LIMA LINKS

Area of Focus: Market information system

How it works: Lima Links is a mobile phone point of sale (POS) and inventory control app that provides nearly 'live' horticultural market price data to farmers in Zambia. The app is used by wholesale agents, allowing them to manage crop intakes from farmers along with their sales to retailers and marketeers. Lima Links then aggregates these transactions across all agents in a market, generating an average price per crop. Unlike most MIS providers Lima Links does not use enumerators. A minimum number of 10 transactions in a 36 hour period are required for price generation through the system. Prices are cross-checked by market-price quality assessment monitors employed through the Zambia National Marketeers Association (or Zanama). Through the system, traders can also send out produce volume requests to farmers within a 50 kilometer area to fulfill certain sales quota requests.

Technology used: Feature phone with an internet connection or any SMS-capable phone

Implementer/Funder: Lima Links was started by SANGONeT, a South African NGO, and International Development Enterprises (iDE), with $200,000 in initial funding from the Gates Foundation.

Fees: Currently none to either the farmers or wholesale agents.

Primary Markets: Currently in Zambia with coverage of 10 markets (4 with reliable data). There is also pilot project underway to increase cross-border trade between the Zambia copper belt and the Democratic Republic of Congo. In addition, future plans include extending the Lima Links system throughout the COMESA region (the Common Market for Eastern & Southern Africa).

Users: Most users are $2/day farmers with farm plots between .5 and 4 hectares and who have enough production to permit some level of market sales. There are currently 200 transactions per day through the point of sale system.

Business Model: Financing over the next two years will continue to rely on the Gates Foundation, with some minimal advertising revenue. Plans are also in the works to have wholesale agents and farmers pay for data costs by 2013.

Impact: Since the system only launched towards the end of 2011, it is too early to determine any quantitative impact. By early 2013 they are planning to conduct an evaluation of the system.

For more information visit: http://limalinks.co.zm (Still under development)

Sources: Matthew de Gale, Program Manager, Mobiles in Agriculture Services, SANGONeT