

Integrated Communication Strategy for the RALF Programme

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Introduction

Substantial growth in Afghanistan's non-drug economy is required if there is to be economic and social progress convincing enough to persuade farmers that alternatives to opium poppy are realistic and viable as a livelihood strategy.

DFID's response to President Karzai's call to the international community to focus support on the provision of alternative livelihoods has been to increase spending on the promotion of alternative livelihoods ten-fold over the past three years. To encourage applied research into natural resource-based livelihoods, including crops, livestock, natural products, post-harvest processing and rural services, DFID has established the Research into Alternative Livelihoods Fund (RALF), with a budget of £3 million over three years. ICARDA manages the RALF programme from its offices in Syria and Kabul. ICARDA is also the lead centre for the Future Harvest Consortium for the Rehabilitation of Agriculture in Afghanistan (FCHRAA), enabling it to exploit cross-programme learning opportunities.

RALF applied a competitive research fund mechanism to mobilise innovative ideas and is currently supervising eleven applied research projects. These are being implemented by 21 international agencies including the Natural Resources Institute-UK; Washington State University; Macaulay Research Consultancy Services Ltd., the Agha Khan Foundation, DACAAR, CRS, JDA, NovibOxfam, Relief International, Mercy Corps, CIMMYT, AVRDC, *etc.* and several Afghan national institutions.

RALF's purpose is to produce local, national and international public goods. Examples of WID (women in development) institutions aimed at providing opportunities for women to become economically active include creation of Women's Self-Help Groups (Badakhshan), Women's Saffron Producers Association (Herat), Forage/Dairy Associations (Baghlan) Women's Mint Water/Oil Associations (Kunduz, Kabul), mostly through post-harvest processing and value addition. RALF is training women in value-adding processes, such as drying mint, and the production of 'mint-water' and 'mint oil' for digestive complaints. The aim is to create attractive mint products for local, and potentially international, markets. Women-run production and marketing associations for mint water are being established. RALF is also conducting research into improving saffron production, processing, quality control and search for international markets. Over 80% of the activities required for saffron production and processing are performed by women. RALF is also looking into appropriate collection and processing of wild medicinal herbs, into crop cultivation in greenhouses, into silkworm and mushroom production, and into micro agro-enterprise such as food preservation, in order to provide women with a secure and unexposed working environment, and access to credit through establishment of Women's Self help Groups.

RALF is in the final year of its 3-4-year funding period. A no-cost extension was granted up to October 31, 2007 but additional time is needed as the last of the RALF Projects are still collecting data from the field. It is unfortunate that a purposive integrated communication strategy was not developed at the outset of the RALF programme. Institutional memory has not been adequately developed; successful on-going communication strategies, differentiated by stakeholder and project/programme level, have not been captured. It is therefore high time

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for emergent ‘lessons learned’ to be identified and communicated at a variety of levels within and beyond the RALF if RALF is to fulfil its purpose of contributing to the international public goods agenda.

Rather than develop separate communication strategies for each project, this paper suggests an *integrated* communication strategy. Given that time to realise and implement the communication strategy is limited, it is necessary to focus on developing and realising a limited range of cross-cutting strategies. The main aim must be to improve project outcomes through appropriate dissemination and an iterative feedback process. A second aim should be to improve the overall quality of stakeholder relationships through promoting a listening and learning agenda.

The integrated communication strategy proposed here is based on the following principle: ‘A communication strategy involves more than dissemination of a message. It is an iterative, two-way, multi-directional process involving a range of stakeholders and their needs. It should take communities into account as generators, transformers and users of information’ (Norrish *et al.*, 2001:4).

The communication strategy adopts the following practical steps¹:

1. Assessing the communication context.
2. Identification and participation of stakeholders.
3. Identification and understanding of the target audience.
4. Identification of, and collaboration with, intermediate organisations.
5. Pre-testing the communication strategy.
6. Monitoring and evaluation of communication activities.
7. Monitoring and evaluation of the overall integrated communication strategy.

