

Cell-Phone Based Agro-Advisory Services for Horticulture Farmers in South Asia

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Problem

- ❖ In developing countries, there are many farmers located in many locations (some more remote than others) and have many questions!
- ❖ Agricultural experts (extension workers) can't visit them – infrastructure and cost limitations are prohibitive.

Solution

Bring farmer and his farm to the experts – not the experts to farmer!

How?

Recent advances in information and communications technology (ICT) and rapid uptake of cell-phones by millions of farmers provide excellent opportunities for delivering real-time information to farmers in rural areas without the need for costly infrastructure.

About this project

Taking advantage of the ICT, Michigan State University (MSU), in partnership with the International Horticulture Innovation and Training Center (IHITC) in India, has initiated a one year pilot project funded by the USAID supported Horticulture CRSP program to explore and test the cost-effectiveness of a cell-phone-mediated personalized advisory service for growers cultivating horticulture crops in poly-houses, shade-nets and open fields. Through public-private partnership, the Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) is providing technological support for the implementation of a model of "Mobile-Agro-Advisory-System" (MAAS) called mKrishi.

In addition to mKrishi, there are many other public and private sector initiatives in India that are taking advantage of the new ICT technology (especially, cell phones) to provide information and advisory services to farmers. These include—Reuters Market Light (RML), IFFCO Kisan Sanchar Limited-Value Added Services (IKSL-VAS), and Kisan Call Center (a nationally implemented phone-based agro-advisory service by the Government of India). IHITC is interested in expanding collaboration with other private sector partners (e.g., RML and IKSL-VAS) to bring these services specifically targeted to horticulture farmers in Rajasthan.

Objectives

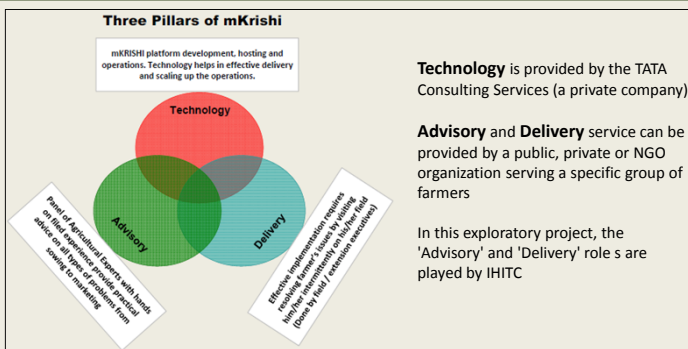
- ❖ The objectives of this exploratory project are to:
- ❖ Validate a 'proof of concept' of an extension model based on public-private sector partnerships and ICT-based technology;
- ❖ Derive lessons on the efficiency, cost effectiveness, benefits, and scalability of personalized advisory services specifically targeted to horticulture farmers
- ❖ Explore opportunities to apply a cell-phone based agro-advisory model for horticulture growers in other parts of India, Nepal and Sri Lanka

Methodology

- ❖ Design and implement mKrishi on a pilot-scale using rigorous methods of impact evaluation which involves comparing short-term outcomes for registered and unregistered farmers before and after the intervention
- ❖ Conduct surveys of farmers that use other models of cell-phone based agro-advisory services (RML and IFFCO-IKSL-VAS) to assess the costs and benefits of these two programs from the perspective of the users of these services.
- ❖ Analyze survey data and derive lessons for scaling up MAAS

Description of mKrishi

The Concept



Features

- mKRISHI application has been tested on BREW and J2Me technology. It can be used with any service providers with GPRS enabled handsets
- Specific requirements: Mobile handset with camera facility to capture the photograph and activation of GPRS with service providers
- Cost to the farmer: Rs. 1000/year (~ \$22) for mKrishi service plus service fee charged by the mobile service provider to use MMS (Rs 0.1 - 0.3 per MMS)

Application

