

DRAFT

CONSULTANCY REPORT:

**COMMUNICATIONS CONSULTANCY FOR THE COARD
PROJECT (CLIENT ORIENTED AGRICULTURAL
RESEARCH AND DISSEMINATION)**

**SAARI
SERERE
UGANDA**

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Definitions requested by the project team

Communication strategy: A communication strategy is about preparing the ground, during the lifetime of a project, which will enable the dissemination of the project outputs to be effective after the project is over. The intermediary organisations are especially important stakeholders in the communication strategy as the project will be dependent on their interest in and uptake of its research outputs, and their capacity to deliver whatever is needed by farmers for adoption. What is needed for the communication strategy is good collaborative working with stakeholders, and in particular the intermediary organisations. This collaborative work will enable stakeholders to have a good understanding of the project and the project to have a good understanding of their capacity, reach and effectiveness in working with beneficiaries.

Distribution: The way in which packaged project outputs or packaged information about project outputs get to those for whom they are intended (are they delivered, are people expected to come and get them from a central point, how do they know when information is available etc). Understanding distribution is one part of understanding the stakeholders and their capacity, reach and effectiveness.

INTRODUCTION

This is a report on a communications consultancy for the COARD Project (Client Oriented Agricultural Research and Dissemination) which took place between May 6th and May 24th 2001 in Uganda. The consultants were Dr Patricia Norrish, Development Communication Consultant, UK, and Michael Ocilaje, Development Communication Specialist, Uganda (see Appendix 1 for the full ToRs).

The purpose was for the consultants to assist SAARI staff and stakeholders to identify current communication needs of stakeholders (including farmers) in the project's target area.

Activities

- Review the current communication 'context' for dissemination of agricultural technologies in Northern and Eastern Uganda (brief response to NARO and NAADs initiatives in light of the project and areas, for linkages).
- Identify opportunities for linkages/networks with relevant development actors in the region and make recommendations for communications activities to strengthen/develop these opportunities.
- Depending on outputs from the workshops, develop guidelines for project implementers (i.e. those people (extensionists, scientists, NGO officers, etc) that are awarded funds through the ATFs), which will assist them with understanding the need for information dissemination of project outputs and also guide them on how to identify, plan and conduct information dissemination activities. This will include a section on how to monitor information dissemination activities.
- Revise the current COARD project communication strategy in light of discussion held during workshops with key stakeholders and with project implementers.
- Provide recommendations on communications activities for scaling out technologies and approaches through the target farming systems and the various agricultural development agencies in the region.
- Provide recommendations on communication activities for scaling-up the project's approach.

Background on the project

The National Agricultural Research Organisation (NARO) started the Client Oriented Agricultural Research and Dissemination (COARD) in December 1999. The project is based at the Serere Agricultural and Animal Production Research Institute (SAARI) and works in partnership with national and local Government agencies, NGOs and CBOs, The project is assisted by the UK Department for International Development (DFID). It will run until 2004. Initially the project is supporting research and extension in the Teso and Lango farming systems (Seroti, Kumi, Katakwi, Pallisa, Lira, and Apac districts) and it will gradually reach out to the rest of SAARI's mandate region (COARD Information Pack for Applicants, July 2000, COARD Information Leaflet, July 2000).

The project facilitates client oriented participatory research and extension through two competitive funds, the Client Oriented Research Fund (CORF), and the Technology Partnership Fund (TPF). Researchers, extensionists and other development workers who are active in E and N Uganda are eligible to apply for the funds, though it is expected that all funded projects should include SAARI and/or NARO staff. Some projects will be led by SAARI staff, whilst others may be led by staff from other NARO Institutes, Makerere University, District Extension Departments or NGOs, amongst others. Decisions on which projects should be funded are taken by local governing committees, which comprise of representatives from NARO, the University of Makerere, GoU extension, NGOs, Farmer Groups and the private sector. The Client-Oriented Research Support Unit (CORSU) administers the competitive funds, provide support and back-stopping to project implementers in client-oriented approaches and methodologies, monitor and evaluate project activities, manage skills development for the project, and assist the scaling-out of project outputs and activities, including dissemination (adapted from Outline Communication Strategy for NARO/DFID project, version 2, Draft, June 2000).

A Draft Communication Strategy was developed at an early stage in the project. The detailed activities proposed in the strategy document covered the early stages of the project and have largely been completed. The first group of funded projects for which dissemination will be a major issue are about to begin and a second round of concept notes has been reviewed. It is thus a good point at which to review the strategy in relation the COARD Project and to the projects which it funds.

