

CASE STUDY: ACCESS AGRICULTURE

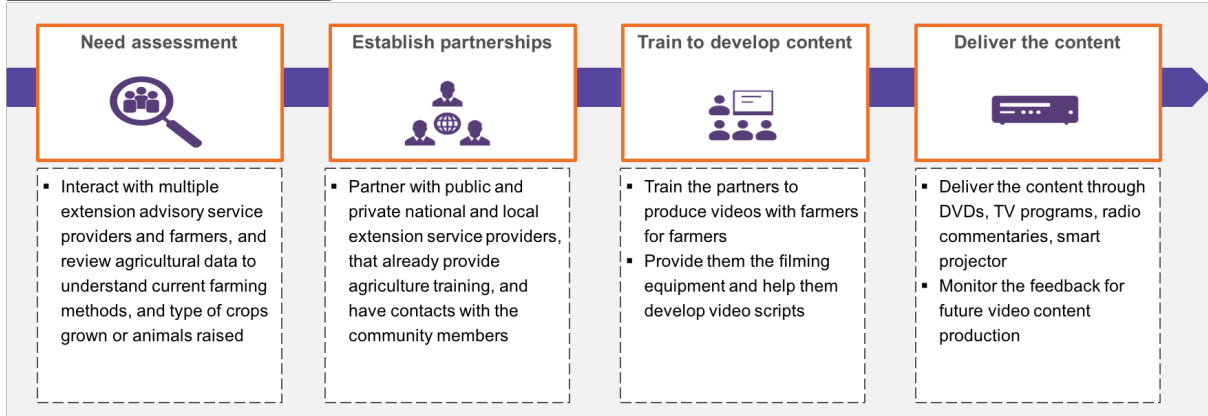


AccessAgriculture
www.accessagriculture.org

Founding year: 2012
HQ: Kenya
Countries of operation : Bangladesh, Benin, Ghana, India, Kenya, Malawi, Mali, Tanzania, Uganda; and videos used in over 100 countries
Orientation: INGO
Employees: 13
Turnover: USD 2 million

Videos are becoming increasingly popular among farmers. They are based on the concept that a farmer always looks over their fence to their neighbor's field to check what s/he can learn. In Africa where many households lack electricity or cannot afford the equipment to watch videos, many farmers are missing out on this great medium. There are now projectors with rechargeable batteries which can be used to screen farmer-to-farmer videos. With increasing mobile phone density, some farmers even watch the videos on their mobile phones.

Access Agriculture is an international NGO that works across all developing countries to enable the exchange of and access to quality audio-visual training materials to secure sustainable livelihoods of rural agriculturists. Access Agriculture facilitates and builds capacity for the production and translation of quality farmer-to-farmer training videos into local languages. It provides quality training material for rural advisory services and agricultural education systems to improve access of youth, women, and smallholder farmers to relevant knowledge.



Operating Model

Access Agriculture enables smallholder farmers in India, Bangladesh and seven African countries access to videos on best practices in agriculture. Its videos, disseminated through media including DVD, radio, television, mobile phones and solar-powered smart projectors - are scripted and filmed in a manner that is easily understandable to farmers and replicable in different geographical contexts. Primarily scripted in English and French, the content can be translated into other languages based on the demand of local communities. Based on the medium of dissemination, the videos are provided either free of cost or by charging a nominal fee to farmers.

The videos contain information on several pre-harvest and post-harvest best practices ranging from categories like cereals, vegetables, integrated pest management, farm mechanization and livestock and are exhibited by filming experiences of smallholder farmers. Farmers participate in the video shoot to share their success story that can be attributed to training and capacity building. They also believe that the exposure via videos can bring them other financial and business benefits. The local extension service providers participate because videos align well with their work of making agricultural information accessible to farmers, and validate some of their recommendations. In addition to spreading their message, these videos also ease their task of encouraging behavior change. Online and offline distribution of such videos helps farmers learn, understand and adopt the practices suggested in the content. The enterprise encourages all extension service providers operating in developing countries to translate the videos available on the website into local languages for easy access to farmers that otherwise do not have access to such content. The enterprise assesses the videos and selects some of them for dissemination on its website.

In addition to its repository of videos, Access Agriculture offers a fee-based translation service to extension service providers and other such agencies interested in using quality videos in their own farmer training programs. The videos are available online as well in DVD format and 3GP format for mobile phone viewing. The enterprise also allows downloads of audio tracks (of the videos) by radio stations, who can feature it any time. Further, the enterprise has a network of partners who disseminate the videos in locations with no access to electricity. Trained agriculture experts use a motorized tricycle with an attached generator and sound system to project the farmer training videos to almost 200-300 villagers at once. The enterprise also sells 'smart projectors' providing access to the enterprise's video library to farmers who are not connected to electricity.

