



How to boost agricultural productivity using sustainable extension methods

CSIF 002

For agriculture to meet its income potential for both SHFs and the economy, improved farming practices must be adopted from pre-planting to post-harvest operations. To enable this, there is an urgent need to make agricultural information available to SHFs. This role is usually undertaken by extension workers; however, the current ratio of extension workers to farmers in Nigeria is about 1: 10,000. This is about 8 to 10 times less effective than the World Bank recommendation of between 1:800 or 1:1000 extension worker to farmer ratio. BIF therefore saw the need to explore other more scalable and sustainable means of getting the required information to farmers.

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BIF INTERVENTION & SUCCESSES

BIF research revealed that over 80% of farmers in rural areas have access to and listen to radio and could therefore be a suitable medium to disseminate agricultural information. However, most radio programmes had become unresponsive to modern farmer challenges with information obsolete or information being received beyond its useful time. The constraints were around: content, format, timing and frequency of agriculture radio programmes. Such programmes had suffered low listenership and were closed or shutting down. Sponsorship was also poor and suffered the same fate as the radio programmes with potential deep pocket sponsors unaware of or uninterested in agriculture programmes.

To overcome these issues, BIF partnered with market actors and stakeholders to launch sustainable agriculture programmes. This intervention aimed to ensure information providers can produce programmes that addressed the identified needs of farmers. The value to SHFs is the availability of timely and useful agricultural information over the radio which would spur them to pay for products and services advertised on the radio programmes and thus ensure the sustainability of such programmes. The growth of such programming will enable SHFs to improve their productivity and income by getting sufficient and timely information on: the best agronomical practices to adopt; the crop specifications needed by industrial processors; weather forecasts; methods for minimising post-harvest losses; best practice methods of post-harvest processing; crop storage opportunities; as well as alternative market outlets, and access to credit.

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MARKET ANALYSIS & INTERVENTION OPPORTUNITIES

With BIF employing a market systems intervention approach, results are typically seen beyond the lifespan of the project. While some interventions will continue to deliver above average outputs without catalytic injection, others will require further assistance to grow and achieve some level of sustainability and ownership. BIF's activities within this market have significant potential to achieve national scale. Already the success of the agriculture radio programming in 7 states, has encouraged Sterling Bank and FRCN to discuss the possibility of expanding their programming to all 36 states in the country. Development programmes can achieve a significant impact by partnering with FRCN to support them with this scale-up ambition.

As with other programming, viable, timely and interesting content for radio is key to sustain listenership and subsequently advertisements. As the BIF interventions have shown, sponsorship will find content, especially where the content has been packaged more as lifestyle programs encompassing agricultural extension information. There is therefore an opportunity for development partners to intervene in this market to improve outcomes for SHFs by: strengthening content development for agriculture radio programmes; increasing the research capacity of different stakeholders in the market; understanding the incentives of banks like Sterling to brand agricultural extension programs and supporting market actors to package that for marketing to other potential sponsors with an eye on replication and sustainability.

A key gap in the Nigerian media is the lack of comprehensive broadcast industry audience measurement data that is accepted by all players in the sector. The available audience measurement data does not cover the huge rural population, who rely heavily on radio for information. Development programmes could therefore build on BIF's work to improve the capacity of audience research firms to survey the rural market.

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