

Commercialising Extension Services in Afghanistan

Today in northern Afghanistan, Radio Azad (RA) are providing extension messages on Good Agriculture Practices (GAP) to grape farmers. ILO's Road to Jobs (R2J) project supported Radio Azad in Balkh, who then contracted Radio Shahar in Samangan to broadcast extension services information on GAP to grape producers.

Farmers lack access to information on GAP

The key findings of the grape market systems analysis (MSA) conducted by R2J project determines low knowledge of grape farmers on GAP and limited access of farmers to factually correct agriculture information as leading to poor agriculture practices which result in low yields (less than 2 ton/jerib¹ compared to a possible 6 tons/jerib). Most of the grape farmers utilize traditional farming techniques and do not have access to latest information on GAP and new technologies.



» Traditional trellising method in Feroz Nakchir district

The search for a radio station to pilot a commercially driven extension information programme

The beneficiaries for this intervention are all grape producers (5,000 farmers) in Balkh and Samangan provinces. R2J project made out a business case for radio stations running a programme on GAP and developing a listenership among grape farmers but doing it on a commercial basis. This would entail creating an interactive farmers' prime time broadcasting programme in which experts would discuss real-life agronomic issues and find out about solutions to farming problems. The radio station would then seek advertisers to buy airtime during the programme and advertise their products to farmers. The revenue would then cover the costs of free information on GAP aired to farmers.

Broadcasting extension services' intervention model

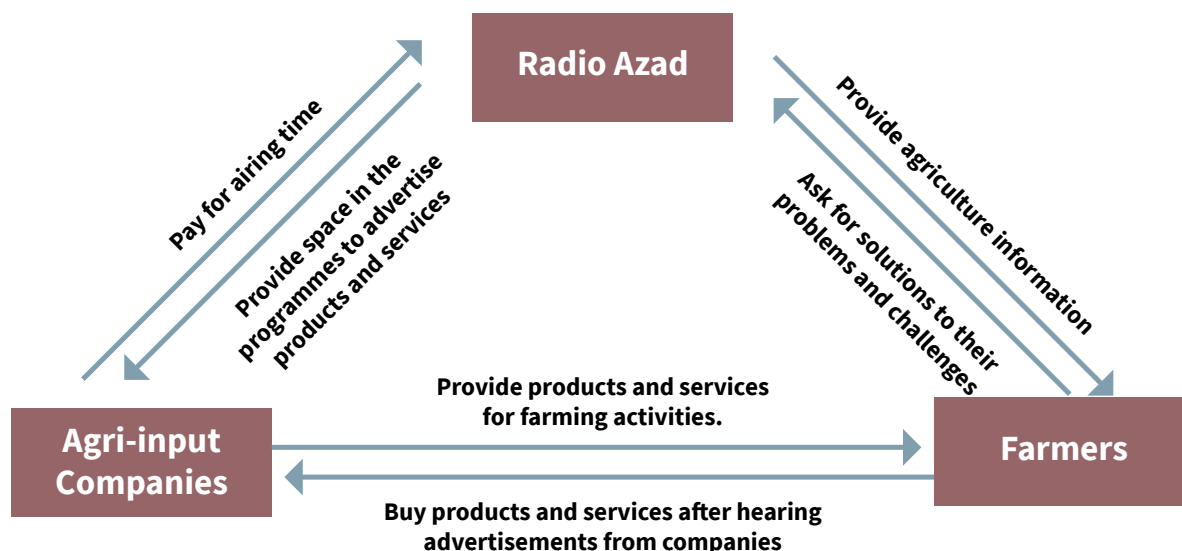
The business model for this intervention is as following. 1) Radio Azad develops and broadcasts agriculture programmes, and provides agri-extension messages to the farmers;

¹ 1 jerib = 0.2 hectares



International
Labour
Organization





» The business model diagram

2) the agri-input companies buy space and sponsor the Radio Azad programmes and; 3) Farmers listen to the Radio Azad programmes and hear the agriculture extension messages.

Radio Azad takes the risk

After several consultation meetings with radio stations, RA finally stepped up to take the risk. “We are just a small radio station funded entirely from private resources and we would like to try this model and see if it will help raise more revenue for our radio station”, said Ahmad, the radio station manager. “Our objective is to provide extension services information on GAP to farmers in a way they understand in order to see higher grape yields and increased farmer incomes”, he explained. In Samangan province where their broadcast signal was weak, RA contracted Radio Shahar, a popular community radio to broadcast the programme.

As Balqis, RA’s presenter of the Farmers’ Voice programme, said “RA has been broadcasting programmes on culture, social and political issues for the past four years and this is the first time we are targeting farmers with information. This partnership with ILO has helped us reach an economically active part of our society. The response from private advertisers has also been phenomenal. We never expected it”.



» Farmers’ Voice live broadcast-Announcer and Agric Specialist at it in studio.

Some farmers listen in, others also call in...

Abdul Jalil, one of the progressive farmers recounted his story about how the Farmers’ Voice programme helped him. “I listen to RA. The farming issues have been good. I had an outbreak of Shakarak disease in my vineyard and I called in and spoke to the experts who advised me what agro-chemical to use and it worked”.

RA have been very flexible in their choice of programme content. They have responded to what farmers want to discuss so it has gone wider beyond the grapes to cover other crops like cotton.

Encouraging response from advertisers and farmers

By end of 2017 the intervention is expected to have produced the following results:

Yield improvement

- Grape yield increase by 5% (100 kg/jerib) for 5, 000 farmers (500 tons in total)

Income

- Additional \$18,000 income created for the farmers
- Additional \$21,000 income earned by Radio Azad (key to sustaining the radio programme for farmers)

Jobs

- 150 jobs improved to the farmers
- Radio Azad sponsored by at least 10 new input suppliers/sponsors
- At least 20 new jobs created at companies as well as at farm levels.

What have been the key success factors?

With support of R2J, Radio Azad started broadcasting a programme on GAP called The Farmer’s Voice. This covered grapes and other crops of interest to farmers. This was originally conceived as a broadcast programme exclusively for grapes farmers but the demand by farmers led RA to be responsive and open up opportunities for other farmers’ concerns. This was what has made the programme popular.



» Marketing training at RA with R2J team in attendance



Farmers have been allowed to call in and air their own concerns and speak to government extension people, inputs supply companies and amongst themselves thus making the learning experience richer.

During the last three months, RA was able to get \$600 sponsorship from Roshan mobile network and Nawrase sauce Production Company.

This came after RA hired Agriculture specialist who would host the programme jointly with a knowledgeable programme announcer. The radio station contracted a marketing consultant to help with developing a marketing strategy and training all staff on marketing. They then signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Directorate of Agriculture Irrigation and Livestock which made it possible for government extension staff to regularly come to the radio station to interact with farmers during broadcasting or during recording of programmes. This was followed by a spirited marketing campaign which included the erection of 2 massive billboards about the radio programme. In total more than 2,000 participated in active discussions and calls.

Radio Azad have learnt to do it themselves

11 staff members of Radio Azad have trained in marketing techniques. The capacity of the Radio Azad management has been improved in business plans, marketing and overall business management issues. Besides making a marketing consultant available to RA, R2J project staff supported RA with mentoring and coaching.

Sustaining radio programmes into the future

R2J project will be reviewing the pilot with all stakeholders including other radio stations who did not participate in order to elicit buy-in from the broadcasting community and advertisers to make the model work for poor farmers. This should ensure replication and further improvement into the future. For Afghan extension services this would be a major positive disruption.



International
Labour
Organization



More information

Email: mutio@ilo.org Telephone: +93 790493700 Facebook: Road to Jobs Project