



global forum for rural advisory services
forum mondial pour le conseil rural
foro global para los servicios de asesoría rural

Global Forum for Rural Advisory Services (GFRAS)

Communications Strategy

1.Introduction

The goal of the communications strategy of the Global Forum for Rural Advisory Services (GFRAS) is to contribute to the overall strategy of GFRAS, making use of communication tools. As a network GFRAS aims to promote and initiate a process – strengthening rural advisory services (RAS) – rather than promoting a specific product or single event. Thus the communication strategy must be viewed in relation to the GFRAS long-term strategic framework.

The communication activities of GFRAS are twofold: On one hand GFRAS has to communicate its mission and achievements to the “outer world”, i.e. the wider (rural) development community, made up of international development institutions (Figure 1). On the other hand GFRAS must inform its members and affiliates about new developments and events in RAS as well as facilitate the communication among them.

The GFRAS “inner” and “outer” worlds are depicted in Figure 1. GFRAS has a steering committee, secretariat, members (organisations who work closely with GFRAS), and affiliates (individuals who are part of the GFRAS network). GFRAS aims to influence two target stakeholder groups: the RAS community, who operate in RAS on a regular basis, and the international development institutions, those entities who need to work more effectively with RAS to achieve overall rural development goals. Some RAS community members are not yet a part of GFRAS and are thus considered part of the “outer” world.

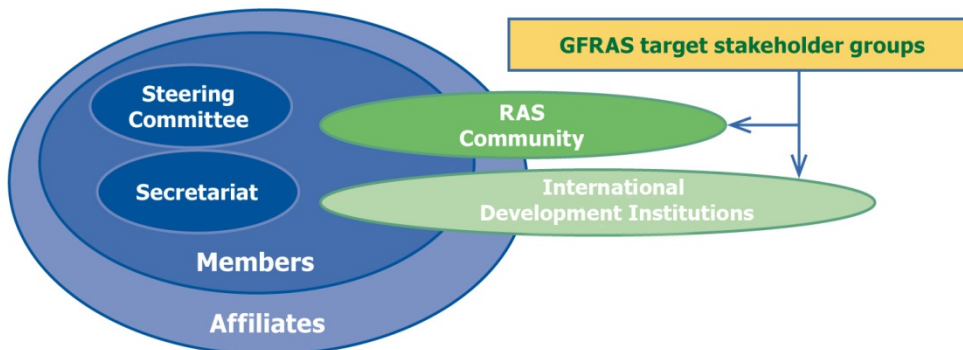


Figure 1. Structure of GFRAS

These two directions – inward and outward – are closely linked: Information from the wider international development community should be made available to the “inner world” and insights and activities from the “inner world” need to be broadcasted to those who might be interested in them too.

As an additional dimension GFRAS wants to facilitate communication among its members and help them to build their own internal communication and to communicate their messages to the “outer world.”

For all this the GFRAS secretariat is highly dependent on receiving information from its members and affiliates. The audiences become the source. That reflects the nature of a network: the

information flows freely among the contributors; to get something out of it you need to put something into it.

And finally GFRAS also communicates through its stakeholders: the members and affiliates of the network are also a communication tool.

