



Expert Consultation on Distance Learning Resources for Rural Women

CONTENTS

6 to 9 December 2000

Bangkok, Thailand

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Foreword

Food and Agriculture Organization is committed to improve food production and rural economies to achieve poverty alleviation and realise sustained food security and eradication of hunger. Such FAO objectives can be accomplished by augmented investment in education for equitable development. Hence, FAO commitment compliments the global agenda on education for all, inclusive of functional literacy and technical information.

The organization directs the efforts particularly to improve the education and learning among rural communities. A special emphasis on rural learners highlights both existing development disparities and institutional mandate. The disparities are the differences reflected in the regional situation as a persistent lag in relevant learning among rural communities, women and poor. The institutional mandate is stated in Commitments of World Food Summit Plan of Action that affirms the equality between women and men and inclusion of rural women and men as partners in organizational efforts to achieve food security.

Most often, a major impediment among rural women to attain their full potential for productivity is the disparity in learning and education compared to their urban cohorts. In the Asian region the urban and rural gender divide in access to universal education and learning for improving livelihood is widely acknowledged, but yet action remains limited. In part the inadequate action is due to insufficient allocation of resources such as funds, expertise and logistics to reach rural learners, particularly rural women and girls.

The current disparity in educational resource allocation is also evident in the allocation and deployment of distance learning resources in the region. Generally, the distance learning institutions are urban biased since majority of programmes are directed to adult learners living in urban areas and engaged in formal education. FAO regional office functions in a region that is vibrant with distance learning programmes, but yet the rural reach in the developing countries is inadequate relative to the rural call for learning, particularly among rural women and girls. Hence, the emerging regional initiative of the women in development programme to explore the potential of using distance learning resources to improve the learning among rural women.

The report is the outcome of the Expert Consultation on “ Distance learning resources for rural women,” held in the year 2000 in Bangkok. The publication includes a synthesis of the papers presented by the country experts and resource persons who participated in the meeting. FAO and myself, hope that the recommendations that emerged from the Consultation would guide both FAO and the member countries to improve rural learning, specifically among rural women and girls by taking advantage of the regional distance learning resources.



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1. INTRODUCTION

The global development discourse is marked by contrasts. A few of the notable contrasts are prosperity against poverty, knowledge against ignorance and globalization against marginalization. The two reinforcing clusters are seen as globalization, knowledge and prosperity and marginalization, ignorance and poverty. Increasingly knowledge is considered to be essential to escape both poverty and social marginalization. As ESCAP has stated, “Knowledge is becoming the key resource.” Addressing the Second Global Knowledge Conference (GK II) the President of the World Bank stated that the world had moved to a revolution, which is built on knowledge, on technology and on information. “Knowledge, if it is properly transferred, if it is made available to all, gives the greatest opportunity for people to advance themselves and to progress in the fight against poverty.” The information and communication technology is an important interface to transfer knowledge and technical expertise and living skills. The interface potential of information technology should be assessed, applied and monitored within the current context of development achievements and failures.

According to the UNDP administrator, “The challenge of information technology is seen both as an enormously important opportunity and an expensive distraction from solving basic problems... There is still debate about technology, when really the debate should be about culture and modality. There are 900 million adults in the world who are illiterate. How are they going to confront this new technology?”

Rural women and girls constitute a large part of the global illiterate population. According to ESCAP, “In the knowledge society education is central to personal, organizational and national wellbeing. Educational attainments on a lifelong basis are becoming correlated with high monetary and social value.” Education for all is still an unfulfilled global goal. In the Asia-Pacific region, for rural women and girls access and achievement in education as a means to improve wellbeing and livelihood are still unattained opportunities. It is highly probable that an information and communication technology (ICT) divide could widen the urban-rural disparity in education and access to contemporary knowledge to shape their livelihood strategies in a world that is characterized by increasing economic integration. Rural women and girls would be further isolated in the knowledge society.

1.1 FAO AND THE RURAL EDUCATION PARTNERSHIP

The mandate of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations is to create equal opportunities to rural women and men in their access and use of technology for agriculture and rural development. Traditionally, FAO has supported information diffusion programmes through national agricultural education and extension systems. But, influenced by the ambivalent national priorities to reach rural women and by institutional constraints including allocation of meagre resources and lack of implementing expertise, the outcome has been uneven. Historically, FAO has encouraged innovation to expand rural access to new technology, including use of communication technology such as video and radio. Within the current context marked by opportunities and threats posed by ICT in disseminating information and distributing the key resource of knowledge, and the increasing urban-rural disparity in education and contemporary learning, FAO seeks to facilitate innovative partnerships and modalities to expand learning opportunities among rural women and girls. Such a course of action is built on the evidence that education and information provide women with access to knowledge for empowerment.

1.2 AGRICULTURAL EDUCATION AND DISTANCE-LEARNING SYSTEMS

The agricultural education system and distance-learning system at all levels (formal and non-formal, primary, secondary, tertiary, technical/vocational and lifelong education), recognizing the needs of rural women and girls, should aim for impact-oriented collaborations. A key partnership should be forged to promote rural access to education and contemporary learning through effective collaboration among the key institutions that focus on agricultural education and distance learning. In Asia, FAO could facilitate productive associations among the existing educational systems that focus on formal and non-formal education. The dominant educational systems that could be targeted to serve the rural clients, particularly rural women and girls, are national agricultural education and extension systems and open-university systems. The agricultural educational system was founded on the idea of applying science and technology to promote food production. The open-university system was seen as an institutional response to meet the accelerating demand for higher education in countries where population growth was high, particularly among the youth, and where there was a lack of resources to develop in-situ traditional universities. But if the two systems have served different clients, it has been due mostly to historical reasons and to institutional mandates. The agricultural educational system focused predominantly on the educational needs of rural learners whereas the open-university system served predominantly adult urban and rural learners in formal education. Yet, both systems serve the national objectives of human capital development; they operate on parallel paths and serve different groups of learners. Their paths do not often cross; when they do, it does not necessarily lead to systematic cooperation resulting in a sustained partnership to serve rural clients. The partnerships between the two educational systems could accelerate educational access for the rural population, particularly for rural women and girls to achieve empowerment through information and knowledge.

2. THE FAO TECHNICAL INITIATIVE IN DISTANCE LEARNING

The FAO technical programmes involved in distance-education initiatives are: the Women in Development Service (SDWW); the Agriculture Extension; the Education and Communication Service, which is within the Sustainable Development Department; and the WAICENT Outreach Programme, in the General Affairs and Information Department (GILF). The collaboration aims to define a catalytic role for FAO in applying distance-learning modalities to expand rural access to education and learning in order to achieve institutional objectives such as effective integration of women as partners in development, rural development and food security with gender equity. At the regional office for Asia and the Pacific, SDWW has taken the initiative to promote the focus on distance learning through national partners in the region.

This consultation on Distance-Learning Resources for Rural Women was planned through FAO inter-service collaborative efforts between the Women in Development Service in the Women and Population Division and Agriculture, Education, Extension and Communication for Development Service of the Agriculture Research and Education Division. The regional consultation was organized by the Women in Development Service programme at the FAO Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific.

3. CONSULTATION VISION, PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVE

Asia is a leader in providing cutting-edge expertise to drive the global information technology industry. Yet, with the exception of a few countries, it also is the home of unmitigated poverty, overpopulation and a persistent gender gap in education and literacy. The Asia-Pacific region shows great diversity in gender-related indicators and differential gains in the advancement of women and girls. But a consistent concern shared among all the countries is one of stark urban-rural disparity in development gains, particularly in education. The rural female children face greater disadvantages than rural male children do. While prevailing social attitudes and cultural norms could explain the disparity prevalent in the communities and within the household, it is necessary to acknowledge the issue of imbalances in the allocation of national resources to serve the rural sector.

As the current trend moves towards greater emphasis on ICT-driven development and on shaping a knowledge society, it is time to pause and consider the modalities to achieve equitable allocation of ICT resources to serve the agriculture and rural communities. The scope of ICT is very broad and could have far-reaching impact — both enabling and disabling. As in every resource-allocation process, the pragmatic approach should be one of maximizing the enabling impact for most and minimizing the adverse impact — the max-min principle. A commitment in applying this max-min principle is that it should apply the rules of equality and equity. The objective should be to maximize the enabling impact among those who are often overlooked as clients for development service and inputs, namely rural communities, populations in remote locations and rural women and girls. The initial global assessment on ICT and gender impact by the United Nations University for New Technologies shows that ICT-driven economic opportunities have favoured women who are generally well-educated and from higher income groups. It states that women with little or no education, especially older women, are losing out. A class and rural divide is also an artefact of the persisting gap in educational attainment among rural populations, with distinct gender bias against women and girls. So, education for rural development and food security could be the levelling force to achieve growth with equity.

