

Agriculture remains the economic backbone for many developing countries, especially in rural areas. Promoting access to agricultural information that can support farmers and rural development therefore plays an important role in the broader social and economic development of a country. The [International Association of Agricultural Information Specialists \(IAALD\) 13th World Congress](#) held in Montpellier, France from 26 - 29 April, 2010 has been looking at how the agriculture information field is preparing itself for future challenges and embracing the opportunities that new information and communication technologies provide to improve service delivery to clients.

Agriculture experts and Information specialists gathered in Montpellier from around the world to share innovations in agricultural information, discuss current projects and examine future trends in the sector. For commercial farmers, emerging technologies have brought opportunities and have changed the nature of certain transactions to the extent that it is difficult to compete unless you are up-to-date with the new Information and Communication Technology (ICT) tools and technological advancement. For example, today to carry out most commercial marketing and sales activities, we need an email address and good access to internet, phone and good technological infrastructure. The World Congress creates an opportunity for networking, discussion, sharing ideas and best practice and to ask questions on how ICTs can help improve agriculture and rural development.

In addition to being vital for the commercial farming sector, the use of ICTs can also contribute positively to livelihood development in rural areas. It has the potential to change the way farmers access information, making it faster and easier for them to get in touch with specialists that can provide technical advice and assistance. The expansion of mobile telephony in the Pacific, in particular, provides opportunities to link more farmers to markets and increase employment opportunities in rural areas. This could contribute to easing the pressure on the urban centres.

The Pacific Agricultural and Forestry Policy network ([PAFPNet](#)) hosted by the Land Resources Division, Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC) can play an important role in raising awareness of the implications for policy makers on new ICT opportunities and how these might affect agricultural education, extension, information and communication management and internal management systems. With a growing trend in the use of innovative ICTs, there are opportunities to reduce the information and digital gap between farmers and potential markets through the use of mobile devices. "With the current ICT industry in the developing world, most of the innovative projects and mobile devices are coming through and there are few initiatives which influence local resources through the use of ICTs to help meet agriculture and rural development" explained Kevin Painting of CTA.

PAFPNet is one of six ACP organisations represented on a advisory team for a project recently launched by [The Technical Centre for Agricultural and Rural Cooperation ACP-EU \(CTA\)](#) on Youth, Rural development and ICTs dubbed ARDYIS (Agriculture, Rural Development and

Youth in the Information Society). The advisory team led by Mr Ken Lohento of CTA has been selected to provide expert advice with regard to ICTs, youth and agriculture development. The overall aim of the ARDYS programme is to contribute to sustainable agriculture and rural development (ARD) in ACP countries and increase the involvement of youth. More specifically, the project will raise the awareness among youngsters on ARD issues in ACP countries as well as build their capacity in the use ICTs and specifically in Web 2.0 applications for rural development.

As part of the activities of the project, CTA is launching a writing contest which will contribute to understanding the youth's views and perspectives on its involvement in agriculture, on the role of ICTs in rural development. This complements another PAFNet initiative which focus on the development of a Youth in Agriculture Strategy which will shortly be launched.

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