

Disseminating Innovative Resources and Technologies to Smallholders (DIRTS)

Newsletter | July-December 2014



The DIRTS project is completing its first full year and beginning to see results. This newsletter captures the highlights of our intervention activities during the third and fourth quarters of 2014. In addition, we will explain how the evaluation team is measuring the impact of the extension program on farmer knowledge and adoption of agricultural best practices. Enjoy your read!

Insurance Intervention

Focus Group Discussions to Improve Insurance Marketing Strategy

Focus group discussions were organized in four of DIRTS communities to establish and evaluate the farmers' understanding of the insurance product and their perceptions on its benefits or drawbacks. As a result of the discussions, farmer participants concluded that while insurance product may not be a good agent for drought mitigation, it does protect them from financial losses that drought may cause. Those farmers who did not purchase the insurance the previous year demonstrated lack of trust towards the scheme.



Communities where the insurance product had been introduced in 2013 demonstrated higher confidence towards it this year. Most of the participants reported that money they used to buy the insurance coverage would have gone towards livestock animals. They also expressed that the compensation amount in case of drought is not sufficient to recover the farm losses.

DIRTS Conducts Survey on Insurance Intervention

In December, the DIRTS team conducted a survey among 997 FAARIGU Insurance policyholders and 30 well-performing Community Based Marketers (CBM). The survey focused on two aspects of the intervention: 1) to learn the viewpoint of policyholders on the outcome of the 2014 farming season and 2) to learn from well performing CBMs on the methods they used when marketing the insurance product to community farmers. The findings of the surveys are forthcoming.

Android-based Extension Intervention

Extension Messages to Include Legumes in 2015

In 2014, the DIRTS extension intervention focused on maize, because it is the main staple crop for smallholder farmers in the Northern Region. However, maize is predominantly cultivated on plots managed by men. DIRTS wants to explore how access to information might impact female farmers. After analysis of the baseline data, we learned that legumes are the second

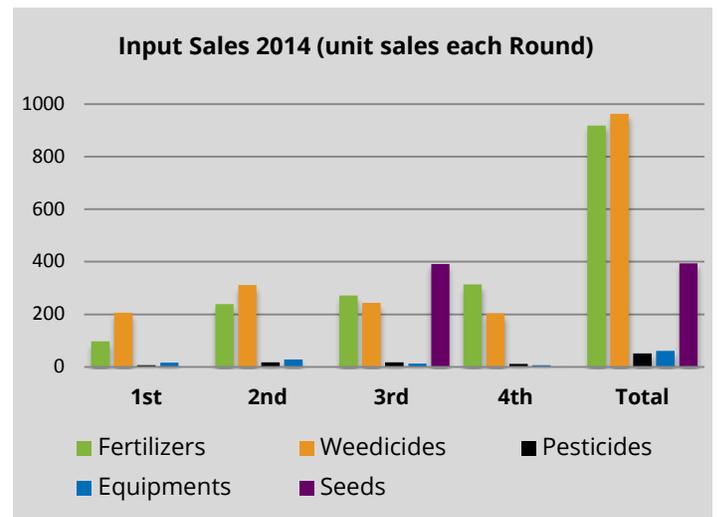
most grown crop after maize and mostly grown by female farmers. Hence, it was decided that in 2015 the extension program should expand to include crops such as soya, groundnut and cowpea. The DIRTS team has started shooting video messages on legumes and developing a legume extension manual for the Community Extension Agents (CEAs). This content is reviewed and approved by SARI scientists and the Ghana's Department of Agriculture.



Agro-input Intervention

DIRTS Closely Monitors Input Sales

The DIRTS team recorded the number of inputs purchased during four marketing rounds, which began in February and concluded at the end of July 2014. For this intervention, DIRTS partnered with agro-input suppliers. Sales were low in general due to national currency inflation that caused price fluctuation on weekly basis in the input market. DIRTS closely monitored such price fluctuation and will consider its effect on entire intervention for 2014.



