

SUPPORTING SMALLHOLDER FARMERS IN ASIA AND PACIFIC THROUGH STRENGTHENED AGRICULTURAL ADVISORY SERVICES (SAAS)

I. Introduction

For food security and increased incomes to be felt across the board; in and among smallholder farmers and producer organizations, the agricultural advisory services (AAS) requires continuing reforms. For one, AAS requires new capacities to adapt to the growing challenges that have impacted the performance of the agriculture sector, namely: impact of climate change, environmental sustainability due to increasing soil degradation and depleting water sources, technological advancement, population pressures, expanding markets resulting from the compulsion of competitiveness as well as the declining interest of youth in agriculture. These changes create compelling demand for reforms in the extension sector- hence, the need for updated expertise or fresh knowledge, skills and attitudes among the actors. As explicitly enunciated by the Global Forum for Rural Advisory Services (GFRAS, 2012), “an expanded role of extension and advisory services within the agricultural innovation system” is necessary, to respond to emerging challenges in agricultural development. The increasingly pluralistic extension landscape, likewise, poses novel modes of harmonizing initiatives. All these require the AAS to be ever proactive to sufficiently develop the technical, organizational and management skills of their client groups and producer groups to improve their livelihoods and well-being.

It is against this backdrop that the Asia Pacific Rural Advisory Services (APIRAS) has proposed this project entitled ‘Supporting Smallholder Farmers in Asia and Pacific Islands Region through Strengthened Agricultural Advisory Services’. The project, has rightfully come in time and in response to prevailing needs in that sector. With fund support from the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), the project was launched in 2016 with the Southeast Asia Regional Center for Graduate Study and Research in Agriculture (SEARCA) taking the reins in implementing the project.

II. Project Overview

Primarily, the project is meant to strengthen the APIRAS as well as AAS providers in three countries, namely Bangladesh, Fiji, and the Philippines. Eventually, global, regional, as well as regional networks and institutions have collectively agreed to provide collaborative support to the project. These included the Global Forum for Rural Advisory Services (GFRAS), Pacific Island Rural Advisory Services Network (PIRAS), Agricultural Extension in

South Asia (AESAs), the Agricultural Training Institute (ATI), Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC), Centre for Research on Innovation and Science Policy (CRISP), and the Bangladesh Extension Network (BAEN). Locally, the Regional Training Center of the Agricultural Training Institute in the Cordillera Administrative Region (ATI-RTC CAR), the Philippine Extension and Advisory Services Network Inc. (PhileASNet) as well as the Second Cordillera Highland Agricultural Resource Management Project (CHARMP 2) have jointly confirmed their involvement in the project considering their intensive engagement in AAS activities.

a. Project Goals

The table below shows the goals of the project. It also shows the outputs needed to achieve the goal.

GOALS: EMPOWER POOR SMALLHOLDER FARMERS IN APR THROUGH IMPROVED AAS		
Objectives:		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Strengthen individual and organizational capacities, their Country Forum and Regional Networks</i> • <i>Facilitate availability and accessibility of up to date knowledge</i> 		
Output 1. <i>Regional and Country Fora are capacitated as effective and inclusive brokers and reference points for capacity development of AAS providers in the region</i>	OUTPUT 2. <i>Effectively networked AAS providers are embedded in an effective KM system</i>	OUTPUT 3. <i>AAS strengthened in their role in regional and national policy dialogue and are engaged in these</i>

b. Actors and Responsibilities

The project is a three-year collaborative undertaking of APIRAS and SEARCA together with GFRAS. It is supported by a grant from IFAD and counterpart funding from GFRAS and the European Union. It is implemented in three sub-regions and one country per-sub-region; in collaboration with APIRAS sub-regional affiliated and country partners as follows:

Sub-regional Network	Country (and Host)
South Asia: Agricultural Extension in South Asia (AESAs)	Bangladesh – Bangladesh Extension Network (BAEN)
Pacific Islands: Pacific Islands Rural Advisory Services (PIRAS)	FIJI – Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC)
South East Asia: APIRAS Asia Pacific: APIRAS	Philippines – Agricultural Training Institute (ATI)

To effectively implement the project and achieve the goals, the project is taking on the country forum approach. The country forum, a virtual organization of Rural Advisory Service providers and stakeholders, in the field of agriculture, serves as a platform for the discussion and articulation of the stakeholders' roles, engagement, issues, and concerns in rural advisory services and agricultural innovation systems. Stakeholders in a CF shall aim for a shared, common agenda for pluralistic, effective, and efficient rural advisory services towards the empowerment of stallholder farmers. (APIRAS, 2017) In the case of the Philippines, the Philippine Extension and Advisory Services Network Inc. (PhilEASNet) has been identified as the country forum.

The figure below shows the key project features to promote innovation and the role of national, regional, and global organizations in the project.

- In the Philippines, the Agricultural Training Institute is the lead implementer of project activities at the country level including:
 - formation or strengthening of the CF
 - support capacity building, knowledge management, and policy dialogue as defined by the project regional work plan as well as the work plan for the country of Philippines
- APIRAS oversees regional coordination, and mostly in charge of the regional knowledge management facet of the project.
- SEARCA, as the overall project implementer, is to provide the overall leadership and management with IFAD and other partner institutions on all matters related to the project.

