

## The GCARD blog

*Social reporting from the Global Conference on Agricultural Research for Development*

### **Appropriate knowledge for smallholder farmers will make the world more food secure**



#### ***Women farmers in Andhra Pradesh, India listening to livestock advice via mobile phone.***

Millions of food insecure farmers could improve their yields, incomes and resilience if they have access to the appropriate information and knowledge which further helps them make informed choices about their farm. Yet, despite many new information and communication technologies (ICT) and successful pilot initiatives, reaching out to these farmers with the right information at the right time is still largely an unmet challenge. This is one of the reasons why the [Second Global Conference on Agricultural Research for Development](#) (GCARD2) conference highlighted this knowledge access issue as a priority to unlock the potential of smallholder agriculture for a food secure future.

Since the 90s, ICRISAT – like other CGIAR centers – has developed many ICT innovations to give farmers living in the poorest and drought prone regions of south central Asia and Sub Saharan Africa access to ICRISAT research data and knowledge outputs. To achieve this ICRISAT works with several stakeholders including National Agricultural Research System (NARS) partners, extension and education organizations, NGOs and community-based organizations, private agricultural companies.

ICRISAT's Center of Excellence in ICT Innovations for Agriculture has developed and supported many information systems linking research, extension and markets, for instance ICRISAT feeds

internet equipped village knowledge centers with up-to-date knowledge on best farming practices, [eg climate adaptation methods, crop rotation, diversification and pest management](#) for smallholder crops such as millet or sorghum. These platforms have helped many farmers, including [women become more food secure and resilient to droughts](#). However, they have also shown limitations in reaching out to the poorer and more remote regions.

Mobile phone technology has addressed many of the last mile connectivity issues of earlier ICT platforms – infrastructure, connectivity, training needs, literacy issues etc. – and revolutionized the way we live. ICRISAT, together with the Indian Institute of Technology (IITK) and partners, has set up a knowledge-sharing platform (Virtual Krishi Vignan Kendra – VKVK) enabling mobile mediated voice interaction between agriculture experts and farmers. Krishi Vignan Kendras currently serves nearly 20,000 farmers in the South India region.

These farmers are regularly receiving useful and timely crop advice as voice messages over their mobile phones. Plans are underway to replicate and expand this model in other parts of the world. The rise of new ICT devices such as tablets will certainly create new opportunities for user-friendly information tools for better agricultural advice services along with informing farmers about quality inputs and market access. It will also create job opportunities for info-entrepreneurs that can bring crucial added value for farmers. Current research will give insights on how to create **a sustainable “backbone communication network”** that will improve the quality and convenience of information (crop, market, weather and user’s choice etc.) dissemination to smallholder farmers and transparency within the value chains.

To significantly scale up this ‘knowledge to the poor’ revolution, research and development organizations have to work together and support local capacity development. Giving free web-mediated open access to research institute knowledge is one step forward. ICRISAT for instance has launched [“Open Access Repository \(OAR\)”](#) and [“KSI Connect”](#), a virtual knowledge series platform to enable learning exchanges and knowledge transfers across the globe. ICRISAT’s OAR platform houses more than 5,700 research documents, a useful and free research database which will facilitate the work of researchers and practitioners in the South. It is already proving a success with at least 6,000 unique visitors every month and an on average 300 downloads every day from more than 70 countries.

The development community will hopefully give greater support in the coming years to initiatives that enable access, sharing and use of agricultural information among the poor and marginalized – a much needed and wise investment for the fight against hunger.

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