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REPORT AND RECOMMENDATION OF THE PRESIDENT

TO THE EXECUTIVE BOARD ON A PROPOSED

TECHNICAL ASSISTANT GRANT

TO THE

FOOD AND AGRICULTURE ORGANIZATION OF THE UNITED NATIONS (FAO)

FOR THE

RURAL KNOWLEDGE NETWORK PILOT PROJECT FOR EAST AFRICA



TABLE OF CONTENTS

MAP OF THE PROJECT AREA	iii
I. BACKGROUND	1
II. TA GRANT PROJECT	2
III. RECOMMENDATION	5
APPENDIX	
Summary of Project Costs	7



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I submit the following Report and Recommendation on a proposed technical assistance (TA) grant to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) to support the Rural Knowledge Network Pilot Project for East Africa in Kenya, the United Republic of Tanzania and Uganda in the amount of USD 1.5 million for a three-year period.

I. BACKGROUND

1. **Agricultural technology development and transfer.** For the last 25 years the emphasis in Africa has been on developing fixed packages of ‘modern inputs’ to be transferred to farmers by Ministry of Agriculture (MOA) extension services. This system known as the ‘training and visit’ (T&V) extension method, has increasingly been discredited mainly due to the lack of relevant technologies for small farmers and farmers’ reluctance to adopt new production methods when they have been treated as passive recipients. The growing disillusionment with this ‘technology transfer’ era has prompted the current focus on participatory approaches. Human empowerment has become the preferred alternative solution. An imperative of this shift from ‘distant product’ to ‘local process’ is that local access to, and control of, information to drive *in situ* knowledge generation and validate its implementation has become the central challenge for rural development practitioners and programmes. A corollary is that attributes such as ‘relevance’, ‘feasibility’ and ‘appropriateness’ can only be determined and validated within, and by, the communities served by the solutions. Moreover, because the dynamics of agro-ecosystems are context-sensitive, they cannot be replicated in field experiments on distant research stations.

2. **IFAD’s collaboration with farmer field schools (FFSs).** Developed by FAO in Asia from the traditions of adult literacy education and village-level basic health-care education, FFSs are an alternative approach to the packaging and delivery of ‘solutions’. Farmers who participate in an FFS learn by doing and by being involved in experimentation, discussion and decision-making. A didactic process is initiated during FFS sessions, guided by farmers’ own within-field observations made at time intervals geared to the phases of key ecosystem events and crop cycles. In addition, farmers are provided access to other information sources – ranging from research expertise to knowledge held by other farmers and communities. By taking local action, measuring and comparing alternatives, and communicating ideas stimulated by this process, an FFS class conducts ‘ecosystems analysis’ exercises that lead to local insight and understanding of the basic processes at work in their fields.

3. IFAD’s experience with FFSs in East Africa began in 1999 when it provided a TA grant to FAO for a sub-regional pilot project to promote the development of the FFS approach in three countries in East Africa. This was an effort to bridge the gap created by the gradual withdrawal of formal government-supported extension approaches based on the T&V model. IFAD was convinced that the FFS approach could be applied to improve farmers’ productivity, particularly because of its critical reliance on communication processes and the social dynamics of group action and empowerment. In a mid-term review (MTR) of the activities of the Global Integrated Pest Management (IPM) Facility in April-June 2001, IFAD concluded that the replication of the FFS



approach in Africa had succeeded in helping farmers to raise their incomes, and had thus alleviated poverty.

4. The IFAD TA grant to support FFSs in Kenya, the United Republic of Tanzania and Uganda is now completing its third and final year of field activities. About 868 FFSs, composed of about 25 farmers each, have been carried out. In total, some 21 454 farmers (9 890 men and 11 564 women) participated in FFSs in the three countries. In terms of crop technology and on-farm management, FFSs have been able to mobilize existing human resources in order to instigate a self-driven and integrated learning process among farmers. The experience gained so far confirms that the FFS approach is effective in raising production and incomes, and suggests that its impact could be substantially strengthened by a special focus on promoting field-level networking and partnership-building.

5. Although there is a large body of information and knowledge on specific crops generated by national agricultural research systems (NARSs) and international research organizations (IROs), this does not reach farmers. FFSs have shown that they can mobilize information and promote attitudes that engender a human change process. At the field level, they have tapped into both indigenous and traditional knowledge, while bringing in scientific knowledge to achieve greater production returns. The MTR of the Global IPM Facility recommended “dedicated focus on the facilitation of networking as part of an explicit information management and public awareness strategy.”