1. Assessing the Communication Context

To date, RALF has been communicating the objectives, progress reports, and expected outcomes of its projects to intermediate and end users in implicit or explicit terms. Due to the need to protect the implementing partners of RALF against reprisals by drug barons, RALF cannot adopt a transparent communication strategy towards many of its stakeholders, including the public in general. RALF has been extremely cautious when inviting the press to its formal events, such as RALF Symposia and field days. When talking to the Afghani public, the communication strategy in informational terms has been to avoid any mention of the term ‘opium poppy’. Rather, the objectives of the programme are portrayed as crop diversification, post-harvest value addition, and improvement of agricultural technology with the ultimate goal of enhancing farmer incomes.

In sum, RALF has to adopt a veiled message with respect to RALF’s ultimate goal – research contributions to the eradication of the opium poppy. At the same time RALF needs to vigorously communicate the potential of alternative livelihoods to make this possible. A careful balancing act is required.

2. Identification and Participation of Stakeholders

Since the RALF communication strategy is an add-on dissemination project, it is simple to identify the main stakeholders. RALF has identified nine broad intermediate and end user stakeholder groups: farming population; non-farming rural population; private sector; project partners; MAI; Afghan universities; DFID/RALF; Donor agencies, Afghan ministries, other alternative livelihood programmes, and the general public.

¹ Based on Norris, P., Lloyd Morgan, K., and Myers, M. (2001) *Improved Communication Strategies for Renewable Natural Resource Outputs. Socio-economic Methodologies for Natural Resources Research. Best Practice Guidelines*. Natural Resources Institute, Chatham, UK.

Ways in which, if any, these stakeholders can facilitate communication and dissemination activities during and beyond the life of the project need to be considered.

3. Identification and Understanding of the Target Audience

The RALF programme wishes primarily to communicate its findings from its applied research, and therefore identification of the *information* to be disseminated is not difficult.

Attention therefore needs to be focused on the selection of the appropriate media product and the appropriate communication strategy for each stakeholder group. All sub-strategies need to be gender-sensitive.

4. Identification of, and Collaboration with, Intermediate Organisations

Intermediate organisations provide the vital link in the pathway to the end users. RALF will need to draw upon a range of collaborating organisations in order to realise its communication strategy.

To do this RALF needs to identify in-country organisations capable of working on, and delivering, the planned communication strategies. National and local mass media producers (TV/ radio, press); local video producers and drama teams; local RRA/ PRA facilitators for workshops; community based organisations; NGOs, and agricultural or research information and communication units could be involved. Discussions with these organisations need to focus not only on their technical expertise, but also on their ability to work with different sectors of the population in a participatory way, and their ability to transform information into a media product suited to the specific stakeholder group being targeted. Their willingness to pre-test their communication activities and media products is important, too.

The Communications Unit at ICARDA HQ (CODIS), Aleppo, Syria will be an important partner in the realisation of RALF's integrated communication strategy. CODIS can assist with website development, listservers, contacts, access to the CGIAR webpage (news items), and the production of materials like brochures and posters. Whilst actual production costs need to be met, the services of CODIS support staff are provided free. The Media and Publication Department of MAI has also offered audio (free air time through national radio programmes). They have also offered video and print services, although additional funds are required to implement these activities. The Media and Publications Dept has already taken part in several RALF functions in Kabul, Baghlan and Herat.

5. Pre-Testing the Communication Strategy

Pre-testing of RALF's communication strategy will need to be undertaken during the development of communication activities and media products. To do these key stakeholders should be involved during the process. Their feedback should be incorporated into materials development.

6. Monitoring and Evaluation of Communication Activities

To provide baseline data to enable M&E of various communication activities, already extant data will be compiled. The data produced during the needs assessment of the various target audiences, step three above, can be added. This database will permit RALF to devise qualitative indicators of success with different target groups. RALF may also wish to develop numerical indicators.

Monitoring and evaluation of communication activities should be continuously performed. Audience feedback can be elicited immediately after a workshop for monitoring purposes. Other means of monitoring the effectiveness of particular communication activities include focus groups, discussions, questionnaires, audience ratings, interviews and regular consultation with stakeholders.

Remark: projects will need to be careful with what they claim to have achieved. Any claims made to having instigated an observed change in practice should be evidence-based. Given the lack of baseline data in many RALF projects, much *ex ante* evidence will remain anecdotal and should be evaluated with care. One evaluation focus will have to be on trying to assess the potential impacts of innovative research into practice.