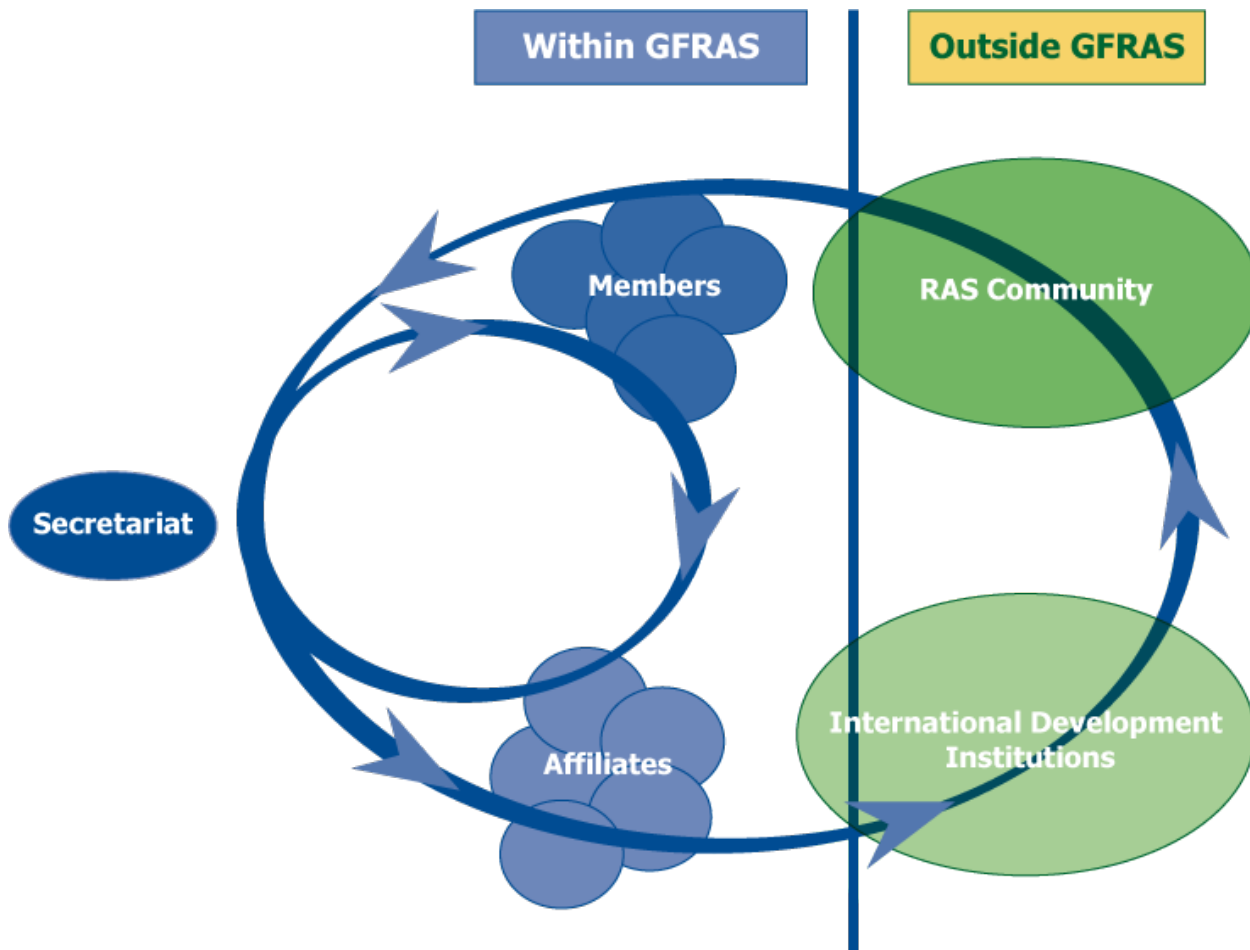


Figure 2. Communication flows facilitated by GFRAS

Note that in the figure the communication is taking place between the stakeholders and that the steering committee representatives are categorised as members.

This document will first examine briefly the mission statement of GFRAS and reformulate it in different contexts. Then it will introduce the target stakeholder groups with whom GFRAS wants to communicate and look at their information needs and barriers. Finally the document analyses adequate tools to transport GFRAS' key messages to its target stakeholder groups.

2. Mission, Key Messages, and Approaches to Communicating Mission

In this section a series of key messages are developed that are based on the mission statement of GFRAS. The aim is to get a couple of simple sentences that define GFRAS and all its activities.

The mission of GFRAS is:

... to provide advocacy and leadership on pluralistic, demand-driven rural advisory services within the global development agenda. Provision of space for leadership, knowledge sharing, and mobilisation of the **RAS community** to advocate within the global development agenda will result in rural advisory services and systems that more appropriately, effectively, and sustainably contribute to the reduction of hunger and poverty worldwide

This is formulated in a more specific way in the three functions of GFRAS:

1. **Providing voice** for advisory services within global policy dialogues and promoting improved investment in RAS;
2. Supporting the development and synthesis of **evidence-based approaches and policies** for improving the effectiveness of RAS; and
3. **Strengthening actors and fora** in RAS through facilitating interaction and networking.

Key messages can then be derived to communicate GFRAS' mission. The GFRAS mission in layman's terms can be summarised in three main points:

- People working in rural advisory services—extension agents—provide education and advice on agriculture to men and women farmers that leads to increase incomes and reduced poverty throughout the world
- But extension agents need help to improve the quality of their work because they operate in isolation and without much support
- The Global Forum for Rural Advisory Services promotes and supports these extension agents by providing knowledge and services to their organisations

It can also be communicated in a short time through use of an elevator speech, a short talk that attracts human interest, or an approach that explains the historical context.

An elevator speech is the 20 seconds that you have to explain somebody in an elevator what you do.