Hence, the primary concern in this consultation is about expanding access for rural women and girls to education, information and technology knowledge so as to improve their social and economic circumstances. The focus is on distance-learning resources as the means to achieve the objective of accelerating the advancement of rural women and girls through innovative educational programmes. The potential for hastening the access to learning is improved through the greater availability of ICT resources. This consultation will explore the opportunities and constraints to employ the distance-learning resources to reduce the social and physical distance which isolates rural women and girls and which impairs their access to learning opportunities. The consultation can review the application of ICT as a potential tool to provide distance education in order to reduce the knowledge and information gap among rural women and girls. Technology is not the master, but a potential tool for development. The focus is on rural human resource development. The quality and relevance of educational resources and learning achievement among rural clients comes first. Appropriate ICT will facilitate the national efforts made to achieve faster and timely educational delivery and to improve the learning process.

Distance-learning programmes targeting rural women could be planned with a dual approach. First, a one-step rural distance-education approach that targets and reaches rural women and girls directly. Second, a two-step approach to improve the capacity of the development workers and service providers who work with rural clients. Both approaches would contribute to capacity

building and improve access to information among rural women and girls. They would require balanced programmes and equitable allocation of resources.

The primary focus is to examine distance-learning resources as potential development tools for accelerating the educational advancement of rural women and girls in order to improve their livelihood strategies and participation (economic and social) and thus achieve welfare gains among rural households. The expert consultation explored the interface for effective collaboration between the agricultural educational system and the distance-learning system at all levels in order to use the resources under the command of two parallel educational systems for the advancement of rural populations, particularly rural women and girls.

The RAP consultation offered a forum to review and recommend a regional strategy to apply distance-education and distance-learning programmes to serve the rural learners with special consideration for inclusiveness of rural women and girls. The consultation contributed to a review of the FAO technical approach to distance learning that would be gender-responsive and women-inclusive. The consultation provided an opportunity to understand differences and commonalities in distance-education programmes from the countries in the region.

As set in the Asia-Pacific regional milieu, FAO objectives in this inter-service technical initiative are to achieve the following principles:

- a. Clarify key concepts and practices of distance education as they relate to FAO.
- b. Build a strategic vision for FAO to apply distance education to the achievement of its mandate.
- c. Recommend interventions (e.g. capacity-building, policy advocacy, network facilitation, information dissemination) through which FAO might become a catalyst for developing effective distance-education and distance-learning programmes to serve the people engaged in agricultural and rural development efforts in low-income, food-deficit countries.
- d. Identify operational principles and guidelines for an FAO approach to distance education.
- e. Provide a foundation for assessing needs, consulting, and nurturing relationships among partners with whom FAO would work in the area of distance education.
- f. Identify potential policy and programme frameworks for developing partnerships between agricultural educational systems and distance-learning systems at all levels to improve rural access to education for food security and rural development.
- g. Identify field-level strategies to apply distance-learning resources to accelerate advancement of rural women and girls to improve their livelihood and wellbeing.

This expert consultation may be broadly defined to include the following aspects of distance-education and distance-learning resources:

- a. Distance-education/learning and/or open-university systems' organizational structure, human resources, institutional infrastructure/learning centres network, outreach potential (urban/rural) and mandate;
- b. Distance-education/learning and/or open-university systems' current policy and programme commitments for reaching rural learners;
- c. Distance-education/learning methodologies applied effectively to reach rural women and girls (formal and non-formal education; ICT used and mentor support provided to rural learners);

- d. Content in the distance-education/learning programmes that will serve rural women's access to technical knowledge and information to improve their livelihood strategies (including non-formal education and primary education support).

The recommendations from the participants to the consultation addressed the following issue areas:

- a. Content for distance-education/learning programmes for rural women and girls;
- b. Potential policy and programme frameworks for developing a partnership between agricultural educational systems and open-university systems to improve rural access to education;
- c. Field-level strategies to apply distance-learning resources to accelerate advancement of rural women and girls to improve their livelihood and wellbeing;
- d. Institutional partnerships within the Asia-Pacific region to develop programmes applying distance education to accelerate rural development and food security with specific emphasis on rural women and girls;
- e. A strategic agenda for FAO to apply distance-education/learning modalities to the achievement of its mandate; and
- f. Identification of key areas of action for the next three years that will include the next work-plan period (2001) and next biennial work-plan period (2002–2003).

4. PROGRAMME AND PARTICIPANTS

The consultation was organized at the FAO Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific in Bangkok. The consultation was held from 6 to 9 December 2000. A copy of the consultation programme is included as **Annex 1**.

The following office bearers were selected by the meeting:

Chairperson

Dr Ma Christina Padolina
Chancellor, UP Open University
The Philippines

Vice-chairperson

Dr Uma Coomaraswamy
Dean, Natural Sciences
Sri Lanka Open University
Sri Lanka

Rapporteur

Dr Chandra Bhadra
Tribhuvan University
Katmandu
Nepal

The number of participants was 22. A list of the participants is included as **Annex 2**. The countries represented were Bangladesh, China, the Maldives, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Viet Nam.

The following persons were invited as resource persons:

Prof Abdul Waheed Khan
Director, Development and Training
The Commonwealth of Learning
Canada

Dr Setijati D Sastrapradja
National Biotechnology Centre
Indonesia

Mr Loh Yeow Meng
Temasek Polytechnic
Singapore

Three TCDC resource persons were invited respectively from China and from India.

Bangkok-based ESCAP, UNESCO and the Asian Institute of Technology represented UN and international organizations in the consultation.

FAO/Rome was represented by:

Scott McLean

Visiting Expert for SDRE/GILF

Agriculture Extension, Education and Communication for Development Service, FAO/Rome

5. SUMMARY OF THE PRESENTATIONS

The presentations fall under three categories, namely from the country representatives, the resource persons and FAO.

5.1 OPENING REMARKS

Dr RB Singh, Assistant Director-General and Regional Representative, FAO Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific, Bangkok, delivered the opening remarks.

Dr Singh welcomed the participants on behalf of Dr Jacques Diouf, Director-General of FAO, and on behalf of the FAO Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific. He pointed out the successful collaboration achieved in organizing the meeting by the Women in Development Service of the Sustainable Development Department and the Agriculture Extension, Education and Communication for Development Service. The focus, he noted, is on three interdependent key technical domains for securing sustainable development. These are: full and equal integration of women for accelerating social and economic advancement; effective and equitable technology extension and education-service delivery to rural communities; and application of innovative education models to ensure equitable access to education, information and knowledge for improving rural livelihood strategies. Multidisciplinary collaborations and inter-agency interaction are crucial for moving forward to achieve sustainable development.

The objective of the meeting is to explore strategies to use distance-learning resources for improving rural women's and girls' access to information and education. This objective is driven by a basic concern shared within the development community which was highlighted in the Beijing Platform for Action and subsequent Beijing Plus Five review. The concern centred on a persisting gender gap in educational achievement and uneven progress in eradicating illiteracy among women and girls.

The concern for the persisting gender learning gap assumes a greater urgency for action when viewed in the context of globalization, which has increased the scope of access to information and the speed of communication. Rural women and girls in particular will continually confront disadvantages if effective measures are not taken now. The investment in human capital will continue to be skewed in favour of the urban residents, high-income classes and men, while negatively affecting rural residents, the poor and the women. Can we halt this trend? The informatics revolution must not become yet another divide.

FAO takes the position that, within this region, distance-learning resources could be effectively employed in reversing the negative trend in rural women's education. Within the current context marked by opportunities and threats posed by ICT in disseminating information and distributing key resources of knowledge, and the increasingly urban-rural disparity in education and contemporary learning, FAO seeks to facilitate innovative partnerships and modalities to expand learning opportunities for rural women and girls. In its fight against hunger and poverty, the organization clearly sees the centrality of the right to information, freedom from ignorance and the bliss of knowledge.

The evidence that education and information can improve women's access to knowledge as a means for empowerment supports this commitment and course of action aimed at exploring the distance-learning potential to improve women's status, both economic and social. FAO studies

in the Asia-Pacific region have shown tremendous contributions of literacy to total factor productivity growth.

FAO has arrived at this meeting drawing the rationale from the institutional mandate given to us by the member countries. The World Food Summit Plan of Action emphasizes that women and men should be equal partners in all technical activities undertaken by FAO to make a hunger-free millennium a reality. Furthermore, in 1999 FAO organized a high-level consultation on Rural Women and Information which agreed upon a two-way information flow strategy for action, namely, information *on* rural women and information *for* rural women. As the Director-General stated, "I support the implementation of two-way information flows: for decision-makers at all levels, to enable them to act with the support of facts; and for rural women (and men with whom they work in an inseparable partnership), to give them a better understanding of their own development and the capacity to take responsibility for it."

FAO sees ICT as an important tool for development, and we clearly recognize the realities of living in a knowledge society. Hence in the forthcoming FAO biennial programme of work we have included a technical domain on "Harnessing ICT for accelerated advancement of rural women and girls", which provides the opportunity for multidisciplinary collaboration. The technical programmes involved in the FAO distance-education initiative are within the Sustainable Development Department, Women in Development Service (SDWW) and Extension, Education and Communication Service (SDRE) and WAICENT/FAOSTAT Data Management Branch in General Affairs and Information Department (GILF). The Asia-Pacific region is best equipped to realize the outputs of this initiative.

