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## Importance of Mobile Technology in Food and Agribusiness Value Chains: Electronically Linking Farmers with Markets

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### Abstract

This project focuses on assessing the requirements for electronically linking rural farmers in Ethiopia, Rwanda and Bangladesh. Rural farmers are limited in their ability to successfully market products by a lack of market knowledge. The availability of inexpensive cell phones and increased use of SMS platforms is changing the nature of market communication. The opportunities for small rural farmers to improve market price and to identify new markets is now possible.

Using “Concept Mapping” process researchers were able to determine what factors were most important in helping rural farmers access markets. Concept Mapping is a process that allows information to be collected from a variety of stakeholders and to be organised using sophisticated statistical analysis that produces a visual representation that captures common trends. The process requires a “prompt statement” that will generate a single idea to complete the thought. The “prompt statement” used was “I would be much better able to market and distribute my products if...” Statements were gathered through interviews in community settings and at formal group meetings. Participants responded to this prompt and generated between eighty and ninety statements for each of the three countries. These statements were rated by participants on two five-point scales (importance and feasibility) and then analysed using the Concept Mapping program. Participants were producers, retailers, middlemen, extension agents and agribusiness representatives.

The results of this study can be examined from three perspectives. First, there is a high degree of similarity in the features that farmers consider most desirable. Secondly, there are common issues around the type of market information that farmer’s desire. Lastly, there are contextual issues; many farmers wanted to use technology as a means of organising themselves into coops, and influence policy in regard to quality and price of storage, pesticides, seeds and equipment.

The goal of this project is to offer specific recommendations that will lead to the development of cell phone platform technologies that will assist local farmers in maximising profits and accessing markets. With USAID funding this project was conducted in Rwanda, Ethiopia and Bangladesh but provides insight to issues common among all developing countries.

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