The World Vegetable Center Newsletter

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Making agricultural information mobile

One of the most innovative new tools for rural development might be in your pocket. Over the last few years cell phone use has exploded in Africa, with more uses than anyone could have imagined.

Using communication technologies for agricultural development was the theme of the World Conference on Agricultural Information and IT held in Japan last week. More than 200 researchers and practitioners from 45 countries attended.

Over a billion people use the internet, but more than three times as many use cell phones. Shared village cell phone services began in south Asia, and now in Africa up to 80% of rural people in many areas have some access to a phone.

Africa leads the world in using cell phones for development. The M-PESA initiative from Kenya's Safaricom uses cell phones as mobile bank accounts. In East and West Africa, farmers receive agricultural production and marketing information via SMS, and in southern Africa satellite phones powered by $4 rechargeable zinc-air batteries make phone access affordable for the most isolated rural communities.

Access to technology is no longer the problem – the big need is for good content.

Courtesy of CTA

Dr. Ajit Maru from the Global Forum on Agricultural Development said "content can cost nine to ten times more than the communications infrastructure."

Britain's DFID, Switzerland's SDC, and Canada's IDRC and CIDA have active projects to support the development and use of rural internet and cell phone information services.

"We have an important role to provide good online information to support our research and development work," said Dr. Warwick Easdown, Donor Support and IT Manager who represented the Center at the conference. "But a lot of potentially useful agricultural information is not well organized or visible on the web."

A consortium of international agricultural organizations including the CGIAR, GFAR, and FAO launched a global initiative at the conference to make it much easier to find agricultural information in today's more complex web environment.

http://www.e-agriculture.org E-agriculture initiative

http://www.tradenet.biz: African marketing portal to connect farmers with buyers

http://ictupdate.cta.int: Magazine on new uses of ICTs for agricultural development

http://www.ciard.net: Coherence in Information for Agricultural Research for Development

The LIBRARY

...from the Allium SDI Bulletin

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Web Link of the Week: DA Direct provides latest updates on scholarly books

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Fang-chin Chen at fang-chin.chen@worldveg.org

FOCUS: VIETNAM

"Veni, Vidi, Vivat Vietnam"

Last week the DG Dr Dyno Keatinge enjoyed Vietnamese hospitality for the first time in the company of the Regional Director Dr Peter Ooi and our Project Coordinator in Vietnam Dr. Le Thi Thu Huong.

He visited several institutes belonging to the Vietnamese Academy of Agricultural Sciences including FAVRI, FCRI and the Plant Resources Center. He was received at a meeting at The Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development by the Vice Minister His Excellency Dr Bui Ba Bong in which the issue of potential Vietnamese Board Membership was discussed informally. He also was privileged to meet His Excellency Mr. Benjamin Liang who is the representative of the Taipei Economic and Cultural Office in Hanoi.

The Director of FAVRI Dr Trinh Khac Quang and the President of VAAS Professor Nguyen Van Bo at a meeting at FAVRI described the long and close association between Vietnamese institutes of agricultural research and development and AVRDC and this was re-emphasized by Dr Keatinge in his presentation about the work and future plans for development of collaborative activities between VAAS and AVRDC. Dr Keatinge was impressed by what he saw of Vietnamese horticultural activities and was much appreciative of the hospitality (and translational support) he received from both his AVRDC and Vietnamese colleagues.

— Dyno Keatinge/Director General

Professor Nguyen Van Bo President of VAAS, Senior scientists from FAVRI and from Hanoi Agricultural University at the meeting at FAVRI

Dr Trinh Khac Quang Director of FAVRI in their greenhouses

Dr Huong and Dr Keatinge at the Plant Research Center which specializes in indigenous vegetables

FOCUS: AFRICA

Training course on Seed Pathology and Seed Health Technology

The vBSS Seed Health Unit has organized a training course on Seed Pathology and Seed Health Technology in collaboration with the African Seed Health Centre (AFSHC) at Sokoine University of Agriculture in Morogoro, Tanzania. The course will run from 1 to 12 September. The 14 participants taking part are from vBSS NARES partners in Mali, Cameroon, Madagascar and Tanzania, including seed analysts from the seed testing laboratories and plant inspectors from quarantine and phytosanitary services.

