: Angela Deppeler, Martin Schmid (HEKS), Joachim Jung (Vivamos Mejor), Felicitas Bachmann (CDE)

### 3 Thematic session

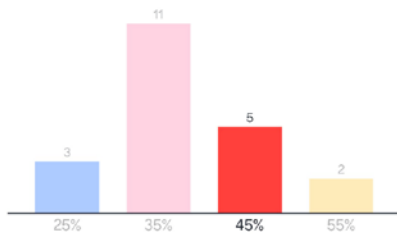
#### 3.1 Setting the scene (Stefanie Kaegi)

Introduction to the group with many new participants the topic with a range of Mentimeter questions:

## What's your experience with digital RAS?



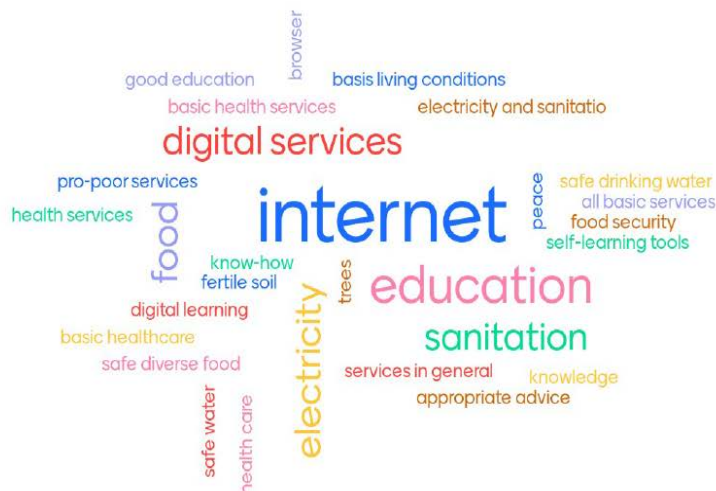
How many persons own a smartphone in 2020? (share of total world population)



What digital tools did your project(s) use to replace f2f trainings and meetings during the Covid-19 pandemic??



In 10 years, all people in remote areas should have access to ...



### 3.2 Thematic inputs (Carl Larsen, John James, Nicole Harari, Benjamin Graeub)

All presentations are available [here](#).

- Insights from the [GFRAS discussion on e-extension](#) (Carl Larsen, Executive Secretary of GFRAS)
- [Video message on e-extension by John James](#), Founder of Enablers of Change and Author of the new extensionist learning kit on e-extension.
- [Insights from the Agripath projects](#) by Nicole Harari, Scientific collaborator at the Centre for Development and Environment, University of Bern
- [Insights from the Farmbetter Tool](#)

## 4 Group work and discussion

Three groups brainstormed and discussed below questions using the Padlet tool. After the group work, each participant reviewed the results of one other group and liked the notes that he or she found most relevant. Below are the combined rated and prioritised (four or more likes) insights from the group work. The full group work outcome is available in Annex 1.

### **What was the most amazing (and positive!) or negative experience with digital rural advisory services you made so far?**

- + Hybrid forms worked well (F2F trainings + moderated platforms)
- + Very good experience with using digital tools to track/monitor extension staff activities and feedback from farmers using KoBo Toolbox.
- + Use of videos made by farmers. Very innovative and empowering.
- - Finding out how hard it is to get farmers signed-up into an app - e.g. digital literacy issues for older smallholders
- - remote farmers access to smart phones, connection in remote areas
- - Too many tools being developed very quickly without considering the user - just to have the tool that was promised as a project output.

### **Which digital tools did farmers use / did your projects offer to access information when physical meetings were restricted?**

- Project evaluation during lockdown in three countries in Africa.

### **What did function well and what challenges appeared related to quality and inclusive access to information?**

- + Working with younger farmers to teach farmers how to use smartphones/newer technologies
- +Some people that normally do not participate did online. Quiet participants could write comments in chats.
- - Language is a challenge; English is not understood everywhere. And special challenge in multi-language countries.
- - Reaching/serving the poorest and illiterate clients is a huge challenge

### **Do you have any recommendations for future e-extension initiatives?**

- Look at optimal combination of digital and physical forms to provide advice
- Technology is only a means to an end that has to always be focused on the needs of the customers/farmers -) what will really create value.
- As discussed, inclusion of themes beyond production (nutrition, markets etc.) will be important to develop
- Use peer to peer exchange to get fit for e-extension
- Be mindful of women and youth - early adopters.
- Hybrid models to create inclusive services

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## 5 News from members

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### **Carl Larsen and Joep Slaats, GFRAS:**

