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WILLING TO PAY TO WATCH VIDEOS

Renaud K. Itoo

As the state gets out of extension and the private sector fills some of the void, it is time to ask if farmers will pay for extension.

In developing countries, few farmers ever pay for advice, so it is unclear if private extension is a viable option. As in many developing countries, farmers in Benin have enjoyed free extension.

In southeastern Benin, in a rice-growing area in the Oueme Valley, we had a fantastic experience in six villages: Damè, Mondotokpa, Fingninkanmè, Kodé-Agué, Kadébou-Zounmè and Gogbo.

With financial support from Access Agriculture for my thesis research, we organised a community meeting in each village, during which farmers chose a topic of a learning video they wanted to watch. In five of the villages, farmers chose the video on land preparation, but in Gogbo they asked to see the one on seed flotation.

We held a short meeting with the village head and a few lead farmers to decide when and where to screen the video. They suggested the village green, or the playground of the primary schools in the evening. For several days before the video screenings town criers went around the villages to remind and invite farmers to attend the screening.

The big day finally arrived. The sun was dying slowly in the immense Oueme Lake. As the sunlight faded away, and the moon took its place, loud music called the villagers together. As if coming from nowhere, male and female farmers, young and aged (and their kids) filled the village green, striking a festival-like atmosphere. Everyone quickly took a seat so as not to miss a moment of the video.

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The master of ceremonies soon captured the attention of this large and eager audience.

Everyone looked at the screen made for the occasion from a piece of cloth. People smiled as soon as pictures of farmers appeared on the screen. The event lasted about 40 minutes (10 minutes to show the video and 30 minutes to discuss it, and to ask and answer questions). According to the participants, these were 40 minutes of enjoyable learning, discussion, and entertainment.

They all said that they were looking forward to attending similar sessions again. The farmers



Farmers are willing to pay to watch videos and children are eager to attend public video shows

wanted to watch other videos on rice and chillies. How can we fulfil the farmers' wish? Could farmers buy the DVDs and watch them on their own in small groups? Could the lead farmers create video clubs to screen videos?

To answer these questions, at the end of each video session, I asked each farmer how much he or she would pay to attend a training video show. The results were far higher than I expected.

All the interviewed farmers were willing to pay to watch videos. Some farmers said they were willing to pay \$2 to attend the screenings. On the low end, some only wanted to pay 5 cents US.

On average farmers are willing to pay 41 cents to watch a video. Male farmers are willing to pay an average of 46 cents while female farmers were willing to pay 25 cents. Some farmers even wanted to buy the DVDs.

Farmer participation in funding extension is not a panacea, but farmers can pay for extension services that are meaningful to them and add value.

On average farmers are willing to pay 41 cents to watch a video. Male farmers are willing to pay an average of 46 cents while female farmers were willing to pay 25 cents. Some farmers even wanted to buy the DVDs.

It will be useful to do a study in which farmers have to pay with real money to watch a learning video. It is important to think of ways farmers could help pay for the advice they need. This could open the door for self-financing, private extension.

RENAUD K. ITOO

University of Abomey Calavi, Benin

itoorenaud@gmail.com