A key partnership for promoting rural access to education and contemporary learning may be founded through effective collaboration among the key institutions that focus on agricultural education and distance learning. In Asia, FAO could facilitate productive associations among the existing educational systems that focus on formal and informal education. In this consultation, the two dominant educational systems of focus are national agricultural education and extension systems, and open-university systems, to serve the rural clients, particularly rural women and girls. But most often due to historical reasons and directed by their respective institutional mandates these two systems have served different clients. The agricultural educational system focused on rural learners and the open-university system served adult urban learners. Yet, the systems serve the national objectives of human capital development operating on parallel tracks and serving different groups of learners. Their paths do not often cross. When they do they do not always translate into systematic cooperation resulting in sustained partnership to serve rural clients. Furthermore, even within agricultural educational systems there is a gender divide in outreach approaches and technology transfer. Such a gender divide may not always have had a positive impact on improving the status of rural women and girls.

Hence this consultation seeks to define a catalytic role for FAO in applying distance-learning modality to expand rural access to education and learning in order to achieve institutional objectives such as the effective integration of women as partners in achieving rural development and food security with gender equity.

Dr Singh indicated that the FAO consultation of the invited experts was timely, since their shared expertise and recommendations would enable FAO to sharpen its vision, identify its mission and clarify its agenda for action in regard to distance-learning resources. Such processes will help FAO to serve its clients in rural communities equitably and advise our

member countries for equitable allocation of educational and ICT resources. Distance learning is the most efficient and cost-effective way to minimize the distance between haves and have-nots, and to reach the un-reached.

At the same time, it is an expectation of FAO that the participants from the countries in the region will also benefit from the exchange of information on methodologies and approaches for harnessing distance-learning resources to serve the rural communities and thus support the latter's efforts to improve their livelihood. Dr Singh further indicated that FAO was confident that through their deliberations and interaction, the participants would develop regional professional links beyond this consultation to promote and strengthen collaborations between open universities and agriculture universities in order to achieve equitable access to education and information among rural learners.

5.2 COUNTRY PRESENTATIONS

This section provides summaries of the country presentations and their respective recommendations.

5.5.4 Bangladesh: distance learning for rural women

Ms Ripa Walie
British Council
Bangladesh

Summary

In Bangladesh, the use of distance-learning resources for the rural poor could be an effective form of development and empowerment. Bangladesh is not a stranger to delivery of services to the poor; NGOs have been doing this for more than 25 years. This could be termed decentralized learning. With reference to Bangladesh, a few salient points need to be taken into account. Programmes must be functional and basic to meet the needs of the rural women. The gender divide is still prevalent and any programme should be geared to bridge it. The programme must also involve minimum costs and proper infrastructure and facilities must be available. The Bangladesh Open University is the only state institutional distance-learning provider. This institution is underutilized and could be put to greater use with the participation of NGOs so that any distance-learning programme would be successful in focusing on the requirements of rural women in Bangladesh.

Recommendations

- a. The Bangladesh Open University has a functional and ready educational infrastructure, which can be used for distance-learning programmes empowering the poor. Funding is important to start off any project.
- b. The idea of an educational bus or boat should be explored to mobilize education and to reach rural learners in remote areas.
- c. The importance of distance learning to improve women's education should be stressed.
- d. Non-formal programmes should be introduced as well as programmes based on agriculture and entrepreneurship.
- e. Technology should be explored in order to exploit online facilities as teaching resources.

5.2.2 China: agricultural distance education and the agricultural broadcasting and TV school system

Mr Liu Yongquan
Vice President
Central Agricultural Broadcasting and Television School, China

Summary

Developing agricultural distance education by using various media is extremely important to meet the demands of rural education in China. The Agricultural Broadcasting and TV School (ABTS) has had great success in agricultural open and distance education by using radio, TV, tapes, videos and written materials. This played an important role in enhancing the capability of the rural labourers, especially rural women and girls, as well as scientific and cultural quality, thus promoting the development of agriculture and the rural economy. The paper introduces the current status of ABTS. The structure and development of ABTS should be such as to take advantage of its distinctive advantages and future prospects.

Recommendations

- a. Improve the existing ABTS courses and methods of delivery.
- b. Enhance training of ABTS staff in curriculum development, lecturing skills and production of educational media.
- c. Focus on producing low-cost training materials and choose low-cost means of delivery.

5.2.3 The Maldives: agricultural education through distance learning

Mr Abdul Raheem Hasan
Deputy Director
Non Formal Education Centre, Maldives

Summary

Various studies and surveys, including UNESCO reports in 1974 and 1987, recognize the potential suitability of distance education to provide education for the dispersed population of the country's 197 islands. Hence, the government sought international assistance. UNESCO, UNDP and the Canadian Fund for Local Initiatives helped the government to develop distance education.

The Non Formal Education Centre was selected as the focal point for distance education to work in partnership with other government sectors. At the moment NFEC and the Tertiary Institute of Open Learning (TIOL) offer courses in distance mode. NFEC offers locally prepared courses in English. TIOL offers English and maths of the International General Certificate of Secondary Education and the Bachelor of Business and the National Diploma of Architecture of the New Zealand Open Polytechnic.

Principals or headmasters of atoll education centres and some of the government schools in the atolls provide the administrative assistance to the central providers.

The Fifth National Development Plan clearly states the government's distance-education policy: to strengthen and expand the coverage of distance-education courses to provide opportunities for courses difficult to re-source in each atoll or island by the following means:

- a. continue the training of staff involved in the development of distance education at central and field levels;
- b. undertake a feasibility study to develop, test and conduct science and mathematics courses through distance education; and
- c. continue English-language teaching.

With this firm policy supporting distance education it is important to continue the trend of international partnership. The development of distance education in terms of coverage and new courses very much depends upon the following developments:

- desktop publishing capabilities of the Non Formal Education Centre and TIOL,
- capacity to develop and produce educational audio-visual materials,
- strengthening of the atoll resource centres (atoll education centres) in order to function effectively as atoll distance education centres,
- training instructional designers and the heads of atoll education centres, both in electronic and print media and
- strengthening communication facilities in atoll distance education centres by the provision of easy and affordable access to electronic media and the Internet.

The Minister of Education at the 14th Conference of Commonwealth Ministers of Education stated that the focus for the future of non-formal education would be to build on past successes and to search for ways to diversify educational opportunities, delivery methods and participation of youth and adults. It is expected that non-formal education could play a key role in creating the kind of learning environment that pervades every island society.

Publications by many organizations and the programmes of the Voice of the Maldives and TV Maldives help local people to gain knowledge and improve their living conditions.

Existing opportunities are open to both females and males. Maldivian educational statistics show that at certain levels of education the percentage of participation of girls is higher than that of boys. The expenditure on education has risen to nearly 20 percent of the government budget. It is likely to rise higher as there is a pressing need to expand secondary education. Investing in education is a high priority for its social and economic returns. Investing in educational technology would allow the educational programme to reach more people.

The Maldives has the policy and programme framework necessary to include agricultural education in the distance-education programmes. It also has the desired network to reach the most distant corners of the country. Education is in high demand. What the country needs is appropriately trained manpower, facilities and technical know-how to widen and diversify the provision of education.

Recommendations

- a. There is a need to train and teach Maldivian nationals to use the 300 square kilometres of land available to them to improve their livelihood and wellbeing. Hence, FAO or any other organization within the Asia-Pacific region or elsewhere can collaborate with

providers of distance learning in the country to create instructional partnerships with a view to develop programmes applying distance education to accelerate rural development.

- b. In view of the country's need for appropriately trained human resources, the distance-education programme should build capacity, facilities and technical know-how to incorporate agricultural education.

5.5.4 Nepal: distance-learning resources for rural women

Dr Chandra Bhadra
Women Studies Department
Padma Kanya Campus, Tribhuvan University

Summary

The objectives of the Ninth Five-Year Plan (1997–2002) are poverty alleviation and human resources development. Women are to be the primary target group to achieve these objectives. The plan also stresses use of information technology in distance learning and education. The current structure of distance education within the Ministry of Education has a limited scope and a limited reach. Radio Nepal and Nepal Television broadcast educational programmes in a very limited manner. Very few of these programmes are targeted to women. Those targeted for women are mostly homemaking, health and agriculture related. Rural women also are reached through face-to-face non-formal education and agricultural extension.

In the plan, the government has proposed establishing the Agricultural and Forestry University and the Open University. The bills for these universities are already drafted for consideration by Parliament. As the establishment of both universities is being conceptualized in the Ministry of Education under one education task force, there is a strong possibility of partnership between them to reach rural women and girls.

Nepal is new to distance education and has much to learn from regional experience. FAO can facilitate regional partnership building.

Recommendations

- a. The strategic agenda for FAO to apply distance education should include exploring private-sector partnership, since in Nepal distance learning could be mostly dependent on information technology, which is in the private-sector domain.
- b. Since in Nepal both open-university and agricultural-university development are at an early stage, this may be an opportune moment for FAO to facilitate effective partnerships.
- c. Distance-education strategy should incorporate capacity building and empowerment of women and girls as well as gender sensitization of both men and women.
- d. It is a very opportune time for Nepal to receive FAO support in building regional institutional partnerships considering its current endeavour to establish the Agriculture and Forestry and Open universities.