Approach to the consultancy

Literature from government and the NGO Network DENIVA, supplied by the project prior to the consultancy provided a basis from which to

consider the communication context within which all stakeholders have to work, both at the national and local levels. This information was built on through a series of visits to key organisations in Kampala, by the preliminary results from the Agricultural Information Scoping Study (AISS) being carried out by COARD, by a report on a Decentralisation Policy and Advocacy Workshop (SODANN/DENIVA, through a two day field visit to interview farmers and farmers groups, and through a series of workshops. There were three of these, one with farmers, one with intermediaries and one with researchers. The intermediaries and the researchers were largely drawn from teams from the first round of funded projects (ATFs). The intermediary group was supplemented by key players identified during the AISS. Farmers were drawn from groups which had been identified during the same study and also from others identified during the two field study at held at the end of the first week of the consultancy.

The literature review, the meetings in Kampala and the results of the workshops together with the Scoping Study formed the basis for a presentation to the CORSU (Client Oriented Research Support Unit) team on Wednesday the 23rd May. The presentation looked at the communication strategy for COARD, for the projects it is funding, and at the need for a PR (public relations) plan for SAARI.

COMMUNICATION CONTEXT

The situation in the country as a whole

Previous studies into the strengths and weaknesses of Agricultural NGOs (DENIVA1995), into information exchange between local GO and NGOs under decentralisation (DENIVA, 1998), on issues of information at the grassroots level (to inform a workshop on 'Formulation of a Communication policy for Uganda' November 1998) paint a very similar picture. They show that the communication context is complex and characterised by a thin spread of communication skills and resources, a wide range of media generally available, but not necessarily reaching people, or not accessible for reasons of cost, low literacy levels, heavy workloads (in the case of women and their access to radio), distance from the source of information, poor quality materials and unclear distribution systems, networks in which information flows from the centre out, but not between members or between members and the centre, lack of, or passive, public resource centres such as libraries, and no system for making information generally available in central locations like libraries.

Opportunities to change this picture (nationally and locally) are offered by the NARO Outreach Initiative, the National Agricultural Advisory Services Programme (NAADs) and the plans for decentralisation. The plans of NARO and NAADs include the establishment of an efficient information exchange system between farmers, farm advisors and research using a wide range of

stakeholders as reference points. These may generate information, but most of it is expected to come from NARS. NAADs aims to build the capacity of Farmers Fora in various ways – technical capacity, managerial and strategic capacity, planning for advisory services). However, these plans are not yet operational and may take another two years to become established.

As part of the decentralisation plans in the financial year 2001/ 2002, the Uganda Government under the Plan for Agricultural Modernisation (PMA) is to channel capacity building and development funds to sub counties governments. The funds are in the form of a conditional grant and their utilisation lies in the hands of the technical staff who make up the sub-county technical committee. However, a condition for accessing the funds is that the LC3 local governments have to raise the ten percent of grant. Most sub-counties have failed to raise this because of the low revenue base and will therefore be unable to access the funds. In addition to the funding issue, there is evidence that those who should be working together to get plans in place at the local level,, namely local government and intermediary organisations and networks, know little about each others activities (SODANN report) and that considerable work needs to be done to change this situation. This will take time.

In the meantime CORSU and the projects it is funding and supporting will need to appreciate and work with the information systems and the capacities of research and extension (GO, NGOs, CBOs) to work with each other and with farmers that exist at present.

This situation is what was explored through the Scoping Study, the two day ... and the workshops. The results from these activities are discussed below. They have been kept separate so that the project staff can see the extent to which they back each other up.

The situation at the local level

Work carried out specifically for the project in the areas in which it is operating shows that the local picture reflects the national one.

From the Agricultural Information Scoping Study: The study is part of the NARO/DFID COARD Project. Its aim is:

- To provide an overview of agricultural information that is available and accessed by farmers
- Identify active organisations in the 6 project districts
- To understand the type of agricultural information available

- To analyse the main modes of agricultural information dissemination

The research team visited 55 organisations in six districts (Kumi, Katakwi, Soroti, Lira, Apac and Pallisa). The preliminary results are given below.

The mass media in the form of national and regional newspapers and radio is available in the area, and leaflets and pamphlets are produced, mainly at district level, by the larger NGOs. A wide range of face-to-face communication includes farm visits, seminars, exhibitions, agricultural shows, demonstrations, workshops, farmer-to-farmer, churches and AT (U) selling products at markets with loud hailers

However, although farmers appear to obtain their agricultural information from a wide range of sources the reality is that whilst larger organisations are able to supply some agricultural information to farmers (written or via the radio), many small NGOs have no written material to disseminate. Most of the organisations visited have no dissemination strategy and sharing of information may be constrained by organisational mandates. AT (U) and UOSPA seem to be the most active NGOs in dissemination.