- An evaluation of GFRAS has been done in 2020 with the main outcome that GFRAS has achieved most of its targeted outcomes but should enhance its monitoring system to measure the impact.
- GFRAS has developed the new strategy 2021-2025: GFRAS - GFRAS Publications - Strategic and Management Documents (g-fras.org) and has joined forces with the Young Professionals for Agricultural Development (YPARD)  
Core funding from SDC for the next five years is secured; GFRAS is currently looking for opportunities to acquire co-funding.
- First meeting with the new North American RAS Network, new RAS network. The network has the potential to get high level policy stakeholders in.
- GFRAS was supposed to move to FiBL in 2020, but due to Covid19 this was postponed to 2021
- Last mile programme has started
- Training programmes (NELK) is extended with new models and technical advise

### **Johannes Brunner and Dominique Guenat, HAFL:**

The Hugo P. Cecchini Institute plans to have a partner event annually or bi-annually. Johannes will share the updates on the events.

### **Nicole Harari, University of Bern and WOCAT:**

- WOCAT will sign a MoU with AFAAS to support digitisation of RAS in the AFAAS region.
- In Uganda, WOCAT has initiated a collaboration with UFAS to foster sustainable land management

### **Sandra Fürst, SKAT:**

SKAT leads a study on extension services and design thinking approach: Sandra will reach out to extension experts for an exchange and expert interviews.

### **Shachi Gurumayum, AgBiTech and AgriMayum:**

Recommends the scientific information without borders and particularly the SAWBO animations

### **Shruti Patel, Biovision:**

Biovision has conducted an evaluation of a farmers' magazine. The outcome could be presented at an upcoming meeting.

### **Wade Jenner, CABI:**

The Plantwise programme is transitioned to Plantwise Plus programme. One of the main changes is the increased focus on digital support and learning tools. Plantwise plus continuous focusing on extensionists rather than directly on farmers.

### **Stefanie Kaegi, Helvetas:**

Helvetas is capitalising the experiences of collaborating with large (international and national) private sector companies. The capitalisation also includes RAS provision by these partners.

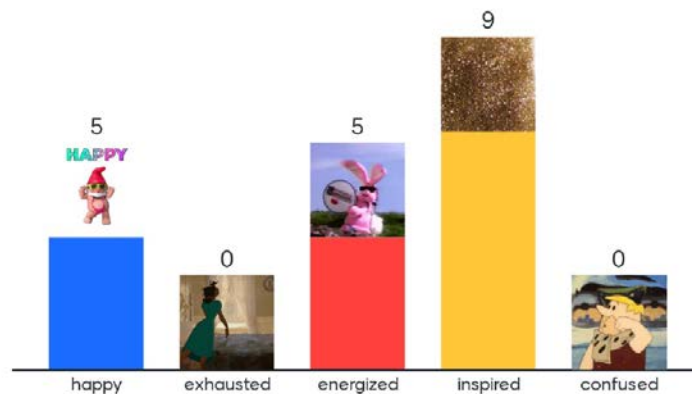
The Value Chain Capacity Building Network together with AESA and IFAD launched the Asia Agritech Challenge 2020, for IT based applications that enhances the resilience of agricultural value chains and market systems. The submission is open from 15 Nov 2020 to 15 Jan 2021: [Home | VCBN Challenge 2020](#).

## 6 Outlook next meeting and evaluation

Which topics would be of high interest for you to discuss during the next SFRAS meeting?



How are you feeling after today's session?



In one word, what do you take home or will you consider when planning a future digital rural advisory tool?



## 7 Annex 1: Full outcomes of the group work (padlet)

# SFRAS peer exchange in groups on e-extension experiences - Group 1

Please post your points by clicking "+"

ADVISORY SERVICES DEC 08, 2020 08:10AM

**What was the most amazing (and positive!) or negative experience with digital rural advisory services you made so far?**

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**Hybrid forms work well (F2F trainings + moderated platforms)**

**Negative: finding out how hard it is to get farmers signed-up into an app - e.g. digital literacy issues for older smallholders**

**Challenge: remote farmers access to smart phones, connection in remote areas**

**Very good experience with using digital to track/monitor extension staff activities and feedback from farmers using KoBo Toolbox.**

**Digital story telling in contest form**

**Videos**

sharing innovative ideas and innovations from farmers (positive experience)

**Text messages to get farmers interested in a topic**

**Which digital tools did farmers use / did your projects offer to access information when physical meetings were restricted?**

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**Blog posts**

**phone survey and starting trainings via text message**

**bringing in farmers into Zoom meetings - sometimes it works great, sometimes it doesn't really work at all**

**MS Teams / Zoom**

**What did function well and what challenges appeared related to quality and inclusive access to information?**

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**language is a challenge, english is not understood everywhere. And special challenge in multi-language countries.**