"As you know, poverty and hunger are still big problems in the world today. There are people and organisations who work to reduce hunger and poverty in rural areas through education and advice and support to men and women farmers. However, these agricultural advisors usually operate in isolation and without much support and encouragement. . The Global Forum for Rural Advisory Services promotes and supports agricultural advisors and their organisations to improve the quality of their work. The Forum provides a platform for advisory service actors to share experiences, learn from one another, and speak on behalf of their profession in order to make the advice more efficient and effective. "

Human interest approach explains what GFRAS does for an individual.

Imagine a small farmer in the Philippines has some problems with her bananas: a new parasite harms her trees or she can't sell her produce in time. The farmer asks the extension officer/rural advisor who visits her village from time to time for advice. The advisor – coming from a governmental or non-governmental organisation – looks at the problem and if he/she does not have a solution ready checks if someone in the network of the Asia-Pacific Islands Rural Extension Network (APIRAS). APIRAS has some suggestions. As APIRAS is also connected via GFRAS to similar networks in Africa and South America – where other small farmers also grow bananas – it can provide the Philippine advisor with some suggestions to solve the immediate problem. And more importantly it can also provide a tool or a consultant that works with the

whole village on preventing the initial problem from surfacing again and improving productivity in general.

Historic context gives the background to why GFRAS does what it does.

In Uganda, a really innovative advisory services programme was started that a lot of other African governments and programmes were interested in. But the head of the Ugandan programme, who used to be a researcher, found out that in advisory services there were no opportunities to meet and share experiences with peers. He started a network so that these people could share good experiences and ideas in advisory services. This idea has caught on in Asia, the Pacific, Latin America, the Caribbean, and at the global level. The Global Forum for Rural Advisory Services provides a platform for these people and organisations to share experiences, learn from one another, and speak on behalf of rural advisory services.

3. Aims and Audience

3.1. General Characterisation of aims

Communication science distinguishes three types of aims:

- a) Cognitive aims – “Know the brand”
The first stage aims to get people to know the subject, to raise its degree of popularity and to make a base for remembering.
- b) Affective aims – “Like the brand”
If stage a) is established, communication can start working towards establishing an emotional relationship to the target groups: The communication subject is recognised quickly, perceived with sympathy and valued for its credibility and reliability.
- c) Conative aims – “Buy the brand”
This type of aims is also called acting aims. They want to get the target group to do something in favour of the communication subject.

The three types of aims form a successive route. Knowing the brand is the first step to achieving a voice, thus connecting function 1 to the cognitive aim (a). We can connect function 3 to the affective aim (b), where GFRAS is gladly welcomed and appreciated by the RAS community. The conative aim (c) can be connected with function 2 (at the initiative of GFRAS, the RAS community proactively develops new knowledge).

However it would be too simple to just attribute each type of aim to a GFRAS function. Function 1 “Providing a voice” is much more than just achieving the cognitive aim. Depending on its specific goal/task it can require the achievement of all three types of aims. This is of course valid also for the other two GFRAS functions.

3.2. Audience

There are different audience categories that GFRAS would like to reach with its communication activities. Each category has different information needs but also different barriers to receiving and processing information. These needs and barriers have to be identified and then addressed with specific communication tools.

At first the different audiences follow the structure of GFRAS. For example, the members constitute a quite well-defined audience themselves. However an implicit aim of this strategy is

to increase their number (as that of the affiliates and all the other stakeholder groups). Hence the audiences are better distinguished according to their “nearness” to GFRAS.

1. Inner world of GFRAS: Steering Committee, GFRAS Members, GFRAS Affiliates, and GFRAS secretariat.
2. RAS community that is not yet a part of GFRAS: stakeholders working all or most of their time in RAS, including academics, heads of extension units, donors, managers working for development agencies, researchers. Generally this audience group already knows something about RAS/extension. The group should be interested in new ideas and approaches and in networking with other stakeholders. It should also be encouraged to become a part of GFRAS (immediately outside and farther out).
3. Supporting institutions: Interested/informed/insider: people and development institutions working in agriculture on national, regional or international level. These include individuals who work for a donor agency, for a governmental or non-governmental organisation with activities in agriculture, for the European and African Unions or the World Trade organisation, for research, for the private sector or in education. This audience knows a lot about agricultural development but not necessarily about RAS – or does not recognise RAS’ role in its work.
4. Intermediaries between GFRAS and the public such as journalists, media.