5.5.4 The Philippines: Distance-learning system for rural women: possibilities in the country and recommendations for regional cooperation

Dr Maria Cristina D Padolina
Chancellor
UP Open University

Summary

Rural women in the Philippines comprise sixty percent of all females in the country and housewives form the biggest group among them. The improvement of their welfare through education would be best served by distance education.

The University of the Philippines' Open University (UPOU), established in 1995, is a country resource that can be tapped to develop a distance-education programme for rural women. At UPOU teaching incorporates (1) the course material, largely print supported by radio and video tapes, (2) the faculty-in-charge and (3) the tutor. Students study the course packages, submit assignments at specified dates, attend study sessions at the learning centres and sit for final examinations. Increasingly, UPOU uses the Internet for its programmes. Many students get in touch with their tutors by e-mail and electronic discussion sessions are held. Courses are being developed for full online delivery.

Distance education for rural women should address their learning needs and circumstances. We need to help them improve their skills to accomplish their usual roles and also to make them aware of legislation governing their rights. The general areas that should be addressed by distance-learning programmes for rural women are capability building, skill enhancement and raising gender consciousness.

UPOU programmes are largely for professionals, not for farm workers. But certainly a partnership can be forged with the university and the ministries or government agencies involved with rural women. The university can assist in the design of the course materials and delivery systems and in the training of personnel. The university's extension activity also can be involved directly in the conduct of distance-learning programmes.

In thinking of regional cooperation for the development of programmes, we may consider a model to develop a generic set of materials that addresses common concerns of rural women in the region, and then to continue this project at the country level with country-specific content and delivery system. UPOP has been involved in such a project for the Asia-Pacific region for the training of small business enterprise counsellors.

One such programme piloted in the Philippines was Communication Technology for Rural Women, which combined delivery systems from several traditions: (1) radio farm programmes; (2) radio farm forums; and (3) distance-learning systems. The programme consisted of an open radio broadcast, monthly group sessions supported by present material and occasional field days or demonstrations. Unfortunately, the programme did not progress beyond the pilot stage because the Ministry of Education and Culture, which started it, decided it was not its priority to conduct programmes for rural women.

Recommendations

- a. Distance education for rural women should address their learning needs and circumstances to improve their skills in accomplishing their usual roles and to make them aware of legislation governing their rights.

- b. The general areas that should be addressed by distance-learning programmes for rural women are capability building, skill enhancement and raising gender consciousness.
- c. UP Open University can forge partnerships with the ministries or government agencies involved with rural women. These would be the departments of Agriculture, of Agrarian Reform, of Health, of Social Welfare and Development and of Interior and Local Government. The university can assist in the design of the course materials and delivery systems and in the training of personnel.
- d. The university's extension activity can be directly involved in the conduct of the distance-learning programmes.
- e. In the area of regional cooperation for the development of programmes for rural women, a model to develop a generic set of materials that addresses common concerns of rural women in the region can then be extended to the country level to develop country-specific content and delivery system.

5.5.4 Sri Lanka: distance-learning resources for rural women

Dr Uma Coomaraswamy
Dean, Natural Sciences
Sri Lanka Open University

Summary

The prime institution that provides formal distance and open learning is the Open University of Sri Lanka. OUSL is one of the 13 national universities of the Sri Lankan university system. It has its main centre in Colombo and reaches learners in all parts of the country, both urban and rural, through a network of regional centres, study centres and teaching centres. Other institutions or organizations using distance learning to some extent include the National Institute of Education (NIE), Sri Lanka Rapavahini Corporation, Sri Lanka Broadcasting Corporation and some government departments including Health, Education and Agriculture.

OUSL uses a well-developed multimedia methodology with built-in quality assurance mechanisms for its preparation of materials and delivery. Methodology varies in other institutions.

Formal agricultural education is delivered through the faculties of the universities, and non-formal education through the Department of Agriculture.

Potential opportunities

- Relatively high literacy exists among rural women as a consequence of good primary-school education administered by the well-developed formal education system.
- Officials of the Agriculture Department are stationed throughout the country to the extent of one official in charge of 600 farmer families.
- A good network includes the physical infrastructure of teaching and study centres of OUSL.
- Educational centres of NIE exist throughout the country.
- Sri Lanka Telecom extends its networks to rural sectors.
- The infrastructure of OUSL is well geared for preparation of material for training.

Constraints

- Rural centres do not have an infrastructure for lab-based modules.
- The rural economy is still too weak for the use of computer technology in homes and communities.
- Technophobia exists among rural women.

Recommendations

- a. Local partnerships among the network of OUSL, Agriculture Department and NIE resource centres should pool their infrastructure, financial and human resources.
- b. Develop partnerships between countries based on joint development of programmes and courses, and sharing material communication technologies already available, adapting them to suit the country's requirements.
- c. FAO should be a stimulus to achieve such partnerships and to provide a suitable mechanism for them.

5.2.7.2 Thailand 1: The Distance Learning Foundation

Dr Chulapongs Chullakesa
Distance Learning Foundation

Summary

The Distance Learning Foundation, at the initiative of HM King Bhumibol Adulyadej, has been entrusted by the Ministry of Education of Thailand to conduct live secondary education broadcast via satellite (KU band and direct-to-home DTH system) and optic fibre via six channels. From 1999, the broadcast has been extended to 24 hours a day. Besides the live secondary broadcast, the programmes also include general knowledge, royal development projects, agriculture, environment preservation, forestry, culture, music, sports, public health, and social campaigns on AIDS and drugs. In the year 2000, with the cooperation of the Royal Thai Army, the free installation of distance-learning equipment was completed at 3 000 secondary schools. The highlight of the evening programme is the "Sightseeing Education" series initiated by His Majesty.

In September 2000, the Distance Learning Foundation entered into cooperation with Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University. Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University became the first university in Thailand to conduct both live lecture and video-taped programme broadcast via satellite and the first distance-learning university programme in Asia with interactive communication. The English-language programme will be implemented for the neighbouring countries by 2001.

Recognized for its work, the Distance Learning Foundation has been requested by the Sasakawa Peace Foundation of Japan, with support from the National Institute of Multimedia Education of Japan, to organize two training programmes for educators, planners, executives, technicians and operators in the education media broadcast for 43 participants from Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Viet Nam. The next training will be of the users or teachers at the destination schools.

The four countries have received distance-learning equipment graciously granted by His Majesty the King for demonstration purposes. In 1998, the Industrial Technical and Economic

Junior College Number 1 in Hanoi was initially granted distance-learning equipment. The result was satisfactory.

The KU-band footprint covers the four Southeast Asian countries as well as Southern China and Northern Malaysia.

Recommendations

- a. Explore opportunities to share expertise, resources related to ICT and content among the existing institutions, organizations and agencies at the national, regional and international levels. This would assist in developing distance-learning programmes that address the needs of the people in that context and minimize the cost.
- b. Partnership with Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University for impact-oriented collaboration with FAO to promote the accelerated agricultural training programmes for rural communities.
- c. The Sericulture Experiment and Rural Extension Centre No. 8 in Chumphon province was set up in 1990 under a technical cooperation scheme with FAO as an immediate response to help rehabilitate an area destroyed by a typhoon. This endeavour is exemplary for closer institutional collaboration which would lead to further joint cooperative undertakings in the near future.

5.2.7.2 Thailand 2: The Rajanagarindra Institute of Cultural and Gender Studies

Dr Chaiskran Hiranpruk
Kasetsart University

Summary

Kasetsart University's efforts to diffuse agricultural development information to the Thai public are vast and widely known throughout the country through their mechanisms of radio and tele-educational network among the campuses. The Rajanagarindra Institute of Cultural and Gender Studies is formulating a programme of distance learning to be launched in 2001 that aims specifically at rural women and girls.

5.5.4 Viet Nam: distance education for women in rural areas

Mr Tran Quoc Chan
Department of (regular) Continuing Education
Ministry of Education and Training

Summary

Distance education started in Viet Nam in 1993 when the government established two open universities with the aim to offer learning opportunities for young people in the country by distance education. In the early 1960s the correspondent learning modality was strongly developed.

The Vietnamese government has used distance education as an important strategy to promote education for people in rural and remote areas. It has subsidized all distance-education programmes on television and radio, and encourages the use of local resources for distance education.

Distance education for women in rural areas

The modalities of distance-education activities for rural women are as follows:

- Conducting literacy activities and increasing the number of literates.
- Integrating literacy skills with functional knowledge in the field of family education, economic and income generation, health education, agricultural production and civic consciousness.
- Helping women to be confident in their family, community and society.
- Mobilizing women to take part actively in economic and social activities in rural areas.

With these purposes in mind, governmental and non-governmental organizations provided many audio-video materials. One third of the radio and television programmes have been directed to women, especially rural women and girls.

The main barriers preventing distance education to reach rural learners, especially rural women and girls, are:

- a. large numbers of illiterate women and out-of-school girls in rural areas;
- b. lack of good materials and facilities as well as good trainers for distance education in rural areas;
- c. lack of financial support for distance education; and
- d. lack of coordination between agricultural educational systems and agencies concerned with improving education in rural areas.

In Viet Nam the literacy rate is 94 percent for adults 15 years old and older. The enrolment rate of children 6–14 years old is 90 percent. These factors, combined with good collaboration for rural development, have nearly resolved problems (a) and (d).

