

The second phase of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS), will be held in Tunis, Tunisia, on 16-18 November 2005.

During the Summit, the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), will hold a panel discussion on the theme "**Eradicating rural poverty by connecting rural communities**".

I am pleased to invite you to attend IFAD's panel discussion, which will be held from 9 to 11 am on Thursday 17 November, in Meeting Room Béja at the Parc des expositions du Kram (Kram PalExpo).

Information and communication technology (ICT) is a powerful tool for rural development. However, before ICTs can make a meaningful contribution to improving the lives of rural poor people, certain conditions have to be met. These relate to ownership, local content, language, culture and appropriate technology. Access to ICTs becomes important only once these conditions have been met.

We anticipate that new ideas will emerge from the discussion on how to increase the positive impact of ICTs in rural areas of developing countries, and on how to ensure that ICTs can contribute in meaningful, substantive and sustainable ways to the eradication of rural poverty and achievement of the Millennium Development Goals.

The discussion will draw attention to the real-time experience and lessons learned emerging from IFAD's First Mile Project in Tanzania, which is tackling two challenges: access by rural poor people to information and knowledge, and to communication technologies such as mobile phones, the Internet and email; and how they can build relationships, communicate and negotiate with others along the market chain to improve their access to markets. The project is supported by the Government of Switzerland.

The discussion will highlight issues including:

- the importance of relevant local content
- how local people are using and adapting ICTs in innovative ways to their own circumstances and needs
- convergence and complementarity of traditional and new ICTs

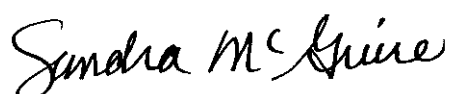
It will do so by bringing in the voices of rural poor people, highlighting their needs, priorities and their hopes for how they can use ICTs to improve their lives. Panelists will be asked to discuss the relevance and implications of the First Mile experiences for Africa, for other regions and globally, building on their own knowledge and experience.

A specialized agency of the United Nations, IFAD is dedicated to eradicating poverty and hunger in the rural areas of developing countries. Through low-interest loans and grants, IFAD develops and finances projects that enable poor rural people to overcome poverty themselves.

Since 1978, IFAD has invested about US\$8.8 billion in more than 695 rural development projects in 115 countries and territories around the world. These projects have enabled over 250 million small farmers, herders, fisherfolk, landless workers, artisans and indigenous peoples to make a better life for themselves and for their families. IFAD's projects help to reduce poverty in some of the world's most remote and fragile areas, and among its poorest and most marginalized people.

On my own behalf and that of IFAD, allow me to voice the hope that our roundtable will be honoured by your presence and participation.

Sincerely yours,



Sandra McGuire
Director of Communication

Panelists

- Cyril Enweze, Vice-President, IFAD
- Richard Gerster, Director, Gerster Consulting
- Nathaniel Katinila, Project Coordinator, Agricultural Marketing Systems Development Programme (AMSDP)
- Clive Lightfoot, Executive Director, International Support Group and President, International Farming Systems Association (IFSA)
- Clare O'Farrell, Communication for Development Officer, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)
- Aida Opoku-Mensah, Officer-in-charge, UN Economic Commission for Africa (ECA)

Agenda

- Opening remarks: Cyril Enweze, Vice-President, IFAD
- Nathaniel Katinila: Agricultural Marketing Systems Development Programme (AMSDP) and conditions on the ground
- Clive Lightfoot: Lessons emerging from the First Mile project
- Richard Gerster: How can use of information and communication technology help eradicate rural poverty: the role of the donor community
- Aida Opoku Mensah: Elements of good policies and strategies to ensure relevant and meaningful use of ICTs in rural areas: the role of governments and the private sector
- Clare O'Farrell: Local appropriation of ICTs and the implications for rural development interventions
- Debate and discussion
- Summing up and closing remarks: Cyril Enweze, Vice-President, IFAD