**Working with younger farmers to teach farmers how to use smartphones/newer technologies**

**Still a challenge IMO: how to get information about the digital service out there...so that digital RAS can then really deliver on scale & cost-effectiveness.**

**scalability and reaching farmers**

## **Do you have any recommendations for future e-extension initiatives?**

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**Look at optimal combination of digital and physical forms to provide advice**

**Technology is only a means to an end that has to always be focused on the needs of the customers/farmers -) what will really create value.**

**As discussed, inclusion of themes beyond production (nutrition, market..) will be important to develop**

**Directory of digital tools so farmers can choose for themselves rather than being "marketed at"...**

**Integrate nutrition into agriculture-focused apps**

Which crops are relevant from a nutrition perspective and what are the nutritional benefits?

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# SFRAS peer exchange in groups on e-extension experiences - Group 2

Please post your points by clicking "+"

ADVISORY SERVICES DEC 08, 2020 08:14AM

## What was the most amazing (and positive!) or negative experience with digital rural advisory services you made so far?

**Use of videos made by farmers. Very innovative and empowering.**

**Data security is an issue for governments and companies.**

**Efficient way to facilitate two way communication.**

**Government extension in Africa is very conventional in views and ways of operating.**

**Accurate cropping data is used as collateral for micro-credit in India.**

## Which digital tools did farmers use / did your projects offer to access information when physical meetings were restricted?

**Project evaluation during lockdown 3 countries in Africa.**

**Use Skype, WhatsApp and MS teams mainly for remote monitoring. More on health and education than agriculture.**

**In Switzerland Zoom better than MS Team.**

Strong digital divide with old farmers. Farmer wife and children are brokers.

## What did function well and what challenges appeared related to quality and inclusive access to information?

**Some people that normally not participate did online. Quiet participants used write comments in chats.**

**Open mind to try and error.**

**Initial frustration with technical issue.**

**Digital divide with old male farmers.**

**Going more digital make it possible to reach areas closed for security reasons.**

**Several people on same device - difficult for bigger discussions.**

## What are recommendations for future e-extension initiatives?

**use peer to peer exchange to get fit for e-extension**

digital extension seems to be the way to go! what are the pitfalls? what are the risks?

**Be mindful of women and youth - early adopters.**

**Be mindful of women and youth**

**Young people are the key to drive this change.**

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# SFRAS peer exchange in groups on e-extension experiences - Group 3

Please post your points by clicking "+"

ADVISORY SERVICES DEC 08, 2020 08:16AM

## **What was the most amazing (and positive!) or negative experience with digital rural advisory services you made so far?**

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**too many tools being developed very quickly without considering the user - just to have the tool that was promised as a project output.**

**fast take over of digital tools in by our partners when COVID restrictions started.**

**Development of a broad range of tools and the use of it be many stakeholders in short time.**

**Just seeing how quickly**

## **Which digital tools did farmers use to access information when physical meetings were restricted?**

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Zoom, facetime, whatsapp, robocalls (for 10'000 farmers), extension movies, bilateral calls

**Skype, whatsapp, telegram, Facebook, WeChat, Plantwise Factsheet Library**

**Phone calls, whatsapp, radio**

## **What did function well and what challenges appeared related to quality and inclusive access to information?**

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**reaching/serving the poorest and illiterate clients is a huge challenge**

In India, Haryana, often women do not have an own mobile phone. So the registered numbers were mainly on the name of the men. We thus do not know whether we have reached out to the female farmers at all.

**It did increase the number of people reached compared to traditional physical interactions; however, it clearly left some behind who previously did benefit from physical interactions.**

**challenges: e-literacy, access to a stable internet connection (asynchronous tools are needed)**

**Data protection in apps is often not a topic discussed with farmers - it is however crucial to raise the importance of it.**

**Investments into the development of a client centered tool may be high.**

## **What are recommendations for future e-extension initiatives?**

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## **Hybrid models to create inclusive services**

**keep in mind who our clients are and not misuse DAS tools to generate too much data for other purposes...**

**taking time to develop these initiatives and not rushing... considering the needs of different stakeholder groups and their possibilities and limitations to use digital solutions.**

**need to provide durable solutions which are not dependent on donor/ project funding.**

**Make sure we build on the successes of this year and not just returning to the old ways once Covid-19 is more effectively controlled. But need to work on weaknesses, particularly the issue around the depth and quality of engagement when done remotely and finding ways to be as inclusive as possible, which almost certainly requires a hybrid model.**

**Keep the opportunity of bilateral calls between advisors and farmers open to all. it is well used and helps for trust.**

**Assess the opportunities of the target group to use and access certain services.**

Try it out and develop other services in case of exclusion of a certain targeted group.

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