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FARMERS PAY FOR LEARNING VIDEOS

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If farmers are willing to pay for their own learning videos, distributing DVDs might become self-sustaining.

I started a pilot experience to sell training DVDs through the existing network of entertainment DVD sellers, agro-input dealers, vegetable sellers, and taxi-moto drivers in Benin.

I started by compiling a series of 9 farmer-to-farmer videos from the Access Agriculture website (www.accessagriculture.org), putting them all onto a single DVD with a language menu, allowing the viewer to watch the videos in French, English and three West African languages (Fon, Yoruba and Bambara).

I had 700 copies of the DVD printed, and called it, "Improving vegetable production". I also pasted a note inside the DVD jacket, with a phone number encouraging viewers to call for further question or comments.

Each of the video distributors signed a contract agreeing to receive the DVD and be paid 200 CFA (0.40 US dollar) after selling it for a minimum price of 500 CFA (1 US dollar), and a top price of \$2. All distributors were asked to keep data such as the name, phone number and address of the person who bought each DVD, so that I could follow up with the buyers.

From August to October 2015, 392 copies of the DVD were sold. About three-fourths of the people who bought the DVD (276 viewers) actually called the phone number pasted into the DVD jacket.

It is highly unusual to get feedback from so many viewers. From August to October 2015, I conducted a telephone survey with those 276 people who had called me.

I was surprised to realise that some of the people were from far away. They were in Nigeria, Niger, Ghana,



Mobile vendors offer Access Agriculture videos for sale alongside entertainment DVDs.

and northern Benin, even though I only offered the DVDs for sale through retailers in the large cities of southern Benin (Cotonou and Porto Novo).

The DVDs were travelling widely, with no encouragement from us. When NGOs distribute training videos, almost all of the DVDs stay in the villages that get them.

The people who bought the DVD had watched the videos, usually several times, with their family and friends. A third of the 276 respondents borrowed DVD players from friends or family to watch the DVD, but I was astounded to learn that nearly 1 person in 5 had bought a DVD player after buying our DVD. All of

In our past experiences, people who receive DVDs for free are not as willing to invest their own time and money buying or borrowing equipment such as DVD-players. We see here that when people spend their own money to buy a DVD, they are more likely to watch the videos, and to invest in video-viewing equipment.

Selling DVDs gives anyone who is interested in agriculture a fair chance to learn from videos, since the DVDs are marketed openly where people can easily find them, and the price is fairly affordable even for a smallholder farmer or an association. On



An agrodealer explains the “Improving Vegetable Production” DVD to farmers who visit his shop.

these respondents were willing to pay and to make the effort to watch the training videos.

A few farmers’ associations also bought videos. When farmers or farmers’ associations called they didn’t ask me to clarify the content of the videos, which suggests that they understood the key points and that the local language translations were clear.

Also none of the farmers who called asked for a gift. They did ask where they could find more videos and buy irrigation equipment (one of the videos on the DVD was about drip irrigation). Through an agro-input dealer in Cotonou, which has been selling DVDs, we were able to put those farmers in touch with an Israeli company which sells irrigation equipment in Niger.

the other hand when NGOs distribute videos, some people are chosen to receive DVDs, while some of their neighbours are excluded.

My experience suggests that small-scale retailers can distribute videos to rural people, even without support from donors, and that these DVDs reach farmers who are serious about learning and using the content.

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