

Using ICT to Strengthen Farm Extension Services: An Update

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Outline

1. The Problem
2. Opportunities
3. Some ICT Options
4. Key ICT Challenges
5. A Few Promising Examples
6. A Few Questions



1. The Problem

Farm extension services (FES) help farmers know

- what and when to plant
- how to care for their plants from seed to post-harvest
- How to handle fertilizers, pests, more.

Extension services work: smallholder farmers' productivity increases.



The 2-Pronged Problem

Too few farmers have access to the extension services they need.

Extension workers cannot easily tap all the information available to help farmers.

2. Opportunities

Opportunities related to AG development

- Most AG development projects (including FTF) include some farm extension services.
- Donors are providing funds to improve FES.
- Some governments are modernizing their FES.
- Large buyers, processors know value of providing FES.

Opportunities related to ICT

- Access to mobile networks *especially* is expanding dramatically in developing countries –and the poor use cell phones.
- Mobile networks now handle voice and data applications.
- Mobile network operators (MNOs) are competing hard for market share, to reduce churn.

Farm extension services have always used ICT as one “channel” – the opportunities have just dramatically expanded.

3. Some ICT Options

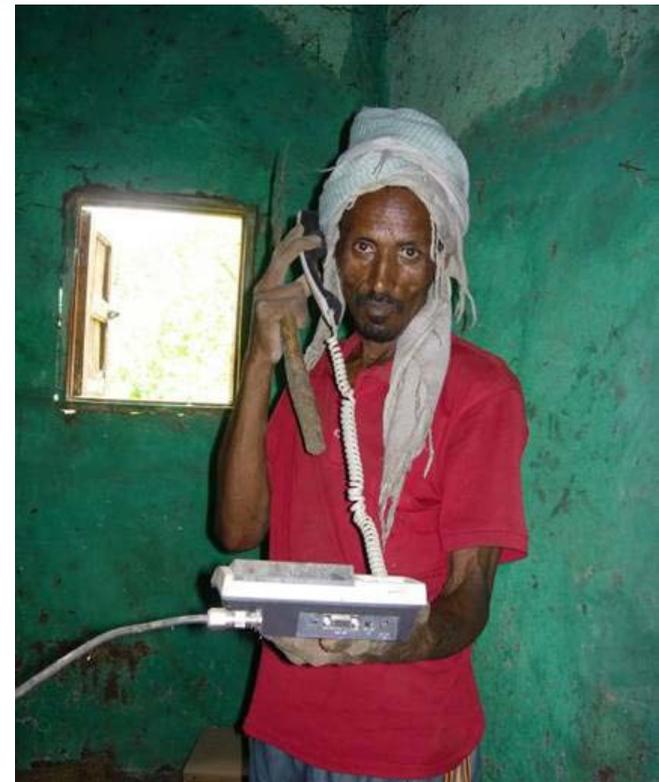
ICT includes

- Mobile networks
- Radio
- Video (stand-alone)
- Plethora of “devices”
- GIS
- Digital cameras
- Internet

And *combinations* of all of these ICT-enabled channels with more traditional ones:

- Face to face training
- Demo plots, more

Fast feedback loop from farmer is unprecedented – “voice of the farmer”



3. Some ICT Options, Cont'd.

More ICT-enabled options

- Voice, text, data
- “Push” or “pull” or both
- Mediated or direct access
- Combine with non-AG apps
- Business models:
 - Sponsored (MNO, big buyer...)
 - Farmers pay (collectively, individually; pay as you go, subscriptions?)
 - Government pays
 - More



4. Key ICT Challenges

How to match “channel” with best learning?

How best to combine?

How to time for greatest impact?

Reaching right information fast

Digitizing *so much* information

Localizing

Scaling: getting beyond “success story”

The lure of “cool” devices

Using or adapting available platforms, applications, service providers

Leveraging governments’ FES



***Affordable access:* telecom enabling environment,
use of telecom universal service funds**

5. A Few Promising Examples

Reuters Market Lite

Grameen CKW

Digital Green

Mali Shambani

Nokia Life Tools

eChoupal

Google Farmer's Friend

Mali community radio

Kenya Farmer's Helpline

IFFCO Kisan Sanchar Limited (IKSL)

- Across USAID projects
- Many to choose from – and most not “packaged” for presentation
- Danger of “development legends”
- Many combine FES with other services (e.g., market prices)
- “Jury still out” on most



5. A Few Promising Examples, *Cont'd.*



Reuters Market Lite (RML)

Where: India (with exploration in sub-Saharan Africa)

How it works: Provides tips on farming, market prices, weather, more via SMS personalized by crop, region, language. Has some 300 full-time content specialists with news, info on 250 crop types.

Who Pays: Farmers subscribe; Thomson Reuters operates. Not yet breaking even.

Scale: over 200,000 farmers subscribe in 15,000 villages in 12 states

Impact: 1 study found benefits from market prices, weather, farm info; second study now underway (IFPRI and Oxford) with control group

Several types of information combined

No donor funding

Farmers pay

5. A Few Promising Examples, *Cont'd.*

Grameen Community Knowledge Workers (CKWs)

Where: Uganda

How it works: Trusted (paid) CKWs disseminate AG advice (as well as weather, prices) and collect AG-related info via Android phones.

Who Pays: Grants to Grameen AppLab from MTN-Uganda; Gates Foundation; Earns fees for data collection by same CKWs; experimenting with fees from farmers.

Scale: Some 200 CKWs each serving 500-750 households

Impact: Pilot study showed farmers increased productivity, incomes; plans call for impact assessment over next 12-18 months.



Several types of information combined

Promising business model

Taps trusted community member



Digital Green

Where: India (exploring options in sub-Saharan Africa)

How it works: NGO helps farmers produce modularized videos of farmers demonstrating improved farming practices; videos shown in villages in gathering places via TV/DVD. Feedback loop via IVR (phone).

Who Pays: Developed with funding from Microsoft; Gates Foundation providing 3 year grant. Farmers subscribe as a part of membership in farmer orgs. Not sustainable based on subscription fees alone. **Scale:** so far 600 villages with 42,000 farmers

Impact: Microsoft study showed 10 times more cost effective than traditional approaches with AG extension workers; adoption of better practices increased 7 fold. Larger scale control trial now under way.

Uses low end video equipment well, involving farmers.
Builds in feedback loop from farmers; uses hub/spoke approach to grow.
Not self-sustaining but on-going subsidies available from gov't, others? 11

6. A Few Questions



1. Are USAID FTF projects:
 - Taking advantage of these and other promising ICT-enabled approaches where there is a good fit?
 - Using other scalable, effective approaches other FTF projects could adapt?
2. What is the best fit between traditional delivery channels and ICT-enabled channels – for different types of learning, advice?
3. Similarly, how can ICT-enabled approaches and “channels” best be combined?
4. What is impact of these and other ICT-enabled approaches – *and effectiveness compared to other approaches?*
5. How can public-private partnerships be used well?

Discussion

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