Recommendations

To develop distance education in rural areas, Viet Nam should address the following problems:

- a. lack of good materials, facilities and good trainers for distance education in rural areas and
- b. lack of financial support for distance education.

5.3 INVITED AND TECHNICAL COOPERATION AMONG DEVELOPING COUNTRIES RESOURCE PAPERS

The resource papers include those presented by special invitees and by the Technical Cooperation among Developing Countries resource persons. These are included in the order of their presentation.

5.5.4 Empowering rural women through distance learning

Dr Abdul W Khan
Director, Development and Training
The Commonwealth of Learning
Canada

Summary

True empowerment requires acquisition of ability to determine and exercise life options and to influence the direction of change. This is possible primarily through acquisition of knowledge and skills. Learning, therefore, has become an imperative for rural women and girls who face enormous challenges in accessing quality education at affordable cost. Distance learning offers an opportunity to make relevant and quality education accessible to rural women in a flexible manner so as to suit their socio-economic and cultural needs.

The use of appropriate communication and information technology allows us to overcome the barriers of time, space and socio-economic factors and to bring a variety of learning resources to meet the educational needs of women and girls. The Asia-Pacific region has enormous resources for distance learning which could be effectively used for the benefit of rural women and girls. A collaborative mechanism could be established between rural development agencies, agricultural research and training centres and extension centres on the one hand, and distance-learning agencies such as open schools, open polytechnic and open universities on the other. Such a collaboration could be a powerful tool to make relevant knowledge and skills available to rural women and girls, thus enabling them to empower themselves to shape their own lives.

New communication and information technology, if used effectively, can be a powerful tool for providing distance-learning opportunities to rural women and girls. A community-based tele-learning centre model would seem to be a suitable approach to make use of new communication and information technology.

Recommendations

- a. In the context of distance-learning programmes for rural populations, extension services of development agencies can provide practical learning experience. This could be done in collaboration with governmental and non-governmental organizations.
- b. Rural development agencies, agricultural schools, colleges and universities, and distance-learning organizations could jointly design and develop appropriate self-instructional courses and materials, with the help of subject-matter specialists and those with expertise in distance education, to meet the educational needs of rural women and girls.
- c. Encourage the participation of development agencies and private enterprises in distance-learning programmes to enable learners to acquire practical knowledge and skills and to enhance the employment potential of successful learners. Such a joint initiative would allow optimum use of existing material and human resources.
- d. Community tele-centres could be a feasible alternative though start-up costs are substantial since creation of infrastructure is essential.

- e. "Learning to learn" using new technologies - that is, building techno-literacy - can help to build confidence to use technology as a tool to further the learning experience (Khan, 1999). This is a major challenge for developing countries.
- f. The importance of promoting a paradigm shift from individual to community access needs to be emphasized.
- g. The existing rural networks could acquire the requisite infrastructure to serve community needs for knowledge and information relevant to the needs of rural women. It would then be possible for rural women to have access to television, radio, audio and video programmes, Internet and satellite-mediated teleconferencing inputs for educational purposes. The service centres could function as study centres providing a range of student support services especially for rural women. This model would promote the generation of locally relevant educational inputs designed to enhance the quality of life of rural women.
- h. The involvement of rural women in managing community tele-learning centres would promote rural employment.
- i. Situating such centres at service centres and rural women training centres could help to ensure sustainability.
- j. The technologies employed should be readily accessible to learners, compatible with local infrastructure, financial and human resources and user-friendly. The tele-learning centres created should have adequate maintenance support. It is evident that this involves creating a package of inputs, not just technology alone.

5.5.4 Modality of potential partnerships to offer open and distance education to rural women (TCDC resource paper)

Dr Madhulika Kaushik
 School of Management Studies
 Indira Gandhi National Open University
 India

Summary

Rural women, responsible for much of agricultural work in Asia, also represent a group that is not usually reached by conventional models of training and education. Recognition that knowledge is the key device of development today has made policymakers and those interested in development look for effective and alternative ways of reaching these vast, diverse, dispersed target groups of rural women in Asia.

Distance and open learning has emerged as a tool with immense potential for creating widespread access of knowledge for groups like rural women. While a very well-developed system of agriculture education and a very extensive system of open and distance education at both secondary and tertiary levels exist in India, programmes specifically targeted at taking the knowledge base in agriculture to rural women do not exist. This paper aims to identify the modality of potential partnerships between the agricultural educational system and the open and distance-learning system to design, develop and deliver agricultural education to rural women. The paper reviews the features of distance education that make it particularly suitable to rural women in the context of the learner profile and learning needs, and identifies the specific facets of partnerships between the agricultural educational system and the open educational system in the country. Collaborative partnerships are possible in sharing resources to maximize outreach to rural women by combining open learning centres wherever they are, extension centres in

agriculture systems, NGOs and private-sector participation. Partnerships can aim at capacity building of the agricultural system in distance education, and at training mentors, material development and material delivery. Collaboration in future research and development also is discussed.

The paper also proposes a collaborative model of programme delivery by resource-sharing between the agricultural educational system and the open educational system to enable access of rural women to education built around their needs and concerns.

Recommendations

- a. The agricultural education system and the open educational system present immense potential synergy that should be exploited with the goal of reaching rural women.
- b. Through memoranda of understanding, specific collaboration could be carried out between the agricultural educational system and the open university system to:
 - identify learning needs of rural women,
 - design and develop self-instructional material,
 - network resources to create maximum outreach for delivery of material,
 - use satellite-based communication infrastructure to provide learning, learner support and to enhance outreach,
 - provide for continuous training and retraining of mentors, content developers, extension and field workers and
 - collaborate for future research and development.
- c. Apart from the Indian Council of Agriculture Research (ICAR) and the Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) extension and study centres, outreach of the programme can be enhanced by establishing partnerships with local NGOs involved with rural women, the primary education set up at the village level, the National Open School and the consortium for educational communication. The national telecast and broadcast channels (Doordarshan and All India Radio) can also be mobilized to get nationwide reach. The country has a vast network of NGOs, some of which are working at the grass-roots level especially for women's empowerment, micro-credit, *anganwari* schemes and the national literacy mission. Some of them may be used to act as local mentors and provide learner support or act as partners in programme delivery.
- d. It is proposed that while programme design and development could be the collaborative effort of ICAR institutions, state agricultural universities and IGNOU, for programme delivery, additional institutions or delivery partners like those mentioned above may be added to get the widest possible reach and penetration at the village level.
- e. Course materials developed by the state open universities, ICAR institutes and other agencies, in collaboration with the national and state open universities, could be delivered through these community tele-learning centres. The model proposes that these tele-learning centres be managed by rural youth themselves.
- f. At the regional level, collaborative partnerships could be developed with open universities in the countries of the region. Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh have well-developed open-university systems, which could act as resource centres for agricultural education through open and distance learning along with the agricultural educational system in these countries.

5.5.4 Enhancing community-based management of agro-biodiversity: the role of the media

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National Biotechnology Centre, Indonesia

Summary

Countries gathered in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in 1992, reflecting the commitment to conserve and use biological diversity in a sustainable way, signed the Convention of Biological Diversity (CBD). As the implementation of CBD progresses, agro-biodiversity comes into the picture. Agro-biodiversity is part of biological diversity, which is necessary to sustain key functions of agro-ecosystems for food production and food security. Being one of the centres of crop diversity, with diverse ecosystems and cultures, Southeast Asia is rich in agro-ecosystems. These agro-ecosystems are decreasing in number due to the rapid change in national development, which requires land for industry, road and housing expansion. With the decrease of agro-ecosystems, the agro-biodiversity is decreasing. Furthermore, the availability of raw materials for the future development of high-yielding varieties is decreasing at an alarming rate.

Farmers are the owners and thus the managers of the agro-ecosystems. In their hands lies the faith of agro-biodiversity. Farmers are vulnerable to the impact of economic globalization because of their low educational status. Unless farmers are empowered, there is a chance that their traditional crops will be gone together with the traditional knowledge of managing them. Food security and income generation for farmers are in jeopardy. Therefore, empowering farmers to face and adapt to rapid change is a matter of urgency. Included in this farmers' group are women and girls. Information on their various opportunities and options should be delivered through media to reach the majority of them. The media are the agents of change, thus the papers should place emphasis on their role to empower farmers. The message should be clearly packaged and targeted to a specific audience (men, women, or girl farmers). Moreover, the benefits that each audience would get from implementing the message should be easily understood.

Recommendations

- a. Information on various opportunities and options for rural women and girls should be delivered through media to reach the majority of them.
- b. The message should be clearly packaged and targeted to a specific audience (men, women, or girl farmers) and the benefits that each audience would get from implementing the message should be easily understood.