Access Agriculture operates mainly through partners that include private sector enterprises, universities, agriculture colleges, and other extension service providers. Usually, the partners engage with field staff in different regions to produce videos on any specific crop or agricultural practice. The enterprise trains these partners to produce videos, and provides them the filming equipment. The partners spread awareness among smallholder farmers regarding the significance of ICT extension services and their role in increasing agricultural productivity. They inform the farmers about Access Agriculture; and encourage them to register on the platform and avail of the extension services. The partners also help improve or customize the video content by incorporating feedback that they receive from farmers.

Access Agriculture has 15 production partners and over 80 other partners including universities, private sector, and extension service providers. The enterprise has made available 150 videos in 70 different languages.

In the initial stages, television stations charged Access Agriculture to showcase videos. However, as a result of the growing popularity of the enterprise and its videos, the broadcasting stations have now entered into agreements with Access Agriculture to broadcast the videos without charge. The enterprise monitors viewership rates and farmer feedback for future video content production.

The enterprise is currently operational in 9 countries. As part of the first phase supported by the Government of Switzerland's grant, Access Agriculture started its operations in Benin, Kenya, Malawi, Mali, and Uganda; further leveraging on the grant, it expanded to Bangladesh, Ghana, India and Tanzania. Generally, while expanding to new geographies, Access Agriculture partners with established agricultural development organizations that are aware of local farming contexts and have an extensive network of farmers that they can reach. For instance, the enterprise has partnered with the Kenya National Farmers Federation (KENAFF), an umbrella organization of farmer groups, representing the interests of about 2.1 million farm families in Kenya. The Federation is a partner to Access Agriculture in producing and distributing agricultural videos for smallholder farmers.

KENAFF has invested in a TV station that will broadcast the videos hosted on the Access Agriculture website. The shows will share the link to the website so that farmers can browse for topics of relevance to them.

Access Agriculture has also worked with government extension service providers in Bangladesh, Benin, India and Malawi. The enterprise also had discussions with the governments of Kenya and Uganda on inclusion of ICT in agriculture.

Financial Sustainability

Some of the major costs incurred by Access Agriculture include those for website maintenance, partner training, and remuneration to the field staff and partners. The enterprise earns revenues from multiple sources including funds from the Government of Switzerland, sale of video translations, and commission from the sale of smart projectors (powered through a portable solar panel). The smart projector is targeted to customers who are off-grid, off-mobile and off-internet. It

also earns revenue by providing consulting services and capacity building workshops. As an international NGO, the organization raises grant capital to run its operations. It has funds in pipeline by the Government of Switzerland at least until 2018.

As Access Agriculture works with local people, the model is not very cost intensive. This is because, in many cases, the partners are already engaged in the creation of video content. Access Agriculture helps such enterprises enhance the quality of the videos. It also encourages them to make videos in local languages; and in a format that can be easily applied by the farmers.

Impact

Access Agriculture has impacted over one million farmers by making quality videos available to thousands of extension service providers across developing countries. The enterprise videos that contain information about agricultural best practices are available free of cost on the company's website. Access Agriculture remains cost effective by partnering with local extension services providers that have established relationship and reach to smallholder farmers. Local partnerships also enhance its distribution capabilities.

Challenges and Lessons

As the enterprise operates mainly through partners, some of the major challenges are also connected with them. Access Agriculture partners with a variety of organizations that are all differently oriented, with different skills and capacities, and therefore faces a challenge in aligning them to its mission and objectives. In order to address this issue, it adjusts its operational activities and procedures, as per the speed and approach of the partners.

Another critical concern is the implementation of its process. It is quite demanding to make an agricultural training video as it requires a lot of time and involvement of many stakeholders, such as farmers, agricultural experts, local extension service providers, videographers, interviewers, and editors. The challenge is to integrate the knowledge of local farmers and experts in the video to be delivered in the shortest time. The enterprise partners with local extension services providers to address this challenge.

Videos from the Access Agriculture library are in the public domain, so anyone can use the videos for free. As thousands of organisations and individuals in the agricultural extension and education system use and further share the videos, it is impossible for Access Agriculture to accurately monitor video distribution and use.

Road Ahead

Access Agriculture has launched a new website, AGTUBE.org, which acts as a social media platform for agriculture stakeholders. It plans to use the platform as a social enterprise to raise funds through corporate sponsorships and advertisements on this website by telecommunication and Fast Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG) companies. The enterprise plans to enhance its financial sustainability by selling smart projectors, and by providing training and translation services.