7. Monitoring and Evaluation of the Integrated Communication Strategy

RALF may wish to put measures in place during the planning and implementation phase of the integrated communication strategy that will enable M&E of the entire strategy to be conducted. Questions it may wish to address could include: Were target audiences properly defined and understood? If not, why not? Were the communication skills available to the enterprise adequate? Was the budget sufficient?

It will be impossible to fully assess the effectiveness of RALF's communication strategy given that attributing changes in knowledge or practice to a particular invention is problematic.

Integrated Communication Strategy

Five levels of communication activity can be identified:

- 1. Within project**
- 2. Individual project and its stakeholders**
- 3. Between projects in the RALF programme**
- 4. Project to programme**
- 5. Programme to wider world**

The integrated communication strategy is divided into component activities in the table below. Most of the activities, remarks and recommendations pertain not to the dissemination of RALF research results (ie media products), but on how to achieve improved communication flows between all stakeholders. This is necessary if the technical international public goods the RALF programme is designed to produce are to be properly evidence-based, and meaningful to the intended stakeholders. RALF should also, at the programme level, consider its contribution to methodological international public goods. It needs to draw out the lessons learned in terms of successful research, communication and dissemination approaches- that have proved to be egalitarian and empowering - in the context of a top-down antiquated agricultural research system.

Note that the component elements of the communication strategy proposed for each level depend on two activities.

1. An activity to solicit baseline data for the proposed strategy. In some cases this is already available.
2. The recommendations frequently suggest capacity building for project partners as a means of ensuring effective communication in different domains and with different stakeholders.

The 'remarks' are taken from Mary Underwood's (Independent Consultant to DFID) Output to Purpose Review.

ANNEX 1: Baseline Data for Communication Strategy

Level	Activity to Solicit Baseline Data for Communication Strategy	Reporting Format for Activity	Remarks	Recommendations
Within an individual project (1)	<p>1. What is your single biggest achievement? What are you truly proud of?</p> <p>2. Do you have any comments on how you communicate within the project?</p> <p><i>Think about what, when, how, why, who, how much</i></p>	<p>1. Bullet Point</p> <p>2. Narrative Report (can use bullets)</p>		<p><u>Communication Strategy</u> Measures to address difficulties in/promote good practice with respect to intra-project communication to be formulated on basis of information provided by activities 1 and 2.</p> <p>In addition to utilising information provided by activities 1 and 2, the Programme manager should extract information of broader interest from project activity reports for circulation to wider world (Level 5), and between projects in the RALF Programme (Level 3) to promote inter-project learning. Focus on cross-cutting issues.</p>
Between an individual project and its stakeholders (2)	<p>1. Who are your key stakeholders? Which communication strategies have been successful? Can you explain why? Likewise, which strategies are not working – and why not?</p>	Narrative Report (can use bullets) with examples	Currently it is unclear as to who the stakeholders are in the project's activities in terms of asset ownership, livelihood strategies and involvement in opium poppy economy.	<p><u>General</u> Skills development in stakeholder analysis recommended for project holders.</p> <p><u>Communication Strategy</u> Ensure that all relevant stakeholders, once properly identified, are targeted with appropriate communications (field day, radio programme, visit etc). Target women and men, ensure gender-sensitive targeting.</p> <p><u>M&E of Communication Strategy</u> Monitor refining of approaches to stakeholders (see remarks), assess and deal with difficulties, evaluate overall success. Ensure gender-sensitive analysis.</p>
	<p>2. Do you think that you have been able to promote equitable decision-making structures that have enabled your partners to participate? Please explain why/why not.</p>	Narrative Report (can use bullets)	Work appears relevant to asset-rich farmers (able to take risks etc), but need to consider how and under what circumstances (support services, training, credit) technologies could be undertaken by poorer farmers. Impact on day labourers should be assessed.	<p><u>General</u> Skills development on how to conduct capacity-building recommended.</p> <p><u>Communication Strategy</u> Identification of support services to enable participation of poorer farmers needs to be performed and communicated to Level 4 (project to programme). Target women and men, ensure gender-sensitive targeting.</p> <p><u>M&E of Communication Strategy</u> As above</p>

