Challenges and Prospects of ICT Use in Agricultural Marketing: The Case of East Hararghe Zone, Oromia National Regional State, Ethiopia

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ABSTRACT

Up-to-date market information on prices for commodities, inputs and consumer trends can improve farmers’ livelihoods substantially and have a dramatic impact on their negotiating positions. Information on new marketing opportunities and the market prices of farm inputs and outputs is fundamental to an efficient and productive agricultural economy. The main focus of this study was on Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) use on agricultural marketing. Use of ICT (mobile phone, radio and television) and factors affecting ICT use in agricultural marketing in Eastern Hararghe were the objectives of this study. Random sample of 210 producers were selected from six purposively selected kebeles from Haramaya, Kersa and Metta woredas based on their production potential. Descriptive statistics and binary logistic regression model were used for analyzing the data and 63.8% were ICT users while 36.2% were not. The model result indicated that age, year of education, information seeking behavior and participation in trainings were significant determinants of ICT use. Network availability in the area, construction of electric line and infrastructures, network coverage throughout the country, affordable cost of simcard with free air time were opportunities for mobile phone use. Construction of electric line and infrastructures, wide area coverage of the frequency were opportunities for radio and television use. Alternative power source (battery) and expansion of Frequency Modulation (FM) stations were other opportunities for radio use. Interruption of network and electricity, language problem, absence of organized source of information are some challenges to use ICT. Adult education and trainings are useful to promote the awareness of producers; establishing basic infrastructures and services including electricity is basic requirement for ICT utilization. For the effective use of ICT, local languages needs to be used and trainings about how to use ICT also need to be provided.

Keywords: Agricultural, Challenges, ICT, Marketing, Producers, Prospects

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1. INTRODUCTION

Agriculture being an important sector for majority of the rural population in developing countries depending on it, it faces major challenges of enhancing production in a situation of dwindling natural resources necessary for production. Farming involves risks and uncertainties, with farmers facing many threats from poor soils, drought, erosion and pests. The growing demand for agricultural products, however, offers opportunities for producers to sustain and improve their livelihoods. Increasing the efficiency, productivity and sustainability of small scale farms is an area where Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) can make a significant contribution. Awareness of up-to-date market information on prices for commodities, inputs and consumer trends can improve farmers’ livelihoods substantially and have a dramatic impact on their negotiating position. Such information is instrumental in making decisions about future crops and commodities and about the best time and place to sell and buy goods (Stienen et al., 2007).

Meera et al. (2004) noted the emergence of a new paradigm of agricultural development both in developing and developed countries; the overall development of rural areas is expanding in new directions; old ways of delivering important services to citizens are being challenged; and traditional societies are being transformed into knowledge societies all over the world.

Access to information and improved communication is a crucial requirement for sustainable agricultural development. Modern communication technologies when applied to conditions in rural areas can help to improve communication, increase participation, disseminate information and share knowledge and skills. The rural population still has difficulty in accessing crucial information in order to make timely decisions. The challenge is not only to improve the accessibility of communication technology to the rural population but also to improve its relevance to local development. Although multimedia communication (audio and video etc.) is available, the rural population still has difficulty in accessing crucial information in forms they can understand in order to make timely decisions (Chauhan, 2007).

All human activities including agricultural such as farm production and marketing activities do face a number of constraints. Communication is one of the major impediments in agricultural activities. In fact, inadequacy of communication/information facilities among other infrastructure for agricultural activities may lead to rural/urban migration by farming household (Aigbeakaen et al., 2007). Making relevant knowledge and information available to farmers is still extremely poor in developing countries. The infrastructure, the hardware, the software, the people and the network are not well developed, used and managed (Fraol, 2009).

The information gap between the producers and the buyers or consumers makes one opportunistic over the other; mostly buyers on producers. Strategically located information boards found
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