Once identified and possibly sub-divided, these groups are surrounded by different information barriers that hinder GFRAS to reach them. Table 1 depicts the audience, the aim, barriers, and type of information needed. The information material that corresponds to an information type will be discussed below. The common barrier of “very busy” of “overcrowded email box” applies for everybody and is not mentioned in Table 1.

Table 1. Audience, Needs, Barriers, and Information type

Audience	Aim They should ...	Barriers	Information type*
GFRAS inner world			
Members	Actively promote GFRAS and take part in GFRAS activities	No barriers, they have already proven an active interest in GFRAS by joining	Full range of GFRAS information material as well as material that is still in a draft status
Affiliates	Support GFRAS in their own regional/national/local organisations, become a multiplier	No barriers, they have already proven an active interest in GFRAS by joining	Full range of GFRAS information material, including “raw data”
RAS Stakeholders, RAS Community who are not yet part of GFRAS			

Strategic level of governmental bodies, large NGOs and large private companies	Get to know GFRAS Recognize the value of RAS as promoted by GFRAS Enable a supportive environment for RAS in their sphere of influence Become an advocate	Political restraints, personal agendas Competing interests	Short introduction info, good examples of RAS in their context
Executive level of governmental bodies, large NGOs and large private companies	Get to know GFRAS Recognize the value of RAS as promoted by GFRAS Start implementing RAS principles in their sphere of influence	Incompatibility of RAS with own mission/working principles or resistance to adapt those	Short introduction info Compact info on planning and implementation topics Good examples of RAS in their context In-depth background information
Extension officers, RAS specialists	Get to know GFRAS Recognize the value of RAS as promoted by GFRAS Use GFRAS outputs in their daily work	Difficult to reach, unknown organisational structure, language, slow internet speed	Short introduction info, compact info on implementation topics, manuals & toolkits, good examples of RAS in their context; in depth background
Supporting International Development Institutions			
Strategic level of governmental bodies, large NGOs and large private companies	Get to know GFRAS and RAS Inform their staff about the existence of GFRAS	Relevance of GFRAS not known, entry points difficult to find, RAS makes up only a small portion if any in their range of topics	Short introduction info, examples/case studies
Executive level of governmental bodies, large NGOs and large private companies	Adopt RAS principles as GFRAS promotes them Use GFRAS in their daily work	Low or competing interests	Brief info, compact info on planning and implementation topics
Academia, professors, lecturers, researchers, students in agriculture and/or development science	Incorporate RAS in their courses and curricula, use GFRAS in their daily work	They don't know GFRAS, existing curricula that are difficult to change	Detailed info, data to use in work, teaching material, Examples
Intermediaries between GFRAS and the broader public			
Communication officers, journalists, media	Get to know RAS	They don't know GFRAS and/or RAS	Brief info Compact info on planning and implementation topics

General public	Get to know issues in agricultural development	Only a vague knowledge of key words like hunger crises, food security etc.	Brief information, examples & cases
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* Note: The column "Information type" describes the format of the information, not its content

Individual members of these audience groups may to be addressed with different aims in mind. Whereas some may never have heard of GFRAS (cognitive aim) other may know the organisation by name but not what it actually does (affective aim) and still others may want to support GFRAS or use the principles it promotes in their daily professional life but don't know how (conative aim).

A serious challenge is posed by the barrier of scarce or slow internet access. This also applies to all audience groups depending on their location on the world. This issue has to be considered at every communication action:

- GFRAS should keep in mind the possible slow internet speed when preparing a new ICT feature
- If possible GFRAS should publish a paper version to be distributed

In the case of the GFRAS Inner World it is important to stress the multiple direction characteristic of communication: The secretariat can only distribute information it receives from members and affiliates. Of course the secretariat can also find or generate information itself but it is only through many different contributors that the network gains a rich reservoir of information and certain relevance.

In that context it would be interesting to define what information need and barriers GFRAS itself has – and the GFRAS secretariat in particular.

3. Information types

In this section an appropriate communication tool for each information type is listed.