II. TA GRANT PROJECT

6. **Project approach.** In order to mobilize existing technical information about agriculture and to shape that information into knowledge products appropriate to the needs of its target group smallholders, IFAD will build on the existing FFS approach, developing farmers’ capacities to mobilize and use their own knowledge in combination with external knowledge. It will also aim to strengthen the existing networks of information exchange, both horizontal and vertical, emerging from ongoing FFS activities. Horizontal networks are farmer-to-farmer training groups, farmer cross-visits and farmer fora. Vertical networks are the linkages established between farmers and local extension workers on the one side, and NARSs, IROs and other private-sector service providers on the other. The emphasis will be on building, documenting and distributing existing information and knowledge developed in FFSs using these local networks. The project will use modern telecommunication technology to integrate, compile, store and share various types of information related to agriculture (technical, managerial, socio-economic or pictorial). The combination of existing horizontal and vertical networks, which use various means of communication (such as newsletters, local radio, informal and formal social gatherings, FFSs), with an electronic network will form IFAD’s rural knowledge network (RKN) in East Africa. Information developed within the context of the electronic network could then be used by other local communication means such as radio and newsletters.

7. Knowledge networking to increase synergy among information providers and users should address and resolve three constraints experienced by small farmers in Africa: they have been (i) offered inappropriate farming technologies; (ii) by-passed by traditional technology transfer systems; and (iii) excluded from most formal information exchange systems. The ongoing FFS activities are learning how to address the first two constraints, while the proposed grant will address the third. The existing FFSs will be the initial entry point for the development of the RKN, along with two ongoing IFAD projects (in the United Republic of Tanzania and Uganda). The exchange of FFS experiences electronically with IFAD project management units (PMUs) and among countries in East Africa will also enhance the replicability and effectiveness of the FFS approach.

8. **Objectives and activities.** The overall goal of the proposed RKN pilot project is to initiate a people-centered knowledge management process that is built on an understanding of farmers’ needs,



shapes the existing technical information to respond to their requirements and delivers knowledge in a form they can understand. The project will use the local communications network already in place under FAO's FFS and the electronic network of FAO's EcoPort Programme, which has been pilot-tested with FAO programmes in South Africa and Zambia. The objectives of the IFAD RKN pilot project are to: (i) adapt existing technical information and knowledge to enable IFAD PMUs in selected countries to respond more effectively to farmers' information needs; (ii) respond to the day-to-day information needs of smallholder farmers, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and community based organizations (CBOs) in order to strengthen the capacity of smallholder farmers to grow and market healthy crops and to deal with unexpected events (such as crop failure and pest outbreaks); and (iii) build strategic partnerships at national and local levels so that farmers are better linked to their national partners and service providers, both in the public and private sectors.

9. The key activities would be:

- (i) carrying out a participatory assessment and planning exercise, including country-level stock-taking of the existing available site-specific technical information about agriculture;
- (ii) carrying out participatory field-level assessments of smallholder information needs;
- (iii) helping local participants to develop and share their knowledge of location-specific information drawing on existing extension and research experience in the concerned countries through the electronic network;
- (iv) enabling IFAD projects and farmers to become a local knowledge network by participating in a global network;
- (v) testing procedures for making agriculture information easily available to MOA staff, national agricultural research centres, local extension workers, NGOs, CBOs and farmer groups; and
- (vi) developing and using the RKN to provide learning opportunities to participating FFSs and IFAD projects.

10. The pilot project will focus on two areas: (i) shaping the content of existing technical information to respond to farmers' needs; and (ii) delivering content in a form that is usable by local service providers such as NGOs, CBOs, local extension agents and, during the final year of the grant, the farmers themselves. Participants will be trained to run their own web page(s), enter information of relevance to core agricultural activities, access information, receive email and participate in email-based discussions.

11. **Costs and financing.** The total cost of the proposed activity will be about USD 1.9 million over a three-year period. Incremental IFAD financing of specific activities to be carried out by FAO focused on smallholder farmer knowledge-building and information needs will total USD 1.5 million. Of this, USD 1.09 million will be provided as a grant to FAO to carry out the above activities under its EcoPort Programme in tandem with the ongoing FFS programme. Some USD 265 000 will be provided to the University of Florida to cover incremental programming and communications systems support for this pilot project; the agreement with the University of Florida will include a clause confirming that the University has no intellectual property rights to the software system developed with the Funds's financing. Disbursement to FAO will be on the basis of an annual work programme and budget approved by IFAD, and will take place in three tranches: USD 500 000 for the first tranche, and USD 297 870 each for the second and third tranches. Following the disbursement of the first tranche, the withdrawals from the grant account for the second and subsequent project years (PYs) will be based on a statement of expenditure, submitted by FAO, in the format of the Financial Systems (FinSys) financial statement, certified by the authorized representative. The



accounts for each financial year or reporting year will be subjected to the internal and external auditing procedures specified in the Financial Regulations, Rules and Directives of FAO.

12. Following the approach of IFAD's FFS grant, FAO will contribute the staff time of two senior professionals and an information officer for six months each year over the three-year implementation period for a total contribution of about USD 396 000. Other institutions and agencies that sponsor information collation and compilation participate voluntarily, so no cost estimate is included. IFAD projects and national institutions will provide their staff and premises at their own expense. IFAD will directly administer USD 139 260 to cover the cost of (i) special consultancies for linking Headquarters and ongoing projects with the RKN and (ii) a final assessment to be conducted in PY3. A summary cost table is provided in the Appendix.