5.5.4 Regional distance-education resource: technological options

Mr Loh Yeow Meng
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Singapore

Summary

In the present information age, there is a vast amount of collective information and resources that is available on the Internet for use in distance education. It is proposed that direct broadcast satellites and inexpensive, small dish-antennae called VSATs can be used as an option to deliver distance education to the under-served rural areas. A local area network can be set up at the VSAT location to allow multiple users to access online learning material for distance

learning in a classroom environment. The advantages and disadvantages of two popular distance-education methods, online courses and video conference lectures, are described. The human resource development needs that are required to leverage on the VSAT ICT for rural education are technical personnel, local officers, and online material developers. Distance-learning opportunities from Singapore include Temasek Polytechnic's two centres, namely the Centre for IT in Education and Learning and the Satellite-Internet Competency Unit. The centres can provide and deliver programme online learning environment (OLE) that can be accessed over the Internet for the purpose of distance learning. The latest courseware available on OLE and procedures for enrolling can be found at www.ole.tp.edu.sg. Customized courses may be requested and put on OLE for the public. Temasek Polytechnic will be willing to provide technical expertise both in the satellite communication technology and Internet courseware development for interested countries to gain access to these Internet-based courses.

In order to establish a long-term ICT network and to promote distance-education programmes, it is recommended that distance learning begin in existing rural schools. There must also be partnership between Internet-technology groups, rural schools, educational institutions, local government and funding organizations.

Recommendations

To establish a long-term ICT network and to promote distance-education programmes, the following prerequisites must be met:

- a. remote communities must be English literate,
- b. remote communities must be computer literate and
- c. a place to gather and learn has to be provided.

To meet these prerequisites, it is recommended that distance learning begin in existing rural schools. A work group should be formed to oversee the collaboration of Internet-technology groups, rural schools, educational institutions, local government and funding organizations to provide license for satellite transmission in the country, funding for the leased line, equipment and manpower, provision of technical expertise and the development of online courseware.

5.5.4 China: human resource development of rural women in remote areas through distance-learning education in agriculture (TCDC resource paper)

Ms Chang Yingxin
Central Agricultural and Broadcasting and Television School
China

Summary

The paper introduces the cultural and educational background of rural women in China, and policies of distance education in agriculture in remote areas of China. At present rural women in remote areas are trained by the agricultural broadcast and television schools in such fields as vocational education, training through Green Certificate Education, Training in the New Century, and practical skills training. The paper includes a summary of distance education delivery to rural women in agriculture, the government's regulatory functions to formulate effective support policies, and efforts to increase inputs from various sectors. It addresses progress made in

recognizing the importance of women's education and of a solid organizational training system. The paper defines the need to upgrade the concept of education, to develop suitable content and methodology for rural women's education, and to adapt various forms of distance-education media to local conditions with rural women as the target audience.

Recommendations

- a. Exercise the government's regulatory functions to formulate forceful support policies.
- b. Increase inputs from various sectors to initiate the distance training of rural women.
- c. Recognize the importance of women's education and of a solid organizational training system.
- d. Upgrade the concept of education and develop suitable content and methodology for rural women's education.
- e. Adapt various forms of distance-education media to local conditions, with rural women as the target audience.

5.5.4 Education for rural women through distance-learning programmes in the ICAR System (TCDC resource paper)

Dr Tej Verma
Assistant Director General, Indian Council for Agriculture Research
India

Summary

The Indian Council of Agriculture Research (ICAR) makes up a system of institutions with a wide reach across the country. Hence, it has the institutional mandate as well as a countrywide institutional infrastructure and human resource network to reach the agricultural and rural communities. The network of ICAR organizations can serve the rural women effectively. Distance-learning modality could improve the outreach capabilities of the ICAR institutions and improve the information and education delivery reaching the rural population.

The home science section of ICAR is the lead unit to serve the rural women clients. This is accomplished through various means. One among them is the Krishi Gyan Kandra at the village level. ICAR has enlarged its vision and identified the need to improve the ICT application capabilities both among the ICAR staff and to improve rural outreach. The crucial concern is the need to expand the understanding among the agricultural university staff of the concepts and approaches relevant to distance-education and distance-learning approaches in agricultural education.

The importance of improving awareness of distance-learning programmes and identifying training needs for rural women was recognized by ICAR. Hence, in collaboration with the Indira Gandhi National Open University and supported by the FAO Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific, initial activities were undertaken to improve the understanding of distance-education approaches among the agricultural university staff. Three workshops were held in the agricultural universities of Punjab, Haryana and Rajasthan. A resource person from the Indira Gandhi National Open University was supported by FAO RAP to serve these workshops. A provisional need assessment was made as to the needs of the rural women. The approaches and modalities were presented and discussed.

Recommendations

- a. Promote agricultural programmes for women, which are directly related to income generation and which meet the actual needs of rural women and girls.
- b. Distinguish need-based agricultural activities for training women, liaising with the private sector and preparing them for entrepreneurship.
- c. Support and promote agreements, cooperation and coordination at all levels of the ICAR system.
- d. Implement distance learning to achieve credible results in meeting the demands of large, dispersed learner groups.
- e. Formulate small groups for empowerment of women on the model of the Central Sector Scheme for Women in Agriculture (Government of India), as the basic distance-learning unit for women in agriculture.

5.5.4 Peer-learning and distance-monitoring-based training of professionals

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Continuing Education Centre
Asian Institute of Technology
Bangkok

Summary

The paper highlights the lessons learned from a five-phase capacity-building programme implemented within a year's time by a three-institution partnership. Rigorous planning and development are required to implement a competency development programme for professionals using distance education. An ICT option uses the Internet to facilitate asynchronous communication and to readily access multi-sourced learning materials. Because of the heterogeneity in the capacities of the ICT infrastructures in the various countries and in the various organizations from which the participants come, a synchronous virtual communication can be ineffective and inefficient. Other aggravating factors are the unpredictable workload of the participants and the uncertain availability of in-house ICT troubleshooting experts.

A multi-phased implementation strategy is proposed that incorporates learning from experts' instructions, learning by doing office-relevant projects and learning by sharing experience among peers. The AIT experience indicates that peer learning, properly managed or directed, can be a good learning facilitator. This overall learning strategy can be applied at two geographical levels — first at the international level involving training of trainers, then at the national level involving cascading training-of-trainers.

Recommendations

An FAO strategy based on the experience of the Continuing Education Centre of AIT and the above opportunities and constraints would:

- build an international and national network of trainers committed to the FAO mandate;

- train the trainers, ensuring technology transfer with cascading effect (international to national to local levels);
- reinforce and supplement the traditional training approach with peer learning and distance mentoring via Internet;
- adopt a common international language, with translation into national languages that are integrated into the programme and
- institutionalize the competency-based programme and process.

Direct institutional partnerships, both at the national and international levels, to pursue the above strategy as follows:

- *A strategic programme leader and institutional partnership enabler* would be responsible to initiate and oversee the programme internationally, and to facilitate the provision of the initial investment fund. This could be FAO.
- *A programme manager/developer* would be responsible for the overall development and implementation of the programme, including financial management. This organization should have the capacity to organize and develop professional development programmes. It should have the organizational expertise in the assessment of training needs, the design of curricula, and in the management and production of training materials and implementation of programmes. It should have the organizational information communication technology appropriate for the development and delivery of Web-based training and have ICT troubleshooting experts.
- *A Web/Internet-based training/education expert* would be responsible to design the programme using e-based learning objectives. The responsible organization should be actively engaged in the research and application of Internet-based technologies for communication and for education.
- *An information communications technology expert* would be responsible to design the Web page of the programme and other e-based communication tools. The responsible organization should be actively engaged in the design and production of Web-based communication interfaces, i.e. Web pages, e-commerce Web-based tools and multimedia-based information systems.
- *Subject matter specialists* would serve as course development consultants. They should come from the agricultural education systems where relevant subject matter specialists undertake research and training relevant to the learning objectives of the programme.
- *Subject matter specialists* would serve as coaches and assistant coaches during the implementation of the programme. They should come from the agricultural educational systems with expertise to carry out synchronous/asynchronous communication via the Internet.
- *Participant trainees* would come from the agriculture and extension educational systems and from distance education institutions. They should be committed to the delivery-learning strategy of the programme.

5.5.4 UNESCO

Mr Wang Yibing
 Programme Specialist in Higher and Distance Education, UNESCO
 Principal Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific, Bangkok

Summary

The rapid advancement of science and technology is leading human beings to step into a knowledge-based society, while widening the gap faster than ever between developed and developing countries and between people in different social classes. Women in rural areas are in a particularly vulnerable position. Human resource development in general, and lifelong learning in particular, are fundamental answers to solve the problem. The advantage of Distance Education and Open Learning (DOL) is its capacity and flexibility to reach all those un-reached, such as women in rural areas. DOL could play a strategic role in narrowing the otherwise widening gap.

One of the main modalities of the UNESCO programme in higher education is to promote university networking in order to stimulate the sharing of experience and new knowledge. UNESCO pays particular attention to the establishment of the UNITWIN Network and UNESCO Chairs in the field of DOL in Asia and the Pacific region. With UNESCO's initiative and funding support, the following UNITWIN networks in distance education have been established:

- The UNITWIN Network in Distance Education for East Asia, which includes the National Open University of Korea, the National University of Mongolia, the Open University of Hong Kong and the Shanghai TV University.
- The Mekong and Southeast Asia Network in Distance Education, which includes two open universities in Viet Nam, the Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University in Thailand, Universitas Turbuka in Indonesia, the Yunnan TV University in China and the Distance Education University in Myanmar.
- The South Asia Distance Education Network for Development, which includes the Indira Gandhi National Open University in India, the Allama Iqbal Open University in Pakistan, the Bangladesh Open University and the Sri Lanka Open University.

