



GK3
An Event On The Future

Emerging People
Emerging Markets
Emerging Technologies

3rd Global Knowledge Conference
11th-13th December 2007
Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia



THIRD GLOBAL KNOWLEDGE CONFERENCE

EP15: e-Agriculture – Continuing Dialogue to Action

PART I: KEY FINDINGS

1.1 Lessons Learned

For centuries, farmers have learned from each other. This is not expected to change even with the implementation of ICT policies. So knowledge transfer should occur not only vertically (between policy makers and farmers) but also horizontally (among the farming community). In fact it is the horizontal communication at the grassroots level that sustains agricultural developments in rural communities across the world. Local or indigenous knowledge should be a key feature in ICT considerations for the agricultural community. Also what works best in a particular locale may not necessarily work in another locale. For example the German experience in agricultural development is very different from that in Africa. Individual farmers in Germany are often in competition with each other while farmers in Africa usually work in a collective group sharing information and expertise.

1.2 Visions, Innovations and Trends

The implementation of ICT policies in future should not be only about creating a knowledge chain but also be about creating an empowerment chain. Context (the geographical aspect) will be an important consideration in the implementation of ICT development programs.

1.3 Priorities / Potential for Action

Emphasis should be placed on user generated information. Also, we need to train knowledge workers who can bridge the gap between policy makers and the agriculture community.

1.4 Burning Questions / Questions to be deepened further

1. Will farmers' voices be actually heard? Traditionally, the mainstream media does not pay much attention to rural agricultural communities.
2. What happens to the middlemen who are bypassed in the ICT revolution, when farmers can communicate directly with the market?
3. Accessibility, which is a key concern now, is only one facet of the ICT revolution. Where will e-Agriculture be in 20 years?
4. Can policy makers be held accountable for drawbacks experienced by the agriculture sector with regard to ICT development?

PART II

2.1 Introduction/Preamble of Session

This session combines a moderated panel discussion, with key presentations to provide background on previous work in e-Agriculture. Key issues to be raised for consideration are the unique factors related to enhancing sustainable agricultural development and food security by improving the use of information, communication, and associated technologies in the sector.

2.2 Details of Session/Panel

Event: Parallel Panel Session 2

Date/Time/Venue: Thursday, 13 December 2007, 11.00 – 12.30, Room 306, Level 3

Organiser: Global Knowledge Partnership (GKP)

Panel Speakers:

1. **M.S. Swaminathan**, Founder and Chairman, MS Swaminathan Research Foundation
2. **Aida Opoku-Mensah**, Director, ICT and Science & Technology Division (ISTD), United Nations Economic Commission for Africa
3. **Anton Mangstl**, Director, Knowledge Exchange and Capacity Building Division (KCE), Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
4. **Manish Pandey**, Deputy General Manager, KATALYST
5. **Matt Keller**, Director for Europe, Middle East and Africa, One Laptop Per Child

Moderator:

Anriette Esterhuysen, Executive Director, Association for Progressive Communications

Rapporteurs:

1. **Taufik Rashid**, Coordinator for Language Courses, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia.
2. **Ravichandran Vengadasamy**, Senior Lecturer, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia.

Key Questions:

1. What is the policy dimension of e-Agriculture today, and how might this change in the future?
2. Where are the limitations in the use of ICT in rural development?
3. What are the biggest constraints to the expansion of e-Agriculture?
4. How can organisations join forces in an economically smart way to increase working capacities and efficiency?

2.3 Summary of the session incorporating the Question & Answer Session

Panellist 1: M.S. Swaminathan

ICT is particularly relevant in developing small agriculture ventures. Communication centers (information kiosks) are imperative to reach everyone in the agriculture community. For example, in the Avian bird flu case, farmers should be able to relay information to the relevant authorities immediately. The communication should be two-way and in real time. Timeliness of content is crucial. It is not enough for governments to put money on hardware and infrastructure – more needs to be done for software development. Also, to bridge the digital divide, India is working towards training one million knowledge workers who will be distributed among the agricultural communities.

Panellist 2: Aida Opoku-Mensah

In the African experience, community radios have been the most effective tools in bringing knowledge to the agriculture community. We need to create an environment where innovation can flourish in the agricultural sector. Many opportunities can be created in ICT development among the agricultural communities.

Panellist 3: Anton Mangstl

ICT is an enabling tool in the agriculture sector as it is in other domains. Even governments can be bypassed in agricultural ICT developments, though the governments have a crucial role to play. Anton agrees with Swaminathan that in the process of ICT developments in agriculture, knowledge workers are necessary to keep the rural community informed.

Panellist 4: Manish Pandey

Political will is required in the implementation of ICT policies and infrastructure. Though technology can cause disruptions in the lives of the agricultural community, these are mostly positive. The benefits of technology in agriculture are too great to be ignored. For example a telecenter in a rural farming community could provide assistance in terms of presenting a wide range of choices for farmers.

Panellist 5: Matt Keller

The local content is the most important in information exchange. When everyone is connected with everyone, and information is disseminated quickly, we can help avert crises