13. **Implementation arrangements.** The proposed pilot project for a RKN in East Africa will be implemented by the Agriculture Department of FAO over a three-year period, and will build on the positive and dynamic field processes already started under the ongoing pilot FFS project with the FAO Global IPM Facility. The Agriculture Department will draw upon and coordinate relevant inputs from other FAO units, including the Extension, Education and Communication Service and the Library and Documentation System Division. In addition to the existing horizontal and vertical networks emerging from FFS work, the project will use the FAO EcoPort Programme to integrate various types of information about local agriculture, as described in FAO's medium-term plan and approved work programme and budget. A steering committee meeting with a representative from FAO headquarters staff and from IFAD will be held each year with the PMU to review the past year's progress and to provide input for the following year's work programme and budget. At the country level, implementation arrangements will follow the existing arrangements made for the execution of FFS activities and collaboration with IFAD projects.

14. FAO will provide technical coordination through a project implementation task force comprising a team leader, an alternate FAO task manager and an information officer. In the field, there will be a PMU consisting of the three core information teams operating in each country under the coordination of a regional project coordinator. With regard to reporting arrangements, an annual work programme will be submitted to IFAD for prior review and agreement, and FAO will prepare annual progress reports for submission to IFAD.

15. **Expected outputs.** By the end of the grant, the basis for a regional local knowledge management network consisting of farmers and participants from IFAD-financed projects and national institutions will have been established and provided with an electronic network capable of stand-alone operation and simultaneous full Internet use where suitable. Participants will actively determine and control the nature of the information in the network, and the procedures for accessing, improving and validating this information. The approach will have been developed and tested in three countries, and could then be extended to cover other IFAD projects in the region.

16. **Links with IFAD's strategic framework.** Reflecting IFAD's focus in its draft strategic framework on local area development, this TA grant will promote a dynamic exchange and development process for specific technical issues in agriculture among local organizations, NARSs and IROs, FFSs and farmers. More specifically, the grant will mobilize knowledge and expertise from different sources to complement farmers' own knowledge. By working with FAO, IFAD can enhance the impact of its own activities, and such learning can then be further disseminated within and outside of the region, particularly in areas where farmers have similar problems.

17. The proposed TA grant reflects a number of IFAD's strategic objectives. It will strengthen the capacity of the rural poor and their organizations by helping them to articulate their own knowledge and by providing relevant external knowledge in response to their needs. This will enable farmers to interact on a more equitable and informed basis on issues that affect their well-being. The grant will



also support appropriate technologies to improve farm productivity by adapting known technologies to the site-specific conditions of smallholder farmers in East Africa. At the country level, it is focused on enhancing individual and community-level capabilities by building on current FFS successes. FFSs enjoy a higher representation of women than men. IFAD's Strategic Framework 2002-2006 explicitly refers to the need for "an explicit emphasis on communication and mutual learning between stakeholders and relevant external networks in the search for better ways to address problems faced by the rural poor".

III. RECOMMENDATION

18. I recommend that the Executive Board approve the proposed technical assistance grant in terms of the following resolution:

RESOLVED: that the Fund, in order to finance, in part, the Rural Knowledge Network Pilot Project for East Africa in Kenya, the United Republic of Tanzania and Uganda for a period of three years commencing in July 2002, shall make a grant not exceeding one million five hundred thousand United States dollars (USD 1 500 000) to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations upon such terms and conditions presented to the Executive Board in this Report and Recommendation of the President.

Lennart Båge
President



SUMMARY OF PROJECT COSTS

SUMMARY OF PROJECT COSTS (3-year implementation period)
(USD)

Component	Activity	Financier		Total
		FAO	IFAD	
Local networking to build technical information				
	Field needs assessment		90 000	90 000
	Training of IFAD project staff and national partners		207 000	207 000
	Training local counterparts and farmers		135 000	135 000
	Technical information shaping and collation		120 000	120 000
	Equipment		123 000	123 000
	National coordination		90 000	90 000
Subtotal			765 000	765 000
Electronic network building				
	National internet connectivity		40 000	40 000
	Communications support		60 000	60 000
	Programming support		60 000	60 000
	Consultancies		145 000	145 000
Subtotal			305 000	305 000
Regional and other costs				
	Regional coordination		75 000	75 000
	Regional workshops		60 000	60 000
	FAO Project service costs		122 200	122 200
	FAO Special Factor (contingencies) (mailto:yr2@4%PY2 at 4% and PY3 at 8%)		33 540	33 540
	FAO technical backstopping	396 000		396 000
	IFAD support for linking ongoing projects		139 260	139 260
Subtotal		396 000	430 000	826 000
Total		396 000	1 500 000	1 896 000