Level	Activity to Solicit Baseline Data	Reporting Format	Remarks	Recommendations
	3. What are your key messages (lessons learned) and how are you communicating these? In this section please specify communication partners (radio etc.) and communication vehicles (posters, TANs etc.)	Narrative Report: Description of your key messages and corresponding dissemination activities. Provide examples of Technical Advisory Notes etc.	Projects are currently not documenting their work on livelihood analysis, household decision-making processes, baseline / participatory survey results. Reporting on gender roles and their participation in project activities is cursory.	<u>General</u> Skills development on how to conduct basic participatory M&E of communication activities. <u>Communication Strategy</u> Build on the most successful existing communication activities. Disseminate these to Level 3 (between projects in the RALF programme) and Level 4 (project to programme).
			Projects do not have clear strategies for capacity building. Training with farmers, extension workers and researchers is being conducted, but reporting is generally only numerical/ not gender-disaggregated.	<u>General</u> Skills development on capacity building <u>Communication Strategy</u> M&E of effectiveness and value of training activity needed since this is a key communication activity. <u>M&E of improved (training) communication strategy</u> Based on initial baseline M&E
Between projects in the RALF programme (3)	What types of information exchange between you and other RALF projects have been most useful (ie, RALF E-Database, RALF E-Forum, Six-Monthly Reports, informal meetings, etc)? Please explain why. Likewise, please outline the gaps in communication activity and explain why these may have hindered your work.	1. Narrative Report (can use bullets)		<u>General</u> - <u>Communication Strategy</u> Build on successful elements and address gaps <u>M&E of Communication Strategy</u> Mutual feedback from projects
Project to programme	How is information being circulated, and how can this be improved?	1. Narrative Report (can use bullets) or questionnaire		<u>General</u> <u>Communication Strategy</u> Build on successful elements and address gaps <u>M&E of Communication Strategy</u> Feedback from projects
Programme to wider world	What are the key outputs of the RALF programme? How are these being communicated?	1. Narrative Report (can use bullets) or questionnaire		<u>General</u> - <u>Communication Strategy</u> Technical IPGs: Build on successful elements and address gaps to create media products suitable for dissemination. Based on outputs from Level 2, activity item 3 (projects to stakeholders) * Focus on outputs; write something for

<p>Programme to wider world (cont)</p>				<p>www.livelihoods.org (IDS), AREU etc. Work with Afghan radio and television stations. Get projects to identify one key achievement (e.g. you have five minutes to give a presentation to your minister, what would you say?). Provide case studies.</p> <p>Methodological IPGs: The RALF programme should draw out the wider methodological lessons learned (methods and approaches used) in order to impact on the wider, top-down agricultural system.</p> <p><u>M&E of Communication Strategy</u> Feedback from projects</p>
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ANNEX 2: Practical Aspects of Communication Media Use (With greater reliance on Afghan institutions in order to build capacity)

STAKEHOLDER (INTERMEDIATE/ END USERS ²)	COMMUNICATION ACTIVITY <i>Activities developed and used in the process of communication (e.g. PRA, focus group discussions, workshops, training). They may or may not use a media product</i>	MEDIA PRODUCT (IF ANY) <i>The packaging in which the research output is contained, or by which it is communicated</i>	INTERMEDIATE ORGANISATIONS <i>Organisations / individuals required to develop and realise communication strategy – require names</i>	LANGU AGE	PATHWAY (INSTITUTION) <i>Route or channel through which the output reaches the end user</i>	TIME-FRAME	REMARKS
Farming Population 1. Landowners (small, medium, large) 2. Sharecroppers 3. Landless 4. Casual Workers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Participatory R&D on farmers' fields ○ Field days by implementing agencies ○ Radio/ TV broadcasts to farmers ○ ICARDA events ○ M&E trips by PM 	Radio / TV programmes Limitations: About 70% of Afghanistan has radio coverage. There are districts where people can not afford to buy a radio. Cheap transmitters should be provided to the people or radios should be placed in the Coop Centres	³ Media and Publication Dept. of MAIL: Focal Point: Mr. M. Latif Rasouli (DG)	Dari Pashto		Fall 2007/ spring 2008	Gender-sensitive strategies required for all farmer groups
Rural non-farming population dependent on off-farm and non-farm activity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Participatory R&D on farmers' fields ○ Field days by implementing agencies ○ Radio/ TV broadcasts ○ ICARDA events ○ M&E trips by PM 	Radio/TV programmes	Media and Publications Dept. of MAAHF Implementing Agencies.	Dari Pashto			Gender-sensitive strategies required

² Intermediate users: those who use the outputs of research to produce information, technology and products for end users. End users: farmers and others (individuals, households, communities, companies and associations) engaged in productive activities using renewable natural resources (Source: Garforth, 1998, in Norrish *et al*, 2001)

³ Radio Azadi has a dedicated slot for the MAIL (30 minutes/ day). They are willing to dedicate a slot per week (eg) to RALF.