From the field visits: The two day field visit found that farmers had access to information through farmers groups, demonstrations, field and farmer to farmer visits, announcement in churches, L.C. Systems, and (a very few) through videotapes on modern farming practices. Farmers are also training other farmers on how to plant ground nuts and on family life education. However, they complained of lack of, or untimely, feedback (e.g. on soil samples taken from their fields). They also said they have little time to go and collect information from its source. Although they like to organise themselves in groups they also said that collecting people together was difficult. Sharing information was considered problematic because some farmers have no interest in new ideas whilst others feel they cannot attain a higher level of modern farming. (Appendix 2 contains details of findings from the two day field visit)

From the workshops (Appendix 3 contains a full account of the workshops)

What farmers want: The farmers had clear, strong views on what they want particularly in relation to training. They expressed a need for:

- Theoretical understanding and hands on practical learning (e.g. exchange visits, study tours, demonstrations)

- Reinforcement in the form of follow up visits, formalised farmer-to-farmer, printed material
- Advice on hand both during and after a project
- Working in groups and regular discussion groups (1 or 2 a month)
- Phased training depending on season and technology (1 week maximum at any one time) in an accessible location
- Being trained to train others

Farmers also said they want more information at the start and throughout a project whether they are directly involved or not (e.g. radio, pamphlets, exchange visits). They also want more specific information (e.g. post-harvest, marketing, how to access credit). They prefer information through a variety of channels (e.g. radio+ face-to-face + leaflets) as they might miss it if it is only disseminated through one channel.

The capacity of Intermediaries to meet farmer's wants and needs: The intermediaries are sympathetic to the needs of farmers, but are limited in their ability to respond to these needs. The main reasons for this are the lack of funding and skills available for dissemination activities and in particular for the writing, production, reproduction, and distribution of dissemination materials and for repackaging information (especially for translation). Although skills to carry out activities are available they are limited by the numbers of staff available and the lack of trainers to train more. Whilst Farmers Associations have dedicated funds for dissemination, it is NOT sufficient to disseminate effectively. In addition many NGOs cover large geographical areas so cannot really deliver effectively in terms of training and support for farmers. Government extension is demotivated for many reasons (e.g. low salary, no recognition, no support for activities) and feels it cannot compete with NGOs in field work activities.

Apart from the need for training in communication and funding intermediaries felt their capacity to cope with what farmers want would be enhanced by the following:

- Documenting and sharing what is being done and more active sharing in networks. At present the network organisation communicates with the members, but there is little communication between members and the centre or between different members. They would also like some kind of centralised location, easily accessible where they could go to find out what information is around.
- More equal co-operation between research and NGOs (at present NGOs request help from research, but it doesn't happen the other way round). Research stations need to be more active in sharing with NGOs.

- More regular outlets for information to be made cheaply available (e.g. pages in newspapers).
- Regular needs assessment due to constant changes in the environment (policy, markets etc) which are outside farmer's control.
- Retraining as technical knowledge and skills may be out of date.

The need for more funding was a critical issue with donors being seen as the main source for funding, although donor policies seemed to be little understood. The need for planned fund raising and better utilisation of available funds were also seen as mechanisms to help overcome the shortfall.

The capacity of researcher to respond to farmers in the light of the capacity of intermediaries: Researchers were asked to consider their organisations strengths and weaknesses in working with intermediaries (given their limited capacity and needs) in delivering what farmers want. They were also asked to consider how they could maximise their strengths and minimise their weaknesses,

Strengths: One of the main strengths of SAARI was seen to be the range of technologies (and supporting information) already available and the ability of researchers to generate new technologies. This is complemented by:

- skills in working with farmers in on-farm trials and in a range of dissemination approaches (e.g. Field days in SAARI, exhibitions at agricultural shows, farmer guides, pamphlets, a limited supply of foundation seed)
- the existing contacts with intermediaries and farmers in such activities as pre-season workshops with NGOs and farmers, participatory identification and needs assessment and planning, research, on-farm evaluation with farmers and the sharing of findings.
- a willingness to co-operate and collaborate with intermediaries. This is being fostered by COARD, which is providing a supportive environment in which closer links with intermediaries can be developed. There is also a unit for Research Extension Liaison which should be able to help.

Weaknesses: However, these strengths are countered by the two main issues raised by all groups. This was the lack of funding and lack of trained personnel with the knowledge and skills needed for extension activities and the dissemination of technologies, communication, materials development, and monitoring and

evaluation. Although support for training can be offered to farmers, intermediaries, and to students in the form of industrial training no follow up is carried out after training. This is further compounded by poor networking with intermediaries, a limited and inadequate understanding of stakeholder's roles and of the interests of the intermediaries, and a limited access to uptake pathways are all seen as particular. These all need addressing. The often conflicting institutional interests, priorities, and strategies of intermediaries and researchers is seen as something that also needs addressing.

Poor staffing in SAARI does not help the situation (less than half the full complement of staff are employed at the present time). Staff also say they suffer from a lack of motivation due to the untimely delivery of resources.

