

Information in Alliances



Case Study

The following document provides an overview of the work on access to information done on Alliances since 2008 to date and tracks the development of the facilitation.

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INFORMATION IN ALLIANCES

Note: Outcome 1: Output 1.4: Access to Information: The following text provides an overview of the work on access to information done on Alliances since 2008 to date and tracks the development of the facilitation.

'If you want to change the space, change people's thinking and to do that they need the right kind of information'

The SDC funded Alliances Lesser Caucasus Programme of Mercy Corps Georgia www.alcp.ge has facilitated interventions related to agricultural information since 2008. It is currently focused on changing how agriculture is reported and debated in Georgia, breaking cyclical and stale ideas and arguments to allow for new ideas and informed debate in the sector through working with the national media associations of TV and Newspapers to develop the field of agri journalism.

BACKGROUND: ALLIANCES AND INFORMATION

Over fifty % of the Georgian population are dependent on agriculture and despite a vast range of agro ecological zones almost all are small scale livestock producers owning milking cows. With the signing of the EU Association Agreement and Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (DCFTA) bringing with it the necessity that Georgia harmonizes its laws with those of the EU, agriculture has become an even higher priority topic for politicians and the media. Paucity of information, poor quality information and absence of information characterized the rural space in 2008 when Alliances began and are still constraints today. The main sources of agricultural information for farmers are from neighbours and friends often passed through informal male gatherings the 'birjas' , or from very general items related to agriculture on the main TV news channels. Information poverty has always been more severe for women as they do not have the same culture as men of gathering in public on the street to chat. Commercially the space has been distorted by donor funded column inches or air time, a lack of understanding of the potential to be found in serving the large rural market and perhaps most significantly a deep urban and rural divide, a public misperception of the fundamentals of rural livelihoods and small and medium rural business.

Working through the Making Markets Work for the Poor Approach, in which the programme co-invests with key market actors be they private or public entities who are the face of the intervention, the programme began with one newspaper client in 2009, local TV in 2010, another newspaper in another region in 2011 and looking for greater scale and impact worked with the public broadcasters only national agricultural magazine programme from 2013. The programme has also concentrated on embedded advice in all interventions most notably through a national veterinary inputs supply company utilizing sms's to customers, as well as in store advice with advice shaped by their customer database. In the new expanded regions of the programme, a TV production company making agricultural and rural livelihoods based programmes has been facilitated and technical videos for use on mobile phones on key topics such as vaccination and nutrition have been developed with a research partner. Another example is in access to decision making for women, where municipal women's resource centres and access to community decision making, primarily involves enabling women to exit an information vacuum and exercise agency in the use of new knowledge for their own and their families benefit. Information can be said to be the one key facet which must be improved in any intervention.

SHAPING THE PUBLIC SPACE

The decision to use information and shape the public space with a specific eye to influencing the political sphere began in 2013 with the making of the *The Road* film documentary. Purposefully taking the form of a beautiful high quality documentary and not a direct advocacy tool, it aimed to highlight the siloed issue of the animal movement route on which a million head of livestock predominantly sheep, travel annually from winter to summer pasture in an ecologically determined pattern of survival and husbandry. The film was promoted publically by the film makers with a glossy premiere, with the main function of bolstering pride in a beautiful country with ancient traditions (and its film making talent), honestly and intelligently showcasing current problems without finger pointing and bringing the issue and the sheep industry out from obscurity and into the public sphere. It worked, bringing to fruition a suite of interventions on the issue and now another film is in production, this time in the new region of Ajara on the Black Sea, where wild honey is still produced. It will portray, very beautifully, the human wildlife interface through the annual cycle of a wild hive and will influence a space which requires support to the honey and rural tourism sectors, an understanding of the

true ecological value of the region in tandem with ongoing rural livelihoods and the galvanization of diverse actors. Above all, it will reflect beauty and positivity back to the Georgians themselves. It will create belief in what is possessed and what is possible.

With regard to agriculture in general however, what became clear was the terrible deadlock in the sector. Politicians and the media were locked in stale and cyclical arguments continuously recycled and served up to the public. There was little or no reference to the private sector just a stymied dialogue between government and farmer with an impossible onus on both, to solve the problems in the sphere. It became very clear that for agricultural policy itself to move forwards the stalemate needed to be broken. The way in which agriculture and agricultural issues were debated and presented needed changing. The way it was reported and the capacity of reporters to do so therefore became the focus of a national level ALCP intervention. In addition by 2014 the Alliances programme areas were well served for tailored agricultural information however large areas of rural Georgia were largely untouched¹, the intervention would also facilitate further scale and outreach.