Most open universities mentioned above have developed some DOL programme for rural development in their national context. Some of their practices are extension programmes and providing practical agricultural skills that address the needs of various agricultural seasons through the community learning centres. These practices have proven successful due to their capacity to reach farmers and women and their flexibility to suit the timetable of farmers and rural women for learning the knowledge and skills they need for their experiment and practice in the field. The community-learning centre can receive easily the programmes provided by TV universities or agriculture TV schools if they install a dish to receive the programme via satellite and then extend to every farmer's family through a cable connection. The contents of the programme range from market information on agriculture product to specific skill and technology regarding planting rice, raising pigs, animal husbandry, handicraft making and other topics.

Recommendations

In facing the challenge of the rapidly widening gap in the use of ICT, DOL should and could play a critical role with relevant programmes using ICT to help farmers and rural women in particular to improve their productivity, marketing and quality of life. Some farmers who have connected with the Internet and get market information and relevant technologies daily provide a good example already, showing that peasants too, including rural women, can benefit from ICT. Training through DOL programmes is a way out for farmers and rural women who have achieved the goal of literacy and have the potential to learn further, including mastering some computer basic skills and skills to use the Internet for their own purpose. UNESCO will continue to explore its role in this regard in its future programme.

5.4 FAO SECRETARIAT PAPER

Distance education for food security and rural development: an FAO vision for action

Dr Scott McLean
Visiting Expert for SDRE/GILF
FAO/Rome

This paper proposes a vision and set of principles for the use of distance-education strategies by the FAO in pursuit of its mission to help build a food-secure world for present and future generations. The paper begins by reviewing FAO corporate strategies and strategic objectives. It then reviews key concepts in the field of distance education, and describes the history and current debates concerning distance education in developing countries. The core of the paper is a vision statement and the elaboration of five FAO principles of distance education. These five principles are:

- distance education should be undertaken for the right reasons;
- distance education should be sensitive to context;
- distance education should use existing infrastructure and have sustainable costs;
- distance education should engage its stakeholders in participatory processes; and
- distance education should be based on sound pedagogical and administrative models.

The paper concludes by identifying a set of target learners and roles to move FAO from vision to action in the area of distance learning.

5.5 CONSULTATION RECOMMENDATIONS

The consultation strongly urges the FAO Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific to further strengthen the initiative to adopt distance-education and distance-learning approaches to close the rural and gender gap in education achievement and economic advancement, through exploring options that use existing and potential distance-learning resources to reach rural women and girls.

In accordance with such an endorsement, the consultation focuses on the following themes and identifies recommendations under these specified themes:

- Learner profile characteristics and learning needs of rural women and girls
- Distance-education strategies for the advancement of learning of rural women and girls
- Partnerships in distance education
- FAO strategic agenda on distance education

5.5.4 Learner profile characteristics and learning needs of rural women and girls

The consultation recommends the following:

a) Identification of the learner profile should be the first step in applying distance-learning approaches to reach rural women and girls effectively. The learner profile should include characteristics and learning needs.

Since the primary client groups identified in this consultation are rural women and girls, the diversity of their specific characteristics and needs should be spelt out in the learner profile.

With due recognition of the reality that rural women do not make a homogeneous client group, the following general characteristics shared among the regional rural women learners are identified:

- Illiteracy
- Overburdened with work
- Lack of mobility
- Low access to mass media
- Low access to technology
- Age factor as a rise in aging population
- Increasing involvement of women in agriculture
- Shift from farming system to market system
- Increasing involvement in entrepreneurial activities
- Socio-cultural subordination
- Lack of access to and control over productive resources
- Lack of techno-literacy
- Need of practical skills for prosperity
- Increase in rural to urban migration
- Poor health and inadequate access to health facilities

With recognition of the differences among the region's countries and the age-related differences of rural girls as a client group, the following general characteristics of the region's rural girl learners are identified:

- Early marriage
- Socio-cultural economic constraints in accessing education facilities
- Lack of sanitary facilities in the village schools for girls
- Illiteracy
- Social isolation
- High level of dropouts from schools
- Socio-cultural subordination

Derived from the shared characteristics of rural women and girls as the intended client group for distance-learning programmes, an illustrative list of learning needs for their livelihood and life skills should read as follows:

- Primary, secondary and basic adult education including reproductive health
- Life skills including reproductive health, social skills and family life skills
- Entrepreneurial skills including agribusiness and farm-market information
- Empowerment (awareness, assertiveness, self-esteem)
- Basic legal literacy
- Agricultural skills
- Nutrition, health and sanitation education
- Income generation, micro-credit, product development, cooperatives
- Food preservation and value addition for agricultural produce
- Consumer education
- Gender equity in food security

5.5.4 Distance-education strategies for the advancement of learning of rural women and girls

The consultation recommends the following:

a) The consultation recognizes the potential of distance education in addressing the education and training needs of rural women and girls on account of the following:

- Learner-centred approach
- Ease and scope of access
- Flexibility in time, location and pace
- Cost-effectiveness
- Use of ICT
- Possibility of resource pooling

It would be appropriate to identify the broad lines of a strategy as illustrated below:

- Identification of diverse learners for basic education, formal education, non-formal education, vocational education and training
- Identification of needs, particularly through participatory needs assessment
- Resource mapping as a tool to identify and assess distance-learning resources such as human, infrastructure, teaching materials and delivery systems
- Collaboration among various relevant agencies in respect to design, development and implementation of distance-learning programmes
- Strengthening the contents of the existing systems
- Transforming the existing knowledge base into distance-learning materials
- Collaboration in respect to design, development of materials and development of distance-learning programmes.

To develop a realistic overview of planning and programme context that would support a holistic distance-learning programme, the following strategic framework is proposed:

Proposed strategic framework

Regional context: Country/Region/Time/Language/Technology

Education	Learner profile	Learner needs	Course development	Delivery	Learner support
1. Lifelong education 2. Primary 3. Secondary 4. Tech/Voc 5. Higher	Rural women/girls	Sensitization/Awareness of sources	Use of appropriate technology for: - access - affordability - sustainability - compatibility - local information	1. Inventory delivery resources of various public and private agencies, NGOs, media organizations.	
Grassroots development workers		Training needs identification by listing competencies of each group	Resource mapping. Collaboration among DE institutions and agencies. Subject matter knowledge. Assess available learning resources and materials within countries and international agencies.	2. Mobilize and strengthen available resources	

Constraints: Human/Financial/Infrastructural/Policy

5.5.4 Partnerships in distance education

The consultation recommends the following:

a) In recognition of the importance of developing good working partnerships to implement successful distance-learning programmes for rural women and girls, partnerships should be explored in such domains as institutional, technical and enabling policy and advocacy.

Within the domains of partnership identified above, collaboration could be directed to the following specific areas:

1. Potential areas and actors in the institutional domain:
 - subject matter,
 - facilities and hands-on practical experience,
 - media organizations,
 - training officers and field offices,
 - community learning centres and tele-centres,
 - agricultural institutions,
 - agribusiness facilities and
 - NGOs, international agencies, bilateral and multilateral agencies and private enterprises.

2. Potential areas in the technical domain:
 - course development and
 - course delivery.
3. Enabling policy and advocacy domain:
 - education policy for distance education and distance learning at all levels and
 - adequate funding.

Recognizing that the partnership will vary according to the needs and the country-specific situation, a multilevel partnership should be explored at national and regional levels linked to specific issues. Illustrative partnership linkages at the national, regional and international levels are proposed in the following framework:

Partnership entities, institutions and issues		
Partnership level	Partners (Who)	Possible activities (What)
National	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relevant ministries/academics/local government bodies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sensitisation of all development agencies to the potential of DL as a powerful tool of development
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National institutions with subject-matter specialists and distance-education specialists 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Memorandum of understanding to work together
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NGOs and private sector 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resource mapping
Regional	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regional economic bodies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resource mapping
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regional educational formulation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sourcing generic materials and adapting to local use subject to the concern of intellectual property rights
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Course design associations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regional cooperation
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regional intergovernmental bodies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthening the existing regional networking
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regional offices of multilateral development agencies e.g. ESCAP, UN agencies, etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sensitization of all development agencies to the potential of distance learning as a powerful tool of development
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Capacity building 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information exchange
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mobilizing financial and other resources 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Multilateral development agencies, e.g. COL, UNESCO, World Bank, UNICEF, etc. 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bilateral development agencies 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NGOs and private sector 	

Recognizing the importance of maintaining sustained interest and of promoting meaningful action, it is crucial that an appropriate regional coordinating mechanism be identified, possibly through existing regional institutions and organizations.

5.5.4 FAO strategic agenda on distance education

As relevant to Theme 4, the consultation recommends the following:

The participants to this expert consultation agree that FAO should define a coherent and strategic approach to the use of distance-education strategies, in the pursuit of its mission to help build a food-secure world for present and future generations.

