

Making e-Agriculture work through public-private partnership in Asia

Public-private partnerships (PPPs)

PPPs in e-Agriculture are generally found at the community level where the strengths of the public and private sectors complement each other in providing information and advisory services that address the needs of farmers and rural communities. The public sector's mandate for provision of information and services can be best achieved through harnessing the potential of the private sector to add local context in a commercial environment.

Examples of PPP models in e-Agriculture range from establishing access points (e.g. cybercafés, telecenters) to generation and delivery of content through the internet and mobile phones (SMS).

Strengths of partners in PPP models:

Understanding why a PPP is required, the respective mandates and incentives of the partners, and their roles in the partnership, is fundamental to its success.

Public sector strengths include: having a large resource base; setting policies and standards; generating reliable agricultural information over a wide range of formats/topics.

Private sector strengths include: capacity for innovation and investment; providing farmer-friendly delivery models that give more choice to farmers and are accountable; a competitive ability.

example **Community Information Center “Farmers’ Home”, Lanxi, China**
The center provides a ‘one-stop shop’ where farmers obtain extension services and purchase inputs, as well as information on new input products, and market prices.
Strength of PPP: *The private sector promotes its products, while the government provides reliable information to address farmers’ challenges, and farmers benefit from both being in the same location.*

Key challenges to making PPPs work in e-Agriculture:

- clarifying public/private sector roles
- developing solutions to poor infrastructure overcoming constraints - including lack of electricity, limited or non-existent connectivity, and lack of support services
- generating sufficient awareness of services among farmers
- developing and updating web content
- clarifying ownership of information - particularly in public sector

example **Nepali e-Haat Bazaar** - portal providing prices and information on agricultural products from major markets.
Lessons learned include how:
- the initiative has given positive exposure to stakeholders of the potential of ICTs
- digitally-supported business-to-business (B2B) models can be customized to suit micro-entrepreneurs
Major challenge to sustainability:
- lack of institutional capacity to continue the initiative

Key factors identified for successful PPPs in e-Agriculture

1. **Win-win situations:** understanding the underlying incentives and core competences of each partner is essential in making PPP models sustainable.
2. **Appropriate** content with the following characteristics:
 - 👉 **Readability:** not too complex
 - 👉 **Accessibility** in local language
 - 👉 **Accuracy/Reliability** validated by experts and tested by users
 - 👉 **Timeliness:** updated regularly
 - 👉 **Multiple formats** i.e. digital and non-digital.
3. **Fostering entrepreneurship and diversity:**
Developing innovative demand-led, needsbased services.
4. **Creating awareness and generating demand:**
 - 👉 Use **new media** as well as traditional **communication tools**
 - 👉 Provide **on-site training** to demonstrate benefits of ICTs
 - 👉 **Build capacity** of information service providers.



Credit: Gamos Ltd.

example

e-Krishok* initiative

A collaborative initiative between Grameen Phone and WIN to disseminate agricultural information via community information centers to farmers in Bangladesh.

Lessons learned: *how private sector can effectively distribute information previously confined to the public domain.*

Challenges: *low farmer awareness, reliability of information, and obtaining real-time market prices.*

**e-Krishok = e-farmer*

The way forward

Further efforts should be made to understand how PPPs can facilitate the generation and delivery of relevant and timely content, particularly to reach the most isolated farmers. Innovation is most required in remote rural areas where the constraints are greatest.

- 👉 **Focus on content** - as the means to institutionalize links between information sources, providers, and content users.
- 👉 **Catalyze and support farmers' networks** - strong grassroots organizations should be encouraged based on needs assessment surveys, and identification of appropriate partners and priority areas.
- 👉 **Incentives** - raise awareness of reasons and incentives for forming PPPs.
- 👉 **Lesson learning** - measuring impact at farm level (productivity, food security & poverty) to evaluate success using indicators such as: replication of existing models; income levels; demand for new services; increase in service usage, etc.

This Policy Brief is based on the input of e-Agriculture Community members who participated in the online forum held from 10 March to 18 March, 2008. The complete discussion can be found (in English) in the Forum Archive at www.e-agriculture.org/forums/archives

Further information and resources can be found in the Key Topics section of www.e-agriculture.org