Poor infrastructure and inadequate transport were also raised as issues. However, there was no agreement on whether inadequate transport meant lack of vehicles, lack of proper use of vehicles, or lack of funds to use vehicles. Only the cotton programme is perceived to have the mobility to reach extension, NGOs and farmers.

Finally researchers at SAARI are hampered by the lack of a PR programme for the institution. This is much needed as farmers tend to attribute the new technologies to the intermediaries rather than to the research institutions through which they have been developed (a fact also commented on in some earlier research into uptake pathways by NARO).

Maximising strengths, minimising weaknesses: Researchers felt their strengths could be maximised and their weaknesses minimised by getting a better understanding of stakeholders interests through some form of stakeholder analysis and through continuous needs assessment with farmers. This understanding would enable the joint planning of well focused research programmes with all the stakeholders. These programmes would incorporate budgets for dissemination and monitoring and evaluation from the start. Follow-up by field extension workers would be built into all projects.

The need for training was emphasised. This would include training researchers in communication skills in extension, and in information technology skills, training scientists, intermediaries, and farmers in participatory on-farm research methods and training for extension staff on the use of technology manuals.

Finally a need was expressed for developing a mechanism to enable a quick response to local needs for dissemination materials. A communication unit for production of training materials and other media was suggested as one mechanism, but the facilitator suggested that developing the capacity of intermediaries to respond to local needs is probably a better option. This might also help to fulfill the

need to widen dissemination channels through better collaboration with local councils, local leadership and farmer groups.

Conclusion from the workshops

Farmers have clear views on what they want particularly in relation to training, to the kinds of support which they need for adopting new technologies, and for the kinds of communication support which they prefer. Intermediaries and researchers have much to offer farmers, but are hampered by the lack of funds and of skilled and trained personnel, particularly in relation to communication and dissemination. Overall the workshops have revealed a remarkable degree of agreement on the issues confronting research, extension and farmers as they try to improve communication between and amongst themselves.

Whilst some of the new measures on outreach (NARO and NAADs) will have a significant role to play in providing information and training to farmers they are not currently in place and it will be some time before they are fully operational. In the meantime COARD is up and running, has already funded one round of projects and is on its way to funding a second. It is in a position to act quickly to put in place training and other activities proposed as a response to the needs expressed in these workshops.

The COARD Project communication strategy

A draft communications strategy was developed at two levels: one for the overall project, and the second for individual projects funded through the CORF and TP. The document outlines the type of activities that might take place at each level, but not the specific activities as they would be different for each project. A framework was presented in the document outlining the practical steps for implementing the strategy.

Responsibility for different aspects of the communication strategy and the kinds of activities involved were set out as follows:

At Project Level, dissemination will be the responsibility of the CORSU. Activities will involve 'institutional' dissemination, mainly for the promotion of the project and its activities amongst stakeholders, through PR materials such as flyers, posters and bulletins. 'Institutional' dissemination will also focus on activities related to human capacity development within SAARI and for project implementers. The project will also disseminate information on "context studies", such as baseline data, marketing and knowledge systems studies, which are conducted to understand the 'development' context of the region and the mechanisms of information exchange, flows and access. Another key role for dissemination at project level is building awareness and providing application details about the two

funds - the TPF and CORF. This will mainly be done through distribution of an information pack (developed and tested with a range of stakeholders) and workshops.

The Project, in consultation with a number of key stakeholders, will develop guidelines for projects on dissemination activities. For example, at each stage of the project cycle various communications activities can take place...a checklist ...may be a useful starting point for Project Implementers to start thinking about how, when, why, and where they should be conducting dissemination activities and who they should be conducting these activities with. The table presented here is a draft guideline, which we intend to develop into a practical tool for Project Implementers.

The draft Communication Strategy provides a good basis on which to build activities which will enable COARD to learn from the projects it is funding and to ensure that those lessons can be built on by future projects through effective dissemination of its outputs and of those from the funded projects. These activities are the subject of the recommendations from the consultants. They relate to the two levels, that of the Project and that of the Projects which have been/will be funded.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on what we have found through the literature review, interviews, and workshops, we recommend the following, all of should be funded by the Project:

1. the Project team need to put in place a dissemination plan
2. that the best way for the project to respond to the communication needs of its stakeholders and to achieve the planned project outputs is to focus on the funded projects as the starting point for capacity building, and for documenting the lessons learnt
3. that the Project should extend the scoping study as a way of determining the capacity of intermediaries to take up the funded project outputs and build the capacity of 'best bet' organisations
4. putting in place a PR plan for SAARI as part of capacity building.

WHOSE RESPONSIBILITY IS COMMUNICATION AND DISSEMINATION?

