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HOW TO DO NOTE ON
DISSEMINATING MESSAGES THROUGH DIGITAL MEDIA

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Ministry of Agriculture
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Lilongwe

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

GVH   Group Village Headman

ICT4AgD   Information, Communication, TechnologyforAgricultureDevelopment

SAPP   Sustainable Agriculture Production Programme

TA   Traditional Authority

1. INTRODUCTION

The use of digital media in collection and disseminating information on various farming technologies and interventions has improved accessibility of information and feedback. It involves the collection and transmission of digitized content through the internet or computer networks and offline mobile applications (app). This includes text, audio, video, and graphics. The Agriv1(agriculture extension application) and Ulimi ndi Nyengo (web-based platform that transmits agriculture advisory services) were rolled out to perform stated actions. The agriculture extension applications and one of the social media platforms, Facebook were used in the dissemination of information through digital media. This form of technology through which information was shared provided end users or project beneficiaries easy access to vital information on interventions being implemented by the project.

The use of digital media specifically aimed at achieving the following;
- To ensure timely delivery of messages on interventions being implemented by the project and any other relevant information;
- To reach out to many farmers as possible with key messages without necessarily meeting them physically; and
- To increase project visibility among stakeholders.

2.   KEY ISSUES

- Access and technical know-how- The use of digital media requires prerequisite knowledge and skills on how to operate gadgets to access information; and access to gadgets.   Many farmers accessed information through phones. On Ulimi ndi Nyengo, farmers received messages through SMSs. With cellular network penetration of 60 per cent, many farmers accessed extension messages easily. Others required smartphones enabled to handle the applications. However, youthful farmers took special interest in the applications.

- Proliferation of mobile applications vs cost of internet data-The high cost of internet affected access to mobile applications. However some young farmers have adapted to the use of WhatsApp groups and messaging to discuss and share messages.(See Case Study on Sara) For the rest of the farmers SMSs assisted a lot.

- Cell phone and Internet coverage-Some areas that had limited phone network coverage presented challenges to accessing information.

- Reduced costs-Digital media enables extension workers to reach out to a lot of farmers at a time. This saved costs that might have been incurred during physical meetings.

- Limited access to electricity-Most farmers access digital information through mobile phones that require charging and it is difficult to access electricity in most rural areas. Only 4 per cent of rural people have access to electricity.

3. LESSONS FROM EXPERIENCE

• Increasing awareness of farmers on how to access messages through digital media application increases access to extension services through digital media. When farmers access the mobile app and read messages on different interventions or good agriculture practices, they often engage extension workers for clarity and get guidance on relevant actions demanded by the messages.

• Training extension workers to develop and interpret messages ensures successful implementation of digital media strategies.

• Farmers with smartphones and access to the app used to share the messages and what they have learnt with fellow farmers through their radio listening groups, clubs and other farmers' groups.

4. DESIGN, IMPLEMENTATION AND SCALE UP STRATEGIES

Step by step implementation of digital media tools (Social Media)(General Principles)

• Audience Analysis-Know your target audience and their media preferences which also guides the message development.

• Selection of Medium- Select the medium for digital communication based on the target audience preference e.g. Facebook or Application or SMS.

• Capacity building – Train staff responsible for developing and posting messages on the medium.

• Procurement of gadgets to be used by officers responsible for management of the media.

• Collecting, developing and uploading content on chosen media. This also involves customising the messages according to communication goals and media structure.

• Providing Feedback from followers on comments and inquiries. This involves monitoring your channel to respond to queries or seek subject matter expert input to respond to concerns or queries.

- Popularising the page- This looks at promoting the page among your target audience.

- Steps in Implementing a Mobile App (Agriv1 and Ulimi ndi Nyengo)

- Identifying and recruiting consultant to develop the application.

- Capacity building – training officers responsible for managing the app, particularly uploading of messages.

- Developing messages to be in the app by subject matter specialists.

- Uploading of messages on the app one by those who were trained to do the job.

- Submitting the app on App Store and Google Play Store for people to access the app.

- Procuring gadgets to be used by officers responsible for management of the mobile app.

- Popularising the App- Taking the initiative to promote the application through social media and websites.

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Sustainable Agriculture Programme Programme (SAPP) has over 1500 Facebook page followers and several others have downloaded and installed the mobile app on their phones.   The use of digital media platforms such as mobile apps and a Facebook page in the dissemination of messages on interventions being implemented under the project has assisted very much to close the information gap existing due to some challenges that make it difficult for face-to-face extension delivery.

References
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CASE STUDY

SARAH KACHEDWA – CHAIRPERSON FOR UKWE YOUTH AGRIBUSINESS GROUP

Sarah also attributes her success to the use of ICT4AgD Platforms that have been introduced in the area through the SAPP Programme. "My produce has increased since I started using the mobile based applications, Facebook and WhatsApp. These applications have been very handy because information can be accessed any time. In addition to that, it is easy for me to identify diseases affecting my crops. I have also found better markets and prices for my produce" narrated Sarah.

Sarah Kachedwa is a female smallholder agribusiness single farmer and trader aged 34. She comes from Phanga Village, GVH Phanga TA Kabudula, Lilongwe district in Malawi. She has been an active agribusiness farmer for over10 years.
Her major enterprises are maize, tomatoes, soya beans, and ground nuts. Her average production levels per year are as follows:

Maize	8700 Kgs
Soya beans	6500 Kgs
Groundnuts	4400 Kgs
Potatoes	200 Kgs

Sarah markets the enterprises in collaboration with the Ukwe Youth Agribusiness group and a cooperative which she is part of. She is also a member of Phanga Farm Business School where she acquired farm business management skills and financial management skills. She graduated from the school in 2017.

Sarah has also participated in other trainings like: warehouse receipts; farm planning and management; marketing and legume production. She trains her fellow youths' farmers in the group with the skills she gained from the trainings.

Sarah is also a member of Gwiritse producers and marketing cooperative society limited where she was elected as a warehouse secretary for the cooperative. She is responsible for all the warehouse records. The cooperative promotes legume production which she also engages in. Even though Sarah belongs to many groups, she manages her time very well.

It is evident that Sarah has been successful in her farming business as she is able provide basic needs for her family throughout the year. Additionally, she has managed to construct a house with iron sheets for herself. Sarah has 4 goats, 2 cattle and 10 chickens as livestock assets for her household. She has also moulded some bricks for construction of another house for her family.

As an innovation, Sarah uses the remains from the livestock she owns to make compost manure which is applied in her maize and legume fields. This has helped her adapt and mitigate effects of climate change and has caused an increase in crop yield.

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