

Mediae

Building Capacity of Female Smallholder Farmers in Kenya and Uganda with Technology



Photo: Kendra Poole for DAI



Change Social Norms & Cultural Perceptions



Create Economic Opportunities



Cultivate Women's Confidence



Design Creative Women-Centric Technology



Develop Community Support

Challenge

Kenya and Uganda are both countries where the agriculture sector accounts for a significant share of their national economies. Fifty-four percent of Kenya's 52 million people are employed in the agricultural sector, as are 72 percent of the 45 million people in Uganda. Yet nearly 35 percent of Kenyans and 20 percent of Ugandans live below the international poverty line (US\$1.90 per day), with female-headed households falling even lower. This indicates that yields and incomes of persons engaged in the agricultural sector need to increase significantly to lift them above the poverty line. At the same time, there is a lack of access to quality agricultural trade information for smallholder farmers in East Africa.

To address these agricultural issues and bridge the information gap, specifically for women farmers, USAID's WomenConnect Challenge (WCC) awarded a grant to the Mediae Company to expand their agriculture-based television programming in these two countries and develop advanced mobile phone-based support for educating farmers on farming techniques, forecasting, and financial literacy.

Solution

Mediae's "Shamba Shape Up" is a "makeover" television show that visits different farms in Kenya to learn about the challenges those farmers face in their production, such as access to finance, inputs, improved seed quality, pest and disease management, irrigation, cattle rearing, poultry farming, and crop harvesting and storage. Experts are brought in to demonstrate techniques and approaches to address those farming challenges in very practical and affordable ways. The show is a favorite for millions of Kenyans, in the coveted time slot on Sunday afternoon after morning church services.

Mediae has recently expanded programming into Uganda with "Mpeke Town," a TV drama series that addresses several themes linked to agricultural production, such as issues around land ownership and women's control over land, suggesting that family members work closely together in farming their land as a business. Both programs educate women on how to use mobile phones and other new technologies that focus on financial literacy and nutrition.

Another approach that Mediae developed to directly engage viewers is iShamba, a digital direct farmer support mobile platform. iShamba provides farmers weekly agricultural tips, weather forecasts, and local market prices for different products. It has nearly 500,000 subscribers in Kenya, and with the WCC grant, Mediae expanded it into Uganda. iShamba subscribers with premium access can participate in WhatsApp peer groups with other farmers growing the same crops and/or livestock in similar regions of the country. Mediae has piloted women-only WhatsApp groups to enable women to feel more comfortable asking questions among their peers.

The company also developed an interactive voice response (IVR) system in Kenya where callers navigate a voice menu system with their telephone keypad. IVR provides a no-stress way for low literacy and/or hesitant farmers to use their mobile phone to learn more on topics relevant to them. This system is particularly useful for women, who are more likely to be illiterate and/or otherwise be discouraged from accessing technology.

Impact

Shamba Shape Up and Mpeke Town have both proven very effective in reaching farmers across Kenya and Uganda. In Uganda, a viewer survey indicated that 56 percent of farmers are using different agricultural practices after seeing or hearing the program. An independent impact study determined that more than 428,000 households in Kenya benefited directly from Shamba Shake Up after adopting a new farming practice. Of those, dairy farmers who adopted new practices increased the value of their milk by more than \$24 million. The same study revealed that farmers in the maize sector of Murang'a who adopted recommended changes in production saw their gross margins quadruple, and that female dairy farmers who made changes after watching Shamba Shake Up reduced the gap in gross margins between themselves and their male counterparts.

Strategies Employed

Through the WCC, USAID has identified five proven strategies to close the gender digital divide and increase women's economic empowerment. The Mediae project tapped into four of these—changing social norms, building women's confidence, increasing community support, and expanding economic opportunities—as the basis for its work.



Changing Social Norms—Media is a powerful tool for changing social norms and perceptions, using characters that are relatable and model positive behavior. Developing specific program segments and targeting more than 1 million viewers can confront perceptions in subtle and non-threatening ways.



Creating Economic Opportunities—The shows improve the quality of management with farmer groups, encouraging best practice in agricultural production, and thus enhancing livelihoods of rural women, youth, and families.



Cultivating Women's Confidence—Educating women on the use of technology and showing women regularly using technology successfully gives viewers the confidence that they can do it too. Staffing the iShamba call center with female agronomy experts has provided additional positive role models and given female farmers more confidence to ask questions to improve their production.



Developing Community Support—Through illustrating better governance and female empowerment in TV programming, communities become more accepting of women being advocates. With the addition of iShamba WhatsApp groups, women can work together on strategies for advocating for others in their communities.



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Advancing women's digital connectivity and meaningful use of technology are key components to ensuring women's socio-economic empowerment. The WomenConnect Challenge is a global call for solutions to improve women's participation in everyday life by significantly changing the ways women access and use technology.

www.womenconnectchallenge.org