Before putting in place these recommendations CORSU needs to negotiate, with fund holders and partners, responsibilities for putting in place communication strategies and for carrying out dissemination. CORSU's responsibilities might include, for example, ensuring that:

- all the issues relating to uptake, adoption and dissemination are adequately considered by the applicants both at concept note and project document stage
- there are sufficient funds in the budget to do something sensible
- monitoring and evaluation during and after the end of project, monitoring uptake after the project finishes, monitoring the achievements against the log frame is carried out either by hiring consultants or using in-house skills.
- taking on responsibility for dissemination once projects are completed
- follow-up activities with intermediaries who are carrying out dissemination activities once the projects is finished

The project leader might be responsible for

- keeping records that will be useful to CORSU in the follow up activities (records of who has been involved in research any workshops, enquiries, interest from and information on the capacity of intermediaries).
- ensuring that outputs are presented in forms that are easily understandable and appropriate to intermediaries/end users/other researchers/all those involved in conducting the research.
- ensuring good communication with stakeholders (including intermediaries) and intended beneficiaries during the project and keeping records of how this has been done and who with.
- thinking how the project can help CORSU with the portability of project research results (not just in the form of a journal paper).
- bringing in wider range of stakeholders and beneficiaries during life of the projects so that wider dissemination is facilitated after the project ends (this includes PR).

The activities related to these responsibilities should be designed in from the beginning and exactly who within the project team will do what needs to be agreed upon.

WHAT NEEDS DOING: THE PROJECT DISSEMINATION PLAN

In order to put in place the dissemination plan which is needed if scaling out is to happen effectively the Project team need to work through the steps in a Communication Strategy as set out below.

Identification of the anticipated or actual research output

The Project outputs as proposed in the log frame provide the starting point from which to plan a communication strategy which will enable the Project to put in place effective dissemination activities both within the project areas and beyond.

The log frame indicates four outputs from the project:

- Capacity for client-oriented research and technology transfer strengthened in SAARI and stakeholders
- Client-oriented technology development approaches and systems developed and operational
- Knowledge, skills and technology transfer approaches developed and operational within the area.
- Client-oriented approaches scaled out

These will almost certainly remain as the project outputs, but it might be worthwhile for the project team to re-examine them at this stage to make sure that this is the case.

Identification of and participation of stakeholders in collaborative activities

A good stakeholder analysis now needs to be done for COARD. Collaborative activities with stakeholders, depending on their importance to the project, need to be started as soon as the project feels it has something to communicate. The Lessons Learned workshop indicates that this is already the case. Sharing lessons is particularly important in such an innovative project and in the light of the changes which government policies aim to put in place (decentralisation, NARO outreach, NAADs etc). If the recommendations from this consultancy are put into action there will be extremely important lessons (e.g. on how research can respond to demand from farmers, on how research and intermediaries can work together, on the kinds of capacity building needed and how that can be carried out) to be passed on to the implementers of the new policies.

HOW: CORSU Team to have a Stakeholder Analysis Workshop run by a skilled outside facilitator

Identification and understanding of target audience(s)

Stakeholder analysis is linked to this step. Part of understanding of stakeholders is understanding that they may not be homogenous when it comes to their communication context and needs. Understanding who the project wants and/or needs to communicate with (and who wants to communicate with the project) is vital at this stage so that communication about the project and longer term dissemination of project outputs can be planned in response to the communication needs of different groups of stakeholders. The temptation otherwise is to regard them as one group who can all be communicated with in the same way.

Identification of and collaboration with intermediate organisations

This is a step which appears not to have been considered yet. It addresses the issue of who will disseminate the Lessons learned through the project. It is possible that COARD plans to do this itself. In which case questions need to be asked about when this will happen and how? If there is no plan for a dissemination project to follow on from the original project then dissemination could well fall apart unless plans for longer term dissemination have been made with intermediary organisations. The project will also need to ensure that follow up on intermediaries dissemination activities is carried out. It is unclear who would do this work and this needs to be clarified sooner rather than later.

To be done as a specific part of the stakeholder analysis by project staff. They then need to consult with identified intermediaries about their capacity reach and effectiveness to carry out dissemination. This could be done with individual organisations or through a workshop. The workshop would help to determine whether any collaborative dissemination activities could take place and what they might be.

Assessing the communication context

The Agricultural Information Scoping Study has made an excellent start of assessing the communication context for the funded projects, but it does not appear to have been looked at for the Project. It is easy to assume that everyone can be reached through the same channels, and particularly tempting to assume that new technologies will provide answers to the problems of dissemination to wide audiences. However, experience shows that this is not the case. In many government organisation only certain people have access to computers, to email and to the WWW. In NGOs the situation may be even more complex and access is frequently extremely patchy. The experience of ID21 (DFID funded research information service based at IDS, University of Sussex) that research information needs to be provided through the web, through email AND on paper, users of regular four pagers from different sectors of the World Bank see the same thing happening there. DENIVA backed this up with information that although they can and do provide their newsletter through email people prefer, for a variety of reasons to have it on paper.