Department of Agriculture Representatives Witness Intervention in Action

"The idea of CEA is a very sustainable one. One that can outlive the lifespan of the project and leave a lasting legacy in the communities and the minds of our farmers"

- Ali Dasana (Director of Zabzugu District Agriculture Department)

Between July and September 2014, DIRTS staff coordinated a field visit with nine Department of Agriculture District Directors (DADD) to 12 communities where DIRTS implements its interventions. The Directors had first-hand experience of the Community Extension Agents' (CEA) interactions with farmers. The Directors also visited farmer fields and quickly recognized those best farming practices that CEAs deliver to farmers.



Research Management Column

Knowledge and Practice Survey

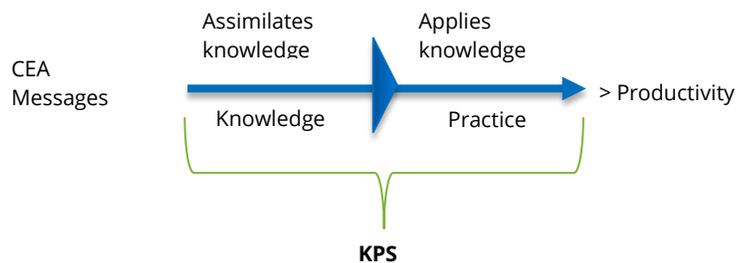
One of the assumptions underlying the extension treatment of DIRTS is that if small holder farmers had knowledge on best farming practices *and* adopted them, higher yields and higher profits would follow. However, it is possible that farmers do all the “right” things and still have low yields. The Knowledge and Practice Survey (KPS) aims to shed light on this, by zooming in on the knowledge and adoption of agricultural technologies promoted by the Community Extension Agents (CEAs).

The team designed a survey instrument to capture farmer’s understanding of best practices.

These were carefully selected from the 30 extension messages used during the 2014

farming season, to include topics that we expected to be very new for most farmers in the area (e.g. record keeping, germination tests) and practices that are likely to lead to significant yield increases (e.g. timing and dosage of fertilizer application). In addition, we asked farmers whether they had used specific practices on each of their plots in previous years and in this farming season.

The team designed a survey instrument to capture farmer’s understanding of best practices. These were carefully selected from the 30 extension messages used during the 2014 farming season, to include topics that we expected to be very new for most farmers in the area (e.g. record keeping, germination tests) and practices that are likely to lead to significant yield increases (e.g. timing and dosage of fertilizer application). In addition, we asked farmers whether they had used specific practices on each of their plots in previous years and in this farming season.



KPS in a nutshell:

- 3236 farmers
- 12,090 plots
- 162 communities
- 20 respondents per community
- 9 December 2014 – 2 January 2014
- 4 Team Leaders
- 22 Enumerators

The findings of this survey will help us understand the correlations between knowledge and practice, and also between the adoption of these technologies and yields (and profits). Furthermore, we will learn what types of information “sticks” in people’s minds and what knowledge is translated into action (and which isn’t). We will use these lessons to improve the design and delivery of extension messages in 2015.

Keep your eyes open for the first results from DIRTS in the next DIRTS update newsletter!



MINISTRY OF
FOOD & AGRICULTURE
REPUBLIC OF GHANA

RESEARCHERS: Dean Karlan, Christopher Udry, Mathias Fosu, Shashidhara Kolavalli

PARTNERS: Ghana Department of Agriculture
International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI)
Savanna Agricultural Research Institute (SARI)
Ghana Agricultural Insurance Pool (GAIP)

LOCATION: Ghana

SAMPLE: 3,240 households in 162 farming communities

TIMELINE: 2014-2016

THEMES: Agriculture

POLICY GOALS: Technology Adoption

CONTACT

Elettra Legovini: elegovini@poverty-action.org

Website: www.poverty-action.org



USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

Support of the DIRTS Project comes from the ESRC, Yale University and MIT

DIRTS project is made possible by the generous support of the American people through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). The above contents are the responsibility of Innovations for Poverty Action and do not necessarily reflect the views of USAID or the United States Government.