



# Redefining Agricultural Extension in the Face of COVID-19

Commitment, flexibility, innovation. During this pandemic, all of us who work in agricultural sustainability need to strengthen our ongoing support to smallholder coffee farming families by being flexible and innovative in order to adapt to the challenges the times present.

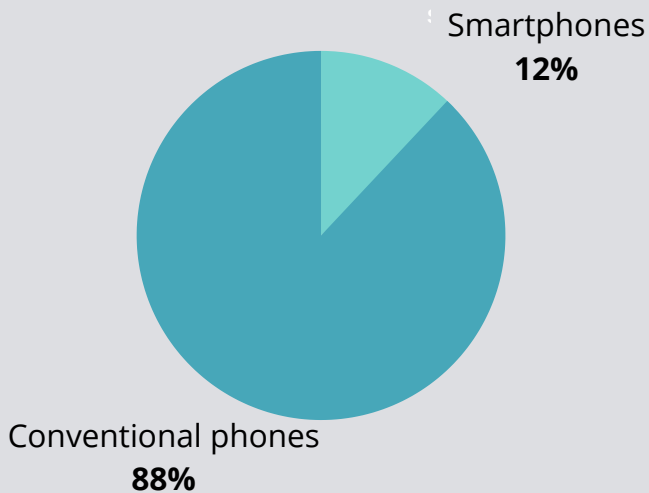
In March 2020 when the nationwide lockdown was declared to curb against the spread of Coronavirus, Hanns R. Neumann Stiftung's (HRNS) immediate goal was to continue supporting farmers while ensuring their safety and the safety of our team. Since our field staff and extensionists could no longer travel to farmers, it was very clear that we needed to explore different possibilities for reaching the farmer families remotely. Initially, we continued to support farmers with knowledge on Good Agriculture Practices (GAPs) and Climate-Smart Agriculture (CSA) practices through phone calls, text messages and WhatsApp.

In order to identify the most suitable formats and tools to reach out to farmers, HRNS carried out a phone survey across the seven countries where we operate. We wanted to find out how many of the families we support have access to mobile devices and internet connectivity, and if they use social media applications like WhatsApp or Facebook. The survey results indicated that 88% of the farmers we interviewed in Uganda have access to a conventional phone. Additionally, about 46% of farmers have at least one smartphone shared within their household with internet access. This means that phones are a lucrative tool and there is need to increase investments into digital trainings and communication solutions.

“In the past we have equipped our extensionists with smartphone devices so they can input data using Apps developed by our Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) department. Now we are looking to exploit the use of digital training methods like videos detailing GAPs and CSA practices as well as other valuable communication tools like radio,” says Malisa Mukanga who is part of the HRNS Uganda Country Management.

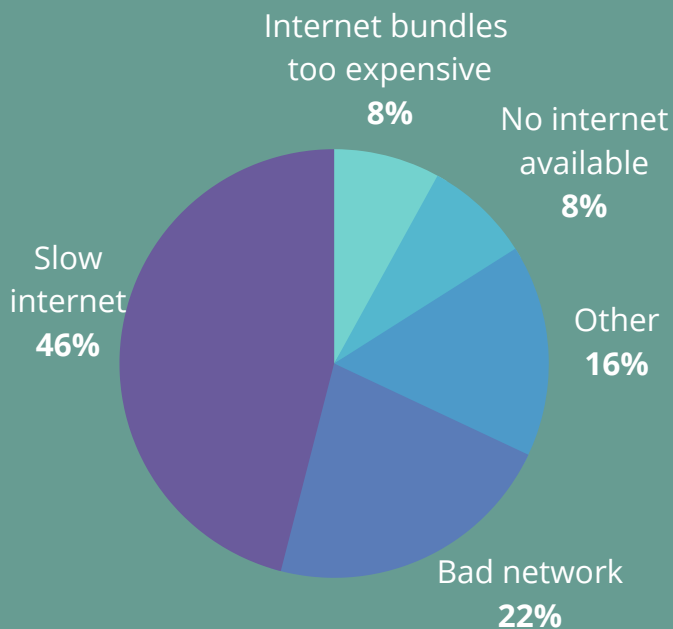


## How common are phones in HRNS Uganda's project areas?



**46%** of the farmers surveyed have at least one smartphone to share within their household with access to internet

## With devices at hand, what are the remaining challenges?



Source: HRNS Digital Readiness Survey 2020

So far, HRNS Uganda, has begun exploiting the use of radio. During the lockdown, HRNS participated in a weekly 60-minute radio show in collaboration with Action 4 Health Uganda (A4HU) and Whave Solutions for a program called TeamUp. In TeamUp, these three implementing partners have come together and combined their expertise in Agriculture, Water and Health with the aim of improving the livelihoods of 50,000 youth in Mityana district. TeamUp is funded by HRNS, Siemens Stiftung, Deutsche Stiftung Weltbevölkerung (DSW) and the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ).

Eight episodes of the TeamUp radio show aired on SUN FM over the span of 2 months. Although project staff could not travel to the studio during the lockdown, this was no obstacle for them. Focal persons from HRNS, A4HU and Whave Solutions pre-recorded their messages on the topics of Agriculture, Water and Health and sent them to the SUN FM presenter for editing and broadcasting. As Whave Solutions is working on the access to safe drinking water, part of their messaging for the radio show was to inform listeners about the importance of personal hygiene and washing hands regularly with soap and water - especially during the pandemic. HRNS broadcasted messages of encouragement to farmers who were facing challenges such as plummeting crop prices and inflated costs of agriculture inputs. We also emphasized the importance of growing more crops for food security and maintaining harmony in households during the lockdown through joint planning and decision making. A4HU's messaging was more targeted towards the local government to advocate for continued access to reproductive health and youth friendly services throughout the lockdown.





*After the initial national lockdown, in-person extension in large groups was postponed. Now HRNS' in-person extension is done in a safe manner and follows the MoH COVID-19 guidelines.*

“The good thing with the pre-recorded show is that we could disseminate the content further after it was aired through WhatsApp groups and Social Media,” explained Monica Basemera who is the TeamUp Communications Officer. “There are a lot of activities that we of course cannot manage through the radio like coaching existing youth groups, but it is the perfect instrument to get the most important and urgent general messages out,” Monica elaborated.

Although digital solutions cannot replace in-person extension, they can and will form an essential part of extension in the future. The success of the TeamUp radio program shows that in Uganda radio continues to be a valuable communication avenue and can offer effective support to farmers despite movement restrictions. As farmers are indicating their willingness to receive virtual trainings, similar digital solutions need to be further developed and exploited.

Overall, HRNS’ digital reaction to continue to support farmer communities and overcome the obstacles that COVID-19 presents have covered a broad range of activities in Uganda and in the seven other regions where we operate. So far, our global digital interventions have expanded beyond phone calls and radio to include digital training sessions, training videos, an online coffee sustainability course, dialogue through messenger groups and webinars. As the global pandemic presents a new normal for us, we will continue to creatively adapt to it and remain committed to improving the livelihoods of smallholder coffee farming families.

Get in touch with us for questions, discussions and further results.

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