Group photo of participants and resource people

Laboratory practical session during the course

The course covers seed pathology and seed testing methodologies. Mr Jan Helsen, vBSS Program Manager, officially opened the course. Professor Robert Mabagala (Director of AFSHC) and a team of experts are facilitating the course in collaboration with Ronia Tanyongana the vBSS Seed Health Specialist and Dr Mathew Abang vBSS Plant Pathologist.

The 5th Innovation Platform held in Antsirabe, Madagascar

Group photo (in front from left): the Liaison Officer, New IP Chair, NAR Breeder, vBSS SME, SEEDFAS Director, Head Seed Testing

The 5th Innovation Platform was held in Antsirabe, Madagascar on 1st August with 18 participants from 9 institutions. The actual progress and the work plan for Madagascar were presented so members could follow up on the RBU progress. It was agreed that the 14 Innovation Platform members are to come from vBSS staff, NARES, regulation bodies, universities, agricultural training institutes, vegetable producers, NGOs and Nutrition Promotion workers.

— Shilpi Saxena

SKETCH

Name: Jaw-Fen Wang

Home: Taiwan

Position: Plant Pathologist; Global Theme Leader-Production

Why do you do what you do?

Since I was young, I have liked to observe plants, nature and people. Biology has been my favorite subject. At university I met a wonderful genetics teacher who stimulated my interest in genetics during long discussions after class. Even today, several of my research topics are related to genetics. I was lucky in meeting several teachers during my student years who continued to inspire me in agriculture research. I learned not only how to be a good scientist, but also the role of a scientist in sharing knowledge with others.

Why do you do it at AVRDC?

I have had a long association with the Center with various positions. The Center provides a good research environment and good opportunities for research collaboration. The excellent team work spirit and practices in the Center are what I have enjoyed the most. I like to share what I know with others and want to be helpful. Here, I have had plenty of chances to do so with farmers, partners and colleagues. As we do projects in various countries, I like to learn more about their history, culture and nature and think how we can be helpful to the local people. You never get bored working here.

What's next?

As the Center continues expanding, we are changing our mode of operations. The Theme Leader's job is new to me, and I am very much looking forward to the "Leadership and Management" course next month to learn how to be more effective and efficient in this new position. One important aspect of the Production Theme is to establish a good linkage between research and development, especially to identify critical research topics from our development projects.

Your favorite AVRDC experience

The experience of visiting a hidden village in the Himalayan foothills in Almora, Uttarakhand, India last May with our survey team is still very vivid. A cluster of traditional stone houses appeared after we walked through dry and bare hills, passed by wild rose bushes and simple terraced plots. The beautiful scenery was a treat for a nature lover like me. Moreover, I admire the spirit of self-satisfaction and calmness of the locals. They may have been materially poor , but absolutely rich in their spirit.

Favorite vegetables

Tomato and sweet potato leaves are vegetables that I and my family would never get tired of enjoying. Tomato can be eaten in so many ways and it fits well in various cuisines. Boiled sweet potato leaves blended with sauces made with sesame oil (those from Shanhua are the best), soy sauce, salt and freshly ground pepper is a wonderful green dish.

CORNUCOPIA

Opening of project office and first training course in the Solomon Islands


Solomon Star

Vegetable centre opens in Honiara


NEWS

Crop soil and pest management workshop underway

The project "Crop Management Package for Sustainable Smallholder Gardens in Solomon Islands" is becoming well known. Both the recent official opening of the Project Office on 25th of August and its training workshop on "Integrated Crop, Soil and Pest Management" from 26-29th of August were well covered in the national media.