Information type	Content	Format	Provided by	Corresponding GFRAS function
Short introduction info	A brief introduction to GFRAS, its mission and the benefits of good RAS	Brochure, poster, presentations in conferences, face to face meetings	GFRAS and GFRAS members	Provide voice
Compact info on planning and implementing topics In-depth background information	Handy guidelines that provide the "ten points to consider," checklists, comprehensive presentations of principles and methods	Series of printed briefs and good practices Presentations in conferences Face to face meetings	GFRAS, GFRAS-working groups	Provide voice Promote investment Support approaches Facilitate interaction

Information type	Content	Format	Provided by	Corresponding GFRAS function
Manuals and toolkits	Practical information on planning, executing, evaluating and teaching RAS	Series of printed documents, aggregated from briefs and good practices Presentation in conferences	GFRAS, GFRAS-working groups	Provide voice Promote investment Support approaches Facilitate interaction
Examples, cases	Good and bad practices and evidence As showcase, teaching or inspirational pieces	Online archive of completed, on-going and planned projects Presentation on conferences	Members and affiliates of GFRAS (registered website users)	Provide voice Support approaches Facilitate interaction
Detailed information, teaching material	Strategic or conceptual frameworks Literature studies	Printed documents, refinement and summaries of above, Presentation on conferences	Affiliates and members, others	Support approaches Promote investment

These tools do not operate separate from each other; they work in a system. For example, the collecting of cases can lead to the creation of a good practice paper which in turn is combined with others to produce a brief or a policy paper on a certain topic. Or didactical material could arise out of several good practice papers.

Also the information follows the successive route of the three types of aims described above. Short introduction information is needed to make GFRAS known to the audience, more detailed information (examples and cases that people can relate to or useful and applicable tools and guides) lead to the affective aim. And finally the more general and in-depth information (strategic frameworks, concepts etc.) are needed to initiate action.

This "information career" is reflected in – and reflects – the structure of GFRAS as described in the long term strategic framework document: GFRAS has a (small) pool of members which make up the active part of the communication audience (active meaning not only in RAS but also directly to the benefit of GFRAS). The GFRAS affiliates follow the activities of GFRAS with interest and use them in their daily professional life. The wider RAS and development community follows GFRAS with more distance and finally the "outer world" does not necessarily take note of GFRAS. The GFRAS communication strategy provides a route to draw more and more (RAS) people closer to GFRAS so that they become affiliates and possibly even members.

4. Corresponding Tools

The information types and formats described above can be matched with the following publication "product" or communication channel.

Conferences, meetings, face to face discussions

GFRAS organizes its annual meeting in various locations. But it also participates in many other events such as regional meetings. It should be an aim to hold presentations (or organise a side event or any other activity that actively contributes to the event) in relevant fora and meetings.

This task cannot be done by the GFRAS secretariat alone. The representatives of its members need to participate; in many instances they are actually the better choice e.g. for regional conferences. To make clear that they represent GFRAS special GFRAS business cards can be distributed.

Materials to provide are:

- Corporate design for presentations and publications
- Conference banner
- GFRAS pin
- GFRAS business cards

Brochures, posters

- Are provided by the GFRAS secretariat
- For GFRAS as a whole and for each member specifically
- The GFRAS secretariat helps its members to develop their own brochures and posters

News articles & papers

- Are provided by the GFRAS secretariat and the member networks
- Presenting GFRAS and RAS in agricultural/development magazines
- Or as a scientific paper (i.e. case study) with reference to GFRAS

News articles do not refer to the mass media but to topic-centred magazines and internet platforms that server the RAS and development community.

Briefs and good practices

- Are developed by working groups led by the GFRAS secretariat
- Short information, facts and figures and possible scenarios on various topics in RAS
- Consistent layout so that they are recognized as GFRAS material
- Published regularly

Manuals, guides, and toolkits

- Developed by members and other organisations, or by working groups led by the GFRAS secretariat
- GFRAS tries to initiate them and provides initial information and/or resources
- GFRAS takes over responsibility for the publication and dissemination
- Irregular publication

GFRAS website

- Operated by the GFRAS secretariat
- Platform where all the audience of GFRAS can meet and interact (social network)
- Continuously update and enhanced
- Inclusion of social media
- Linked to websites of regional networks (content sharing)

GFRAS Update

- Electronic newsletter

- Content from the website enhanced by special information from the GFRAS secretariat to make the update a unique feature and that is published first in the Update before anywhere else (special offers, urgent news)
- Free subscription
- Sent every three/four months

GFRAS Community News

- Information about new content on the GFRAS website
- Directed only to the registered users
- Parts may be repeated in the following GFRAS Update
- Published every two months

Teaching Material

GFRAS should keep in mind that its publications will and should also be used in a teaching environment, e.g. at universities. However writing teaching books per se is not an aim of GFRAS, but can be supported if GFRAS members wish to catch given opportunities.

5. Entry Points

In addition to the outlined tools GFRAS musts identify possible entry points to each audience group, to show GFRAS where to apply the tool.

