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“Filling gaps and removing traps
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Providing Smallholder Farmers with Weather-Related Information to Build their Resilience to Climate Variability: A Qualitative Exploration

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Abstract

This paper is aimed at exploring possible impact pathways of a hypothetical intervention which consists in providing smallholder farmers with weather-related information. The study used a qualitative approach based on focus group discussions with smallholder farmers and agricultural extension officers to build a Theory of Change (ToC) of the intervention of interest. The field work was conducted in three villages of the municipal area of Bembèrèkè in North Benin (West Africa). The results suggested that providing smallholder farmers with weather-related information has the potential to help them in taking informed production decisions. Possible decisions include the right timing of key activities such as planting or sowing, application of inputs (e.g. fertilisers, herbicides and insecticides), etc. Through informed production decisions, smallholder farmers can better allocate their production resources and record higher yield and income. The ultimate impact is that smallholder farmers will have better life—livelihoods. There is several weather-related information that can be potentially useful for smallholder farmers. There are also several dissemination channels, some based on the social network of the community and others on Information, Communication and Technology (ICT) tools that can be used. Each channel has some strengths and weakness and the best approach would probably depend on the settings of the intervention area. Though the expected impact is straight forward, a number of assumptions that needs to be in place for an impactful intervention. For instance, weather-related information needs to be accurate, available in a timely manner and easy to use (read and interpret). Furthermore, the described possible impact pathways need to be tested rigorously through policy-oriented research.

Keywords: Benin, impact pathways, theory of change, weather-related information