



**BRIEFING
NOTE 19
ON:**

**Rural Knowledge Management
Strategies: Lessons and Challenges**

Rural Knowledge Management Pays Off

Nearly two million dollars was the reported increase in turn over from the four thousand or so small farmers in seven districts in Tanzania in just one season¹. For the individual farm household this meant an income rise from fifty percent to, in some cases, as much as three hundred percent. It is not only the farmers engaged in Linked Local Learning that have got higher incomes. Other market intermediaries, like Dodoma transport and Mohamed Enterprises in Tanzania for instance, have also increased their profits. LLL is something that works to address the critical issue of poverty reduction. The performance indicators we see the changes occurring in are: production levels, commodity ranges, farm income, farmer sale prices, and number of deals improving market access.

Reported Increase of Turnover of AMSDP² District Core-Group Customers in Tanzania August 2005 to March 2006

District	Million TSH
Mbozi	186.0
Mbinga	8.51
Hai	80.3
Songea	1,169.1
Mbeya	734.1
Arumeru	0.565
Nkasi	1.02
Total of Districts =	2,179.6
<i>(exchange rate 1\$ = 1,200Tsh)</i> USD =	1,816,329

LLL has proven itself to be a useful tool for innovation in the areas of demand driven service provision for agricultural production, marketing and enterprise

¹ *Linking Local Learners for Improved Market Linkages. Final Report of First Mile Project, Tanzania. AMSDP. Government of Tanzania. April 2006.*

² *Agricultural Marketing Systems Development Programme of the Government of Tanzania supported by IFAD*

development. It helps local learners innovate solutions to problems and disseminate them. LLL's online knowledge pool develops the knowledge assets of small farmers, local service providers and key players in market chains. New comers appreciate avoiding making the same mistakes and finding peers to learn how to improve their access to markets. New comers appreciate the innovative ways to gain access to ICT's: the info-mediaries, the 'shushus', the mobile phone rents, and the village billboards. Knowledge sharing occurs naturally, systematically and continuously with the support of up-to-date learning tools and mentoring at local, national and international levels.

One farmer commented that: "each comment sent in is equal as it carries just the idea and the name of the contributor – it makes us all equal". LLL empowers local learners because they set the learning agenda in their face to face assessment workshops. LLL pools locally relevant knowledge emerging from exchanges of tacit 'know-how' between peers whether they are local farmers or local service providers. Valuing know how and innovative capacity empowers the local inventor.

LLL's learning teams link together small farmers, local service providers, government officials and market chain intermediaries to improve small farmer access to markets. Online peer exchanges are integrated with face-to-face action learning process that brings together producers and key players in market chains to vision improved market chains that benefit all parties. Developing market chains characterized by fair trade, price discovery, transparency and risk sharing. Knowledge consolidation of local field experiences occurs through local stories, interviews with practitioners and policy briefs. These are made available to all through a link on website www.linkinglearners.net.



Warehouse Receipt System in Operation

Lessons from Experience

From this pilot and our earlier trials we have learned that knowledge management is communication between learners that keeps 'know-how' alive by sharing and innovating for their own use. It is a continuous cycling of the tacit knowledge of peer to peer exchange and written explicit knowledge of experiences and practice. However, our short experience proves developing commodity chains is much more knowledge intensive and communication intensive, or connectivity demanding, than we expected. One key to success that we have learned in knowledge utilization is the maintenance of an unbreakable link between the idea or 'know-how' and the person who knows it. This allows other learners to contact the right person to re-invent how to do it for themselves in their own unique circumstances. We have also learned the vital importance of mentoring and technical back-up for quality control and links to wider knowledge networks. Perhaps the biggest mistake we have learned from was that we did not properly include radio in the communication triangle of mobile phones – internet – radio. We have learned that this triangle could provide significant multiplier effects. Commercial radio and local service companies operating the triangle we now see as a sustainable way to continue and expand the knowledge assets of small farmers for increasing income through better access to markets.



Using ICT to share experiences

Challenges Ahead

The future challenge is to sustain the flow of benefits to small farmers and scaling up services to reach many more small farmers. Indeed, the demands we have picked up from farmers, service providers and managers is for sustainability of benefits through support to the commercialization of marketing services in the rural districts. Our concern here is that small district level business will need a strong national back-up company to support them. Where concerns remain about commercial viability of services that poor people need, then this public interest can be taken care of through private-public partnerships with these rural service companies and/or through demand-side subsidies so the needy can afford the fully commercial services they need. Such a back-up company would also provide the quality control function which is critical to providing innovative and cutting edge services focussed on the vital issues confronting small farmers in their attempts to increase incomes.

Perhaps then the greatest challenge facing us all is how public institutions can nurture the development of private enterprises that will take over to sustain and scale up the benefit flows to small farmers. A challenge that has to be met recognizing the current climate of distrust and miss information between public and private sectors. Even though policies have changed old attitudes that "the government provides" as opposed to the government ensuring a fair and conducive environment for doing business still survive in many remote rural districts. Has not this pilot project shown us that the time has come for some experiments in private-public partnerships on knowledge management services for small farmer development?

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