Audience	Entry point	Tool
GFRAS Inner World		
Members	The GFRAS secretariat is in continuous contact with the GFRAS members and facilitates contact among members. Members regularly receive information from the secretariat and when applicable special mailings for a sub-section (e.g. all African members)	Direct contact (face to face, email, Skype) GFRAS website, GFRAS Update Conferences, meetings Full range of publications
Affiliates	The GFRAS secretariat has direct contact with some affiliates. Most of them are served with bulk tools.	GFRAS website, GFRAS Update, Conferences, meetings, Full range of publications
RAS Stakeholders, RAS Community who are not yet part of GFRAS		
Executive level of governmental bodies, large NGOs and large private companies	High level conferences Peers: e.g. the CEO is most effectively informed of a new thing by another CEO. Own staff: Secondly the CEO listens to his/her staff from the following group	Brochure, briefs, & good practice GFRAS Update
Managing level of governmental bodies, large NGOs and large private companies	This group should become the most regular user of GFRAS (and therefore join the affiliates group). They should read about GFRAS in their information sources and hear from it from peers.	Conferences, news articles and papers, briefs & best practice, manual & toolkits, GFRAS website

Extension officers, RAS specialists	Their supervisors and/or their teachers/trainers. This group is the difficult to reach.	Manuals & toolkits, briefs & best practices
Supporting International Development Institutions		
Executive level of governmental bodies, large NGOs and large private companies	High level conferences Peers: The CEO is most effectively informed of a new thing by another CEO. Own staff: Secondly the CEO listens to his/her staff from the following group	Brochure, briefs & best practices, manuals & toolkits
Managing level of governmental bodies, large NGOs and large private companies	Conferences, peers, topic information sources, supervisor and line manager, internet	Conference, brochure and poster, brief & best practice, news articles papers, GFRAS website
Academia, professors, lecturers, researchers, students in agriculture and/or development science	Conferences, peers, publications, internet	Conference, brochure & poster, brief & best practice, news articles & papers, GFRAS website
Intermediaries between GFRAS and the broader public		
Communication officers, journalists, media	Special mailings, internet	GFRAS website, GFRAS Update
General public	Internet, news media	GFRAS website, GFRAS press release

6. Timetable

The timing of the different communication tools could look like in the table below. It does not imply a strict rule; it simply highlights the importance of continuous communication.

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
GFRAS annual meeting ¹									x			
Other events ²			x				x					
Manual, toolkit ³									x			
Brief, good examples				X								
GFRAS Update			x			x			x			X

¹ The GFRAS annual meeting can also be viewed as a provider of content for other communication tools. Discussion on certain topics may lead to a publication or the setting up a working group.

² Obviously the exact time for non-GFRAS conferences is speculative.

³ One scenario could be that at the annual conference a topic and a workgroup for it is launched. Within one or two years a publication of some sort is ready for publishing, ideally shortly before or at a GFRAS annual meeting.

GFRAS Community News	x				x		x				x	
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This table is not to be understood as a finite timetable. It rather represents a framework that wants to make sure no communication tool is forgotten in the heat of day to day business.

And of course it should be handled with enough flexibility to allow for those unforeseen events and breaking news.

6. Accessibility

As a global forum GFRAS has to take in account many different communication habits and styles. In the northern/western hemisphere and in economic centres the internet is nowadays the leader of providing information. However in many rural areas access to the internet is still difficult due to infrastructure problems. Other means of communication would be print, radio, television, mobile phones.

Another important point is language. GFRAS so far operates in three languages: English, French, and Spanish. Core documents are translated in all three languages. Other publications are written mainly in English and translated if demand for it is strong enough.

7. Monitoring and Evaluation of GFRAS Communication

An overall M&E framework for GFRAS is laid out in separate document. At this point GFRAS should formulate some measurable indicators that relate directly to the communication materials like:

- Number of conferences attended by GFRAS secretariat and GFRAS members
- Number of publications distributed and downloaded
- Number of visitors and registrations on the GFRAS website
- Number of invitations to conferences and meetings
- Number of registrations for e-Newsletter "GFRAS Update"

The next step would be to formulate some measurable communication aims:

- Hold presentation on GFRAS/RAS at 2 major conferences each year
- Attend 5 others to meet people and make GFRAS known
- Initiate 1 "bigger" publication a year
- Publish 1 briefs/good practices a year
- Gain 2 new members a year
- Gain 200 registered users/affiliates on the website
- Secure funding

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