Chapter 3
A Synopsis of Information Communication Technologies Applications in Agro–Based Livelihoods in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the applications of information communication technologies in agro-based livelihoods in Nigeria. A multipurpose community information access point was established at a pilot level in Ago-Are, Oyo State, Nigeria. The center equipped with basic ICT infrastructures including Internet connectivity made available through a VSAT, provided timely solutions to the basic problems of farmers' lack of information on agriculture, lack of access to inputs and output markets, and lack of access to some basic but relatively expensive equipment. The services include the Answering Farmer's Needs-a private-public collaborative project involving several organizations. There is also the Fantsuam Foundation, a not-for-profit organization that works with farmers in rural communities in Northern Nigeria with an on-going micro-credit project aimed at alleviating poverty among rural women. The paper highlights the synergistic use and challenges for each of these projects and proffers suggestions for the adoption and adaptation in different parts of the world.

INTRODUCTION

This paper examines the applications of information communication technologies in agro-based livelihoods in Nigeria. This is based on the fact that the overwhelming breakthrough in the information communication technology has lent use of these technologies in agriculture. Along the production chain, all crops and livestock production systems are users of the information technology. Information is widely acknowledged as one of the critical factors of production decisions and farmers' demand for information has increased in recent years due to greater market instability, more complex production technologies among others. As a means of transferring agricultural technologies to practice, several methods have been adopted in Nigeria. These practices include the Answering Farmer's Needs in Nigeria - a private-public collaborative project involving several organizations namely Commonwealth of Learning (COL), International Institute of Tropical Agriculture; (IITA), Ibadan, Total Development International Foundation (TODEV), and Oke-Ogun Community Development Network. A multipurpose community information access point was established at a pilot level in Ago-Are, Oyo State, Nigeria. The center equipped with basic ICT infrastructures including internet connectivity made available through a VSAT provided timely solutions to the basic problems of farmers' lack of information on agriculture, lack of access to inputs and output markets, and lack of access to some basic but relatively expensive equipment (Adewale, 2007; Adekoya, 2006)

Fantsuam Foundation, a not-for-profit organization, works with farmers in rural communities in Northern Nigeria with an on-going micro-credit project aimed at alleviating poverty among rural women, Health Education, Promotion of the use of solar stoves, Promotion of Rainwater Harvesting, Literacy and Numeracy programs for adults and the Staging Post' project. The Staging Post provides relevant health information and re-training

for frontline health workers in rural clinics and health centers. The internet is our most prolific source of health information at the moment, which is downloaded on discs for translation, re-phrasing and editing to adapt the information for health workers.

Mobile Phones in Sustainable Fisheries Livelihoods Programme (SFLP)

In April 2006, representatives of fishing cooperative unions on the Lake Chad basin in Nigeria contacted local mobile phone operators inviting them to visit the fishing communities with a view to providing mobile coverage to the area. Only one of the companies responded and after a field visit it has begun installing the necessary equipment in Baga to provide coverage within a radius of 34 kilometres thus benefiting 20 fishing communities. The cooperative unions trained their members in the use of the phones and set up a microcredit scheme to purchase the phones. Pilot Fishnet Initiative (FNI): A model information network that provided data on fish production techniques and methods was established by the Ilaje local government area of Ondo State in Nigeria. It aims to network all fishermen in the administrative area. Information on marketing and fish distribution was disseminated through traditional village meetings; TV; leaflets; radio; posters and etc. It was under the authority of chairmen of fisher cooperative groups (FAO, 2009).

Nigeria Agriculture Information Services

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID), in partnership with the MTN telecommunications company, has launched Nigeria Agriculture Information Services (NAMIN) to boost commodity trade in Nigeria as the introduction of internet services would serve as a veritable tool to increase access to information

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