The consultation reviewed the draft document Distance education for food security and rural development: An FAO vision for action prepared on 17 November 2000. From this document the following recommendations were made:

- a. The following five principles of an FAO approach to distance education should be endorsed:
 - Distance education should be undertaken for the right reasons.
 - Distance education should be sensitive to context.
 - Distance education should use existing infrastructure and human resources, and have sustainable costs (this does not mean that FAO should not help develop new resources, facilities or innovative approaches for distance learning; it does mean that distance education should make use of appropriate media and technology, and use existing national institutions and infrastructure whenever possible).
 - Distance education should engage its stakeholders in participatory processes of programme planning, implementation and evaluation (here, stakeholders refers to those with an interest in a particular distance-education intervention, and not simply FAO Member States).
 - Distance education should be based on sound pedagogical and administrative models.
- b. The following vision statement contains suitable content for an FAO vision of distance education, but the content should be expressed in more powerful language: FAO is an international catalyst for the learning of a diverse and globally distributed set of individuals, organizations and communities whose capacities and actions influence the achievement of food security and rural development. In collaboration with a wide range of partners, and in conjunction with other methods of intervention, the Organization employs innovative and appropriate distance-education methods to accomplish its strategic objectives.
- c. The general categories of people identified on the following list are an appropriate set of target learners for FAO initiatives. However, in the introduction to this list, a specific reference should be made in order to ensure that such categories are gender sensitive. Thought should be given to order the list more systematically. Also, the list should not be viewed as comprehensive.
 - Policymakers, planners and civil servants
 - Researchers, educators and information professionals
 - Business leaders, investors and donors
 - Producers and those who lead them or work with them
 - Those (besides producers) who work in the agriculture and food industries
 - The rural poor (including women and girls), the food insecure, and those who lead them or work with them
 - Those who lead and administer rural institutions
 - Leaders in the international community

- Those who negotiate and administer international agreements, standards and instruments
- d. The following six roles for the FAO in distance-learning processes related to the areas of the Organization's expertise are considered appropriate:
- Production of new knowledge
 - Dissemination of information
 - Provision of technical support and advice
 - Advocacy for policies and guidelines
 - Promotion or facilitation of networking and information exchange
 - Provision of education and training

6. FAO REGIONAL OFFICE FOR ASIA AND THE PACIFIC: OPERATIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS

Within the Asia-Pacific, with due recognition of the vitality of distance education and distance learning programmes and the availability of distance-learning resources, but with attention to varying quality issues of distance education and acknowledging the immense potential for using these resources to accelerate the advancement of rural women and girls, it is recommended that the FAO Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific explore relevant regional activities to sustain commitment and to expand the initiative endorsed by the consultation.

A few specific pilot initiatives that could be explored are:

1. Support a forum of selected experts from open and distance-learning systems and agricultural education and extension systems in exploring and enhancing application of distance-learning resources for the education and socio-economic advancement of rural women and girls.
2. Develop a regional strategy document in the area of distance-learning resources for rural women and girls.
3. Support resource-mapping exercises in selected low-income, food-deficit and transitional countries in the region to provide a database to facilitate development of distance-learning initiative and activities at the regional level.
4. Explore the options for extra budgetary resources to strengthen the SDWW initiative in the area of harnessing ICT for the accelerated advancement of rural women and girls, beginning with the distance-learning resources.
5. Explore the possibility of organizing a regional event to address the ICT distance education for rural women and girls. Focus the event on the global context of the Beijing Plus Five review follow-up, the FAO mandate of a Hunger-Free Millennium and SDWW Gender Plan of Action that is being proposed to the FAO Conference. Identify extra budgetary resources and appropriate institutional collaboration.

6.1 CLOSURE OF THE CONSULTATION

The consultation closed with a note of appreciation from the participants for the efforts of Ms Revathi Balakrishnan, RAP Rural Sociologist and Women in Development Regional Officer, for organizing the meeting and for the excellent arrangements and support given by the FAO RAP Women in Development staff. The technical officer expressed her grateful acknowledgment of the contributions made by the participants to the deliberations and to the final document.

ANNEX 1 AGENDA

5 December 2000

Participants' arrival

6 December 2000

8:30 AM

Registration

9:00

Opening session

Meeting called to order: *Dr Revathi Balakrishnan*

Welcoming remarks

Mr Dong Qingsong, Deputy Regional Representative FAO
RAP

Opening remarks

Dr R B Singh

Assistant Director-General and Regional Representative
FAO Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific

Participants' introduction

Election of meeting officers

Chair: *Dr Ma Cristina D Padolina*

“Consultation vision, purpose and objectives”

Statement by

Dr Revathi Balakrishnan

Regional Rural Sociologist and WID Officer
FAO Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific
Special keynote address

“Empowering rural women through distance learning”

Prof Abdul Waheed Khan

Director, Development and Training
The Commonwealth of Learning, Canada

10:15 – 10:30

Discussion

- 10:30 – 11:00 *Coffee Break*
- 11:00 **“Distance education for rural learners: FAO vision for action”**
Secretariat paper
Mr Scott McLean
Visiting Expert from SDRE/GILF
Agriculture Extension, Education and Communication for Development Service, FAO/Rome
- 11:30 – 11:45 AM **Discussion**
- 11:45 AM **Bangladesh: Country paper**
Ms Ripa Walie
Education Promotion Manager
Education and Export Promotion Unit
The British Council
Bangladesh
- 12:15 – 12:30 PM **Discussion**
- 12:30 to 2:00 *Lunch*
Hosted by **Dr R B Singh**
Assistant Director General and Regional Representative
FAO Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific
- 2:00 **China: Country paper**
Mr Liu Yongquan
Vice President
Central Agricultural Broadcasting and Television School
China
- 2:00 – 2:30 **Modality for potential partnerships to offer distance education in agriculture to rural women**
Presentation: Resource paper

Dr Madhulika Kaushik

Indira Gandhi National Open University
India

2:30 – 2:45

Mr Wang Yibing

UNESCO

Presentation

2:45 – 3:15

Discussion

3:15 – 3:30

Coffee break

3:30 – 5:00

Discussion

7 December 2000

8:30 AM

**“Enhancing community-based management of
agro-biodiversity: the role of the media”**

Resource paper

Dr Setijati D Sastrapradja

National Biotechnology Centre

Indonesia

9:00–9:15

Discussion

9:15

Nepal: Country paper

Dr Chandra Bhadra

Women Studies Department

Padma Kanya Campus-Tribhuvan University

Nepal

9:30

The Philippines: Country paper

Dr Ma Cristina D Padolina

Chancellor

UP Open University

The Philippines

10:00–10:30

Discussion

10:30	<i>Coffee break</i>
10:00–11:00	<p>Regional distance-education resource: technology options</p> <p>Resource paper</p> <p><i>Mr Loh Yeow Meng</i></p> <p>Temasek Polytechnic</p> <p>Singapore</p>
11:00–11:15	Discussion
11:15	<p>Sri Lanka: Country paper</p> <p><i>Dr Uma Coomaraswamy</i></p> <p>Dean, Faculty of Natural Sciences</p> <p>The Open University of Sri Lanka</p> <p>Sri Lanka</p>
11:30	<p>China: Human resources development of rural women in remote areas through distance education in agriculture</p> <p><i>Ms Chang Yingxin</i></p> <p>Central Agricultural Broadcasting and Television School</p> <p>China</p>
11:45–12:15 PM	Discussion
12:30–1:45	<i>Lunch</i>
1:45	<p>Thailand 1: Distance learning via satellite: lifelong learning via technology</p> <p><i>Dr Chulapongs Chullakesa</i></p> <p>Secretary General</p> <p>Distance Learning Foundation</p> <p>c/o Department of General Education</p> <p>Ministry of Education</p>
2:00	Thailand 2: Kasetsart University

Dr Chaiskran Hiranpruk

Director

Rajanagarindra Institute of Cultural Studies

Kasetsart University, Thailand

2:15

Viet Nam: Country paper

Mr Tran Quoc Chan

Senior Officer

Department of (Regular) Continuing Education

Ministry of Education and Training

Viet Nam

2:30–3:00

Discussion

3:00–3:15

Coffee break

3:15

The AIT experience on peer-learning and distance-monitoring-based training of professionals

Mr Nicanor A Austriaco

Executive Director

CEC Asian Institute of Technology, Thailand

3:45

Maldives: Country paper

Mr Abdul Raheem Hasan

Deputy Director

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Male, Maldives

3:45–4:30

Discussion

4:30–5:00

Preparation for deliberations on focus themes

8 December 2000

Focus themes

8:30–10:00 AM

Learner profile: characteristics and primary learning needs of rural women and girls

10:00–10:30	<i>Coffee break</i>
10:30–12:00	Distance-education strategies for advancement of learning rural women and girls
12:00–1:30 PM	<i>Lunch</i>
1:30–3:00	Partnerships in distance education for rural women and girls
3:00–3:30	<i>Coffee break</i>
3:30–5:00	FAO strategic agenda in distance education

9 December 2000

9:30–10:30 AM	Identification of key areas of action
10:30–11:00	Synthesis of recommendations
11:00–11:30	<i>Coffee break</i>
11:30–12:30 PM	Presentation of the report
	Adoption of the report
12:30–1:30	Closure of the expert consultation

ANNEX 2

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