Entrepreneurs, agro-business, traders of agricultural products	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Field days by implementing agencies ○ Radio/ TV broadcasts ○ Farmers' Associations and Co-operatives set up by implementing agencies 		<p>Media and Publications Dept. of MAIL (Mr. Rasouli)</p> <p>Extension Dept. of MAIL (Dr. Fazl)</p>	<p>Dari Pashto</p>		<p>Focus on value addition Tasting samples</p>
Project partners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Dissemination of RALF research results ... ○ RALF project workshops/ symposia ○ Workshops organised by individual projects ○ Participation in events organised by other ALPs ○ Face to face meetings (and email contact) between PM and Implementing Partners <p>Need to link associated communication activity with media product in column on right.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ RALF website ○ CD's ○ Reports ○ Minutes of steering committee meetings ○ Minutes of selected RALF-DFID meetings ○ ICARDA Publications (Week at ICARDA, RALF Caravan) ○ Publications of Implementing Partners 	<p>CODIS, ICARDA</p> <p>MP6 , ICARDA</p> <p>RALF Management (N. Malik)</p> <p>CODIS, ICARDA</p> <p>Implementing Partners</p>	<p>English</p>		

MAIL-HQ, MAIL-Provincial Research and Extension officials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Communication of RALF project progress ○ Steering committee meetings ○ Other ICARDA events in Afghanistan ○ RALF project workshops/ symposia ○ Workshops organised by individual projects ○ FHCRAA events <p>Need to link associated communication activity with media product in column on right.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Periodic direct contact (two during each visit to Kabul) ○ M&E Field Trip Reports to the Provinces ○ Minutes of selected RALF-DFID meetings ○ ICARDA Publications (Week at ICARDA, RALF Caravan) ○ MAIL Bimonthly (Karhana) ○ RALF website ○ Posters ○ University research publications, ie. Elm-O-Fan 	<p>N. Malik</p> <p>RALF Management (N.Malik)</p> <p>CODIS,ICARDA</p> <p>Median and Publ. MAAHF</p> <p>Extension Dept. MAAHF</p>	<p>Dari Pashto English</p>			
Afghan universities (faculties of agriculture, pharmacy); faculty and students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Other ICARDA events in Afghanistan ○ RALF project workshops/ symposia <p>Need to ensure clear linking of communication activity with media product in column on right.</p> <p>Workshops organised by individual projects</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Seminars at universities ○ Internship opportunities ○ Publications of Afghan universities ○ RALF website ○ Posters ○ Periodic direct contact (two during each visit to Kabul) ○ ICARDA Publications (Week at ICARDA, RALF Caravan) ○ MAIL Bimonthly (Karhana) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ RALF Management ○ ICARDA – Afghanistan Management ○ Deans& Faculty of Afgh. at Kabul, Nargarhar, Herat and Balkh universities ○ Dean & Faculty of Pharmacy at Kabul Univ. 	<p>Dari Pashto English</p>			

DFID; RALF Steering Committee; ICARDA senior management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ RALF project workshops/ symposia ○ Workshops organised by individual projects ○ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Periodic direct contact (two during each visit to Kabul) ○ Publications by individual projects ○ Steering committee meetings ○ Minutes of RALF-DFID meetings ○ ICARDA Publications (Week at ICARDA, RALF Caravan) ○ MAIL Bimonthly (Karhana) ○ Other ICARDA events in Afghanistan ○ RALF website 		English			
Donor agencies; other ALP's; other Afghan ministries (counter-narcotics, MRRD, commerce etc)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ DFID-sponsored events ○ ○ RALF project workshops/ symposia ○ Participation in events organised by other ALPs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ RALF website ○ Publications of Afghan universities 		English French			
General public	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Radio/ TV broadcasts within Afghanistan ... 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ RALF website ○ 'Controlled' press releases at each formal event ○ MAIL Bimonthly (Karhana), Publications of Afghan universities ○ ICARDA Publications (Week at ICARDA, Caravan) 		English French			

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