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A Mechanism to Discover Hidden Markets and to Improve Information Flow Towards Food Producers: A Case of Kiambu District, Kenya

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Abstract

Food insecurity in many regions in Kenya is mainly attributed to changes in rainfall patterns, lack of markets to sell agricultural produce from regions with surplus and poor infrastructure to distribute to regions facing deficits. Small scale farmers are in desperate need of markets to sell their produce at a good price. They require information on credit and input markets. This paper discusses the methodologies to improve farmers' access to these markets and enhance access to relevant information that they may find useful in making decisions. The study argues that providing a platform for farmers to interact and transact business directly with buyers, sellers, researchers and other relevant stakeholders in agribusiness would provide market for the farmers. This interaction may facilitate exchange and dissemination of update information on changes in the markets and, changes in consumer needs and taste. Many studies have shown that networking among individual or groups either in social or professional networks may help in development of the members. This paper argues that providing farmers and agricultural extension agents with access to current information and communication technologies (ICT) could be instrumental in finding new markets for the farmers and in dissemination of relevant information. By facilitating the agricultural extension agents to have access to internet, mobile phone and rural radio, hidden markets can be discovered and new information and technology can reach the farmers before they become obsolete. Many businesses have grown through advertising their products online. A national website managed by extension agents can help farmers advertise their produce so that anyone willing to buy can contact the farmer directly. Agricultural based businesses can also advertise their products in the website. Consumers can use the website to buy fresh produce directly from the farmers. Although internet is not available to most households in Kenya, agricultural extension agents can post information of buyers and sellers in village boards and in the market place. This paper discusses how ICT can be implemental in finding new markets and reducing food insecurity in Kenya

Keywords: Extension, food insecurity, ICT, Kenya