



4.10 Bridging the Digital Divide and Increasing Access to Information and Services in Food Systems

1. What, in brief, is the solution?

- Ensure that digital infrastructure is available in rural areas to ensure their connectivity.
- Ensure that the voice of marginalized people and their needs regarding lack of connectivity and enabling infrastructure is reflected in the planning of a comprehensive territorial digital strategy. Workers organizations of women workers, rural workers and informal workers should be included to understand the actual ground realities and issues.
- Ensure socially equitable access to quality digital services for vulnerable communities and marginalized groups (in particular small-scale producers and workers, informal food vendors and caterers, migrants and Indigenous people) and public and private actors interacting with them. The strategy can include a variety of components such as local digital platforms to connect consumers and caterers (in particular urban) to local farmers, and to enhance their right to health, safety and environment; access of small-scale producers and workers to data and data analytics (including on markets and weather); provision of digital extension services and services for inclusive finance. Complemented by targeted information and communication and appropriate training and support.
- The strategy will be closely associated with local policies related to social protection, poverty alleviation and livelihoods support as well as crisis management initiatives.
- The development and implementation of the strategy will require a multi-level coalition of government sectors (agriculture, education, social protection, health, labour), private sector companies, training institutions, international entities and civil society (including non-governmental organizations), investment in digital skills development and development of appropriate products.

2. What was/were the source(s) from which this solution emerged?

Private Sector Mechanism, UN HABITAT, IFAD

3. What problem is it trying to address within food systems?

Addressing multidimensional poverty and promoting equitable livelihoods in both rural and urban areas is a critical dimension of food systems transformation. Governments and all stakeholders must tackle the varying layers of disadvantages faced by rural and urban poor populations, including chronic poverty and hunger, lack of access to health care, lack of infrastructure, schools and telecommunications connectivity and lack of information on resilient and sustainable food and agriculture practices in the efforts towards sustainable livelihoods and effective consumer-producer partnerships.

The whole world is in the middle of a digital revolution. Access to information and communications technologies (ICTs) in both urban and rural areas is growing rapidly. Digital approaches can fundamentally change access to and provision of all the above services. But progress is uneven in geographic and socio-economic terms and in many areas, women and youth have less access to smartphones and digital services.

The COVID-19 pandemic brought in the weaknesses of present food systems and highlighted the need for access to technology and digital connectivity for all, in particular the rural and urban poor, both as consumers (e-commerce, teleworking, online learning, dealing with social distancing, etc.) and as producers/workers. A wide strategic response to the crisis that encompasses practically every aspect related to the safety and livelihoods of local populations, such as health, social protection and solidarity



networks, education, shock resilience, economic empowerment, and many more will contribute to more equitable livelihoods.

4. Why is addressing that problem important for achieving the goal of your working group?

Technology and innovation from e-enterprises will help institutions and marginalized population groups by putting information, services and finance at their fingertips to strengthen their livelihoods and quality of life.

5. How can this solution address that problem (theory of change)?

Bridging the digital divide is essential to address local socio-economic inequalities and ensure functional urban-rural linkages for inclusive territorial development. This cannot be limited to digitalization of value chains.

6. Why does this solution align to the definition and criteria for a ‘game changing solution’ developed by the Summit?

Ensuring digital access will contribute to all action tracks and empower marginalized population groups in both rural and urban areas, facilitating exchange of information and organization, and access to finance, investments, infrastructure, markets, e-commerce and social services. Strengthening access across the food system will have a quantifiable impact in the opportunities created, livelihoods generated and investments created. Bridging the urban-rural digital divide will contribute to rebalancing territorial development by generating and strengthening economic and social opportunities in small and intermediary cities and neighboring rural areas. The reverse migration (away from cities) generated by the COVID-19 crisis could provide an opportunity to revisit local food systems.

7. Existing evidence supporting the argument that this solution will work, or at least achieve the initial outcomes?

At the WEF 2021 an alliance was launched the EDISON alliance . “The EDISON Alliance cultivates meaningful partnerships between leaders in government and industry during a multi-year journey to enhance the case for rapid digital development. We do this by building a “network of networks” to identify and scale new and existing strategies, projects and initiatives leveraging connectivity as a key lever across the Sustainable Development Goals.” It would be important to link with that and ensure complementarity to avoid duplication of efforts.

8. What is the current and/or likely political support for this idea?

Most developing countries have digital strategies and are pursuing an agenda for digitalization so it is likely to garner a lot of political support.

9. Are there certain contexts for which this solution is particularly well suited, or, not well-suited.

This initiative can be applied globally. While progress in digital access is uneven among countries, lack of access to digital connectivity is closely associated with socio-economic disparities and/or geographical remoteness.