HOW: Member of the CORSU team could carry out a survey to be fed into the proposed Combined CORSU Team and Stakeholder Workshop

Identifying the communication objective

Once the communication context is understood then it is important to take account of and understand your objective in wanting to communicate with people, to consider what you expect them to do

based on your communication. And to think about whether that is practical for them and whether it fits in with their own objectives, or those of the organisation with whom they work. In the case of COARD the changes in policy which the government is planning to put in place fit with the aims of COARD and in that sense the job is easy. However, the lessons learned may not always be easy to take on board, especially if they indicate difficulties in relation to resources for capacity building for example. Looking at the lessons learned and what they will mean in the longer term for government policies needs to continue throughout the life of the project. The Lessons learner workshop was a small step in the right direction, but a mechanism need to be put in place for this to continue. Regular workshops (two or three days) every six months with an outside facilitator and a system for recording what takes place could be a useful approach.

HOW: Combined CORSU Team and Stakeholder Workshop run by a skilled outside facilitator. This should be one of a series to be run throughout the Project as part of project monitoring and evaluation. It should feed into lessons learned. A second workshop after six months is proposed at which decisions on the timing of future workshops could be considered.

WHAT NEEDS DOING: TRAINING FOR THE FUNDED PROJECTS

In order to achieve the project outputs we recommend that the COARD project focuses on awareness raising and capacity building with the fund holding 'teams'. Teams in this context means all those organisations and individuals already named in the projects whatever their role and, most importantly, those intermediaries who will disseminate the projects' research outputs once the projects are over. These may not have been fully identified yet and may go on being identified throughout the lifetime of the projects. Exactly what intermediary capacity needs building will have to be identified through the extension to the Scoping Study which is also recommended (see...)

The Project has high expectations of the funded projects in terms of the way in which research will be conducted, the kinds of partnerships that will be developed and the way in which dissemination will be carried out. For most, if not all, of the teams these expectations are rooted in approaches to research and dissemination which are very different from previous practice.

The Project has made a good start in raising awareness and training people in the new skills they will need to work in a Client Oriented environment. But at the present these have been carried out in relation to the way in which concept notes and proposals are written. Now that the first round of projects have been funded and the second round of concept notes have been selected to go forward there is an urgent need for putting in place awareness raising and training in

relation to the need for an underlying communication strategy, in uptake and dissemination, in the preparation of materials, and in monitoring and evaluating the impact of communication activities and materials. The immediate need for this has been identified through the workshops and through an analysis of the projects documents. These documents indicate that most of the projects have ambitious plans for the production of materials(manuals, posters, leaflets) but there are few, if any, details on how these are to be produced and put into use.

We recommend that the Project funds these activities and documents them and the impact they have for its own learning and for wider dissemination.

What funded project teams need

During the workshops a strong need was expressed by the researchers for a mechanism for rapid response to developing materials for local use. It was suggested that SAARI to have its own unit, however, in view of the possible changes which will be made to the way in which research, extension, farmer links work in the next few years such an investment might prove to be a waste of resources. We therefore recommend that building on existing capacity is the best way forward for the present.

Fund holders and their teams need to be aware of the importance of planning and budgeting for a communication strategy during the course of a project as the basis for good dissemination after the project is over. They also need to be trained in how to do this.

In addition those team members who are to carry out work on materials, or have responsibility for project communication through activities such as workshops and farmers field days, need to be identified (if that has not already been done) and trained.

We have suggested that funded projects teams need awareness raising and training. However, in addition the Project will need to make decisions, based on the capacity, reach and effectiveness of NGOs to carry out communication and dissemination activities and to produce materials, about who to train to carry out dissemination after the projects are finished.

Awareness raising and training could be done by teams together, but responsibilities need to be clearly assigned.

Awareness and training in the following is needed:

- Identification of the anticipated or actual research output and an awareness and understanding of the need for project outputs to be

relevant to peoples lives, to have been validated by farmers as well as researchers and to be practical for them to adopt.

- Identification of and participation of stakeholders (especially NGOs) in collaborative activities. Based on needs expressed in the workshops teams and stakeholders may need training in understanding of each others needs and agendas, in team building, and in collaborative working. CORSU is already fostering this approach but it may need more systematic training.
- Identification and understanding of target audiences. Teams will need awareness of and training in how to do;
 - which media to use for communication about the project during its life and for dissemination once it is over
 - how to produce materials for specific target groups
 - how to keep farmers and intermediaries inside and outside the projects informed of what is going on (this helps to build uptake pathways)
 - how to pre-test materials
 - how to carry out monitoring and impact.
- Understanding of the communication context as it is now. This report, the workshop report and the analysis of the first stage of the Scoping Study could be presented to the teams and discussed at a workshop, this could form the basis for:
 - exploring the specific context for each project in collaboration with intermediaries and farmers
 - looking at the feasibility of communication and dissemination plans as expressed in the Project Documents and revising them if needed
 - exploring their own capacity to carry out those activities and determining their own training needs in collaboration with the Project
 - planning (including budgeting) who will do what.

