

MULTI-FUNDER INITIATIVE

Canadian International Food Security Research Fund (CIFS RF)

Using radio and cell phones to speed adoption of better farming practices in Ghana

Radio broadcasts, text messaging, and phone apps are providing more farmers with the information and market linkages needed to adopt technologies that increase their productivity and improve nutrition in their communities. Trials throughout Africa demonstrated these efforts were most effective when led by the private sector. The results included increased yields, higher incomes, and greater adoption of good farming practices. The model will be further refined in Ghana for scale up in that country and beyond.

Investing in innovation to boost productivity

Smallholder producers, mostly poor farmers and rural women, manage over 70% of Ghana's farms but achieve only half of potential yields. Boosting productivity and incomes depends on farmers' knowledge and adoption of improved and proven technologies. Yet, existing agricultural extension systems are dysfunctional and economically unviable.

Experts in Canada and Ghana developed and tested a cost-effective solution designed to share readily understandable and actionable information. It uses information and communication technologies (ICTs)—notably mobile phones and radio campaigns—to rapidly connect farmers to trusted information, resources, markets, and financial services.

The model includes a greater role for the private sector, including agricultural professionals who source produce for large agribusinesses. A trial in Uganda found that mobile-enabled extension agents helped increase crop sales by 22%. In Kenya, sales jumped 56% when the agents connected farmers to credit using ICTs.

Firming up the business case

Researchers will work with industry partners to establish the conditions for scaling up, profitability, and long-term sustainability of a private-sector led ICT-enabled extension service in Ghana. They will also look at adapting the models to the nutrition and health sectors.

The team will develop commercially viable ICT solutions that would be owned, taken to scale, and sustained by private businesses.

The project supports the Government of Ghana's food security and agricultural policies by demonstrating how ICT-enabled extension systems can accelerate adoption of innovations and improve inefficiencies in the agribusiness supply chain.

Expected results

- Increased yields by an estimated 50% for 60,000 female and male farmers, growing to 120,000 households within five years
- Validated profitable business model for sustaining business-owned ICT-based extension services at scale
- Improved access to markets through established supply chains and reduced price volatility for commodities
- Strengthened the capacity of three radio stations to develop, produce, and broadcast interactive radio campaigns

LEAD RESEARCHERS

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