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“Bridging the gap between increasing knowledge and decreasing resources”

Agri-Information on Mobile Platforms as a Tool to Bridge Rural-Urban Markets for Hill Farmers in Uttarakhand

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Abstract

Inadequate information, in terms of relevance and timeliness, is a key hindrance in the decision making of small holder farmers. Access to information is even more critical in a hill state like Uttarakhand, India where 75 % population depends on agriculture despite small land holding. Modern agriculture is knowledge intensive which requires timely and reliable information on different aspects and stages of crop cycle including post harvest and market information. Timely information can help in efficient decision making leading to improved returns to the small holder farmers. Multiple initiatives using various media including television, radio, magazines, bulletins, call centres etc have been used by various agencies however the access to these services are found to be still inadequate in Uttarakhand Hills. With high penetration of mobiles phones (82 %) in rural households. Mobile platform presents an opportunity to use it for efficient dissemination of agricultural information. GIZ, in partnership with various stakeholders and Reuters Market Light as service provider, facilitated the agriculture information dissemination through SMS in Uttarakhand on a pilot scale, with an overall aim of addressing the information gaps of small and marginal hill farmers as a part of its Regional Economic Development (RED) Programme. This paper discusses the impacts of this pilot initiative, from the results of a study conducted for impact assessment after one year of intervention. The methodology included FGD, structured and semi structured interviews. Study sample consisted of 10 % of the beneficiaries and non beneficiaries from 5 districts of Kumaon & Garhwal. The information requirements of farmers (both subscribers and non-subscribers) were found to be the weather forecast, market price, seeds, Government schemes and crop advisory, respectively in the order of priority. Mobile SMS was rated as the best source of information, helping farmers gain timely market information from and adopting better agricultural practices. Few cases reported 5–10 % increase in the market value of their produce. The preference for this service was found to be aligned with specific crop cycles. Further customisation of content, improvement in customer care services and training for farmers are few recommendations

Keywords: Agri-information, decisions making, distress sale , SMS service, Uttarakhand