



Report on USSD / IVR application and short number developed to provide farmers with market information in Tunisia - in the framework of the “ICT2Scale” project.

Background and Justification

One of the requests from farmers in the Central Western region of Tunisia is to receive market prices for different agricultural commodities and inputs. This information will allow farmers to compare prices of different local markets in their region and select the one with the best prices to increase their income. At the same time, the provided information increases their negotiation power with potential intermediate “middlemen” who usually purchase products on their farm.

Project intervention

A survey identified the commodities for which farmers in Zaghouan and Kairouan departments demand prices. One of them is straw and hay, which are very important for livestock farmers in the region as this supplementary feed is purchased in large quantities during periods of feed shortages (summer and winter). These prices are fluctuating a lot throughout the year.

Beside feed, commodity prices of olives, apricots, and some legumes are also collected. Mineral fertilizers like Ammonium Nitrate and DAP, which are sold by retailers in the souk, are also in the list of the 10 most requested commodities. Besides the price, the farmer also receives information on the availability of the commodity on the specific market. This will help to save time and costs for transport.

The prices of the commodities are collected by the CTV extension staff of the five delegations Saouaf, Zriba, Nadhour, Sbikha, and Ouslatia. They visit the weekly market (souk) where the commodities are sold, enter, and send the prices (price range) to a platform provided by the IT company NG Trend. Farmers can access the prices using their mobile phone by sending an SMS with the short number “85270”.

The project has chosen this kind of USSD (Unstructured Supplementary Service Data) rather than the IVR (Interactive Voice Response) as none of the three telephone companies operating in Tunisia is providing IVR services. This is rather unfortunate as the rate of analphabets in Tunisia, in particular among rural women is still very high.

Project output

The project has trained the CTV staff in the use of the NG Trend platform and pays the annual fee of the “short number” which works with all three national phone companies. A flyer with the short number and the different commodities was developed in Arabic and French (recto-verso) to guarantee a successful outscaling of the information on access to market prices through this short number. As the number of

users (farmers and traders) is still limited (about 100-150 per month) more farmer meetings will be organized in 2020 to promote the use of the number. Broadcasting through local radio will be organized in collaboration with the national partner AVFA.

Table 1: Evolution of number of SMS to request price information (Period: August-December 2019)

| | August | September | October | November | December |
|----------------------------------|--------|-----------|---------|----------|----------|
| Number of price requests per SMS | 3 | 50 | 159 | 142 | 75 |

Project adaptation and future intervention

The experience so far has shown that the use of the mobile phone “short number” is still limited (see Table 1). Therefore the project plans to collaborate with a Start Up and the National Observatory of Agriculture (ONAGRI) to develop a smart phone application showing agricultural market prices of many products in all regions (governorates) of Tunisia. ONAGRI already collects these prices and makes them available on their Website but has no application.

The app will be available in addition to the existing “mobile phone short number”. A recent survey carried out by another ICARDA project in Zaghouan showed that the percentage of households with smart phones has increased substantially over the last years. In 2019, 45 % of the HH in Zaghouan have at least one smart phone, as compared to end of 2016 where the baseline survey of the “Mind the Gap” project revealed that only 3 % had smart phones. A major advantage of creating a smartphone application is that not only does it cover more products and a wider region, but it is also cheaper than requesting prices per SMS. A farmer actually pays 0.15 TD (5 cents) per SMS.