News

COVID-19: Digital Advice for Farmers Through App

ICCO is implementing several projects in Asia in which we make agricultural data available for farmers via smartphone apps. In times of COVID-19, these apps can be used to raise awareness on COVID-19, to provide online consultation and to facilitate an online marketplace where farmers can buy and sell produce. However, access to the internet remains a challenge.

One of ICCO's projects in Asia is called **SMARTseeds**, in which farmers make use of the **SIPINDO app**. Farmers can find information here about the weather forecasts, market prices and the use of pesticides. Now information on COVID-19 has been added to help farmers create a safe working environment. Information is also given about the upcoming policy from Indonesia's Ministry of Agriculture, which is planning to help farmers with discounted free seeds and fertilizers for the upcoming season.

Online Training and Protective Equipment for Farmers

The SMARTseeds project has shifted the offline training into online activities by utilizing the online consultation feature of the SIPINDO app with experts and field agents. This has helped farmers to get necessary information that they cannot easily get from their peers due to social distancing. Since the start of the pandemic, 223 engagements were received via the online consultation feature. Based on field interviews, farmers really appreciate this consultation feature as it gives them alternative access to knowledge and expertise during the pandemic.

Photo: Farmer showing the SIPINDO app. Credit: EWINDO

Online Buying and Selling

SMARTseeds has also increased awareness among farmers about the buying and selling feature in the SIPINDO app. This feature gives farmers alternative options to market their produce during the pandemic. Last month, the app facilitated 52 farmers to advertise their product via the app. This number has doubled from what was recorded the month before.

Protective Equipment

The project team has also reallocated budget to provide protective equipment, such as masks, handwashing facilities and hand sanitizers.

Photo: Handwashing facility and hand sanitizers for farmers SMARTseeds. Credit: EWINDO

Challenge: Limited Internet Access

However, there are also challenges which are not easy to solve. Due to the economic slowdown, farmers have experienced economic loss and this has increased the focus on their primary needs, meaning that they have to skip secondary needs like internet access. Many users can only access the app when they have access to free public wifi. Providing more public wifi facilities in rural areas can be a solution, however, there are limitations in realizing this.

About the SMARTseeds Consortium

SMARTseeds is one of the Geodata for Agriculture and Water (G4AW) projects funded by the Netherlands Space Office. This program is a Public Private Partnerships (PPP) involving 6 public and private partners from Indonesia and the Netherlands: ICCO Cooperation, EWINDO, Nelen & Schuurman, University of Twente (ITC), Institut Pertanian Bogor (IPB) and Akvo. Through this project, the consortium aims to support 100,000 vegetable farmers Indonesia, specifically for chili, tomato and cucumber.

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