

# Harnessing ICTs among farm households through interactive learning and competence building

Perspectives from India and China

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## I Background

During the recent past there has been frequent discussion in academia on the role of information and communications technology (ICT) to solve the problem of information asymmetry and increase the competitiveness of different sectors. It is argued that the rise of radio, television, mobile phones, the internet and the development of many means of mass communication have reduced the cost of access to all kinds of information that facilitates the spread of codified knowledge around the whole economic system (Capasso and Correa, 2010). The relevance of ICT for a particular sector originates from two perspectives: information provider and faster communication. Eggleston et al. (2002) provided a framework for analysing the role of ICT in development process through the information flow and efficient functioning of market. They discussed that the efficient functioning of market can only be ensured through the free flow of information from consumer to the producer and vice versa. Both consumer and producer face the coordination problem which results in either overproduction or underproduction in the market. Further, they argued that this coordination problem becomes all the more acute in the agriculture-based rural economy as there are virtually no sources of information regarding market price and other production-related information in the agricultural sector. To earn a profit from their farms, farmers need information at various stages. They need information on agricultural technology or on farm input, information on post-harvesting as well as information on market price (Ibid., 2002). Information on farm input (high-yielding varieties of seeds, fertilisers, pesticides and others) could boost agricultural production and reduce production costs while information on prices might enable farmers to sell their product at appropriate prices. That apart, awareness about the relative price of various crops helps farmers to make decisions on cropping patterns because in a poor rural economy, sluggish flow of information on agricultural technology often results in a wrong mixture of crops (Ibid., 2002). Moreover, all these information could also be helpful in reducing the role of middlemen. Though the role of middlemen