Identifying the communication objective. Teams need to understand why they want to communicate with people and what effect they expect their communication to have. This will help in planning which kind of activity or material will be most appropriate. This needs to be done routinely as part of the communication plan.

The ToRs for this consultancy suggested the possibility of producing guidelines and/or checklists for the funded projects teams. However, without an understanding of what is needed and why non-specialists tend to find guidelines difficult if not impossible to apply. We recommend that any such guidelines and checklists should be produced in consultation with the teams during the various awareness raising and training workshops. These could then be tested

in use and put forward to be used and retested in use by the next group of fund holders.

A set of 2 Best Practice Guidelines (Improved Communication for renewable Natural Resource research outputs, P. Norrish, K. L.Morgan and M.Myers, 2001) have recently been published by DFID and NRI. They could be used as the basis for drawing up checklists and guidelines in the workshops.

OTHER TRAINING NEEDED IN SUPPORT OF THE PROJECT COMMUNICATION STRATEGY

Reporting from funded projects

In order for follow up activities to be carried out by CORSU (further dissemination, monitoring of dissemination and uptake and impact of project outputs) a lot of information is needed. Experience with other projects indicates that if this is not thoroughly documented dissemination once the project is over will be extremely difficult. Information needed includes:

- whether project outputs have been validated by farmers and researchers and evidence of validation.
- whether there is a good distribution system in place for packaged project outputs (for dissemination, PR, advocacy, etc)
- whether support is needed and whether it is in place (e.g. credit, inputs, training, markets)
- whether farmers and organisations working with farmers need training in the use of methods and technologies and whether it is available
- whether support, (training and/or finance) is needed for activities and for the possible adaptation, translation, reproduction, distribution and follow up of materials and is it available.
- that materials have been developed to the point of usability (in the right language, format, right place) and evidence of validation.
- a record of communication activities such as workshops and who has attended these with contact addresses
- a list of contacts with intermediaries and whether they are likely to be able/want to disseminate and provide support after projects are over, what constraints do they face to doing this.

Project leaders need to understand why this information is needed as it is probably different from the usual reporting which they make on research projects. It has implications for routine project reporting and especially for what needs to go into the FTR. The FTR should give a clear indication of project outputs achieved with evidence of:

- the demand driven nature of the research
- demand for/interest in project outputs across a range of stakeholders who will be instrumental in uptake and

dissemination; links between stakeholders (including DFID bilateral projects/ NGOs/GOs/private sector

- participation of target organisations. and beneficiaries in the research process, in communication activities, and in the generation and pre-testing of materials
- communication activities (e.g. what kind, who with, for what purpose, what follow up)
- materials delivered and used (e.g. what kind, who for, for what purpose, what follow up)
- of testing in use and/or impact assessment of materials
- a communication strategy or dissemination activities in the project document and how it has developed/changed
- mid-term review report or some other evidence of M&E of project outputs, communication activities and media products development and production.

Project teams need to understand their own capacity in relation to communication and dissemination, they also need to know about and understand the capacity of those intermediaries who will take up project outputs for dissemination once the project is over. The kinds of questions they need to be asking include:

- are they actively involved in information dissemination?
- do they have mechanisms for ensuring that decisions about information needs are made in consultation with farmers and are they active seekers of information which farmers want/need?
- can they offer support for the use of information (e.g. provide or link into training)?
- do they have the capacity to work with different groups/sectors of the population and are they able to facilitate joint learning and analysis (needs analysis and follow up)?
- do they carry out routine pre-tests of materials for comprehension, relevance, usability etc. if so how?
- what criteria do they use to judge effectiveness in communication activities and materials?
- do they have the capacity to repackage information for a range of stakeholders in a range of media?
- are they able to work directly in local languages/literacies (e.g. drama and song)?
- do they keep track of the use of information (monitoring and evaluation capacity)?
- what information distribution systems do they use and do they monitor them?

If organisations are not carrying out all or any of the above it is necessary to try and assess why. This information would then give an indication of where the project could give either training or other resource support.

Documenting the lessons learned

The funded projects need to be treated as case studies to provide the information which the Project will need to disseminate to those interested in understanding or putting into practice Client Oriented approaches. Different approaches could be used to do this:

- Getting people to keep note books/reflective diaries on what they have learnt and the changes they are making to the ways in which they work
- Doing regular interviews, sound or video
- Participant Observation - using video for example

Following all projects in detail would be ideal but given the constraints on staff time at least a selection of projects should be documented in detail as case studies.

WHAT NEEDS DOING: THE SCOPING STUDY

The Scoping Study has already provided useful information, but in order for the Project to make use of the available resources for dissemination of the projects outputs, and for identifying organisations which could benefit from capacity building and resourcing some questions still need to be answered, they include:

- There is a need to know about in country experience and capacity in dissemination at all levels from the national to the local. Understanding at the national level could help the project in finding help with training for capacity building. Understanding at the local level will provide the basis for further capacity building. Information from both levels could provide the start of a data-base of organisations with the capacity for effective dissemination.
- Farmers have expressed a liking for working in groups, but there seems to be little information on groups available. This information needs to be put in place quickly to be of use to the funded projects. The Scoping Study should check if any work has been done and if not carry out a quick survey in the project area to find out which groups have worked and why and whether or not they were formed especially for projects.
- Is there in-country experience of communication strategies and dissemination activities? If so, were they successful, who planned them, and could the same organisation be called in to help plan the present communication activities or train others to do similar things? Likely useful sources for this information may include:
 - University schools of communication or extension
 - Private communication/advertising organisations
 - NGOs

- Agricultural information or communication units
 - Health information or communication units
- Who has carried out communication activities and designed and produced the media and materials? Were they successful? Can they be called upon and do they need strengthening? Likely sources for this information may include:
 - Agricultural or research information or communication units
 - NGOs with good grassroots links (training, PRA or other participatory networks, newsletters)
 - Community based organisations
 - National and local networks
 - Local video producers, drama teams
 - Local facilitators for workshops, for PRA/PLA
 - National/local mass media producers (TV, radio, press)
 - It is vital to know the capacity of individuals/organisations to deliver materials that are usable and appropriate for the audience and their communication context. The quality of the materials collected during the Scoping Study and supplied by Abigail Mulhall is variable, but in general is quite poor with little consideration given to the possible need for photocopying. It would be useful to try and follow up some of the materials and see if they are being used. This would help to fill out the information needed by researchers and their partners when preparing manuals and other materials. A follow up system should be put in place to track materials and see if they are being used, who by, what for and to what effect.
 - What is the capacity of those to whom materials will be delivered to pass them on and offer the support that may be needed to enable uptake. Do they need capacity building to enable them to do this?
 - What kind of information intermediary organisations need to enable them to work effectively and how do they want that delivered (e.g. as printed material, by email, as a video)?

WHAT NEEDS DOING: PR FOR SAARI

We recommend that the project team carry out an exercise with SAARI staff to will help them understand the current situation in relation to PR and what needs doing. There is an activity for this kind of analysis in the Client Oriented Manual from Tanzania.

An important finding from the project workshops was the need for retraining to bring technical skills up to date, and for training in people skills.

WHO SHOULD CARRY OUT THE ACTIVITIES RECOMMENDED IN THIS REPORT?

Abigail Mulhall has the necessary skills to be able to take on responsibility for the work needed on the funded projects. She could be assisted in this by an 'information assistant' who would also work on the SAARI PR plan. This person would need to have a qualification in communication. specific training needs could be met by bringing in particular expertise to work with Abigail Mulhall and the 'information assistant' as and when needed. The advantages of this arrangement would be that you would not have to spend time bringing a new member of staff up to speed to take on the full responsibility of the for the funded projects. Abigail would provide the continuity needed to get things done as and when needed particularly in relation to the training/capacity building.

The additional work on the Scoping Study could be continued by the those who carried out the first phase. If it is not finished by the time the APO attached to the project leaves his place could be taken by the 'information assistant' who would work to Abigail.

It would probably be best to have an outside facilitator for work on the COARD Communication Strategy.

END NOTE

One other important issue was raised during the workshops which the Project needs to take up with NARO. This was the need expressed by extension (GO and NGO) for upgrading their technical knowledge in the light of the changes being made in agriculture.

DOCUMENTS CONSULTED

Additional Information for Applicants, COARD, Jan. 2001

Coard Project Log frame

Draft Paper on Agricultural information Scoping Study, COARD

Facing the Research Challenges for the Modernisation of Agriculture: NARO Strategy for 2000- 2010, NARO

Gill and Carney, Competitive Agricultural Technology funds in Developing Countries

Information Pack for Applicants, COARD, July 2000

Map illustrating the project Location plus ARDC sites

National Agriculture Advisory Services Programme

NGOs and Agricultural Development: A study into the strengths and weaknesses of agricultural NGOs in Uganda, DENIVA, September 1995

Outline Communication strategy for NARO/DFID project (version 2) Draft, COARD, June 2000

Plan for the Modernisation of Agriculture (PMA)

Project Bulletins, COARD, (May 2000, July 2000, December 2000)

Project Flyer, COARD/CORSU, July, 2000

Report of the decentralisation and advocacy workshop for Soroti District by SODANN/DENIVA, SODANN, September 2000

Responding to research Challenges for the Modernisation of Agriculture: Medium Term Plan 2001 - 2005, NARO, February 2001

The Development Benefits of Competitive Funding, GTZ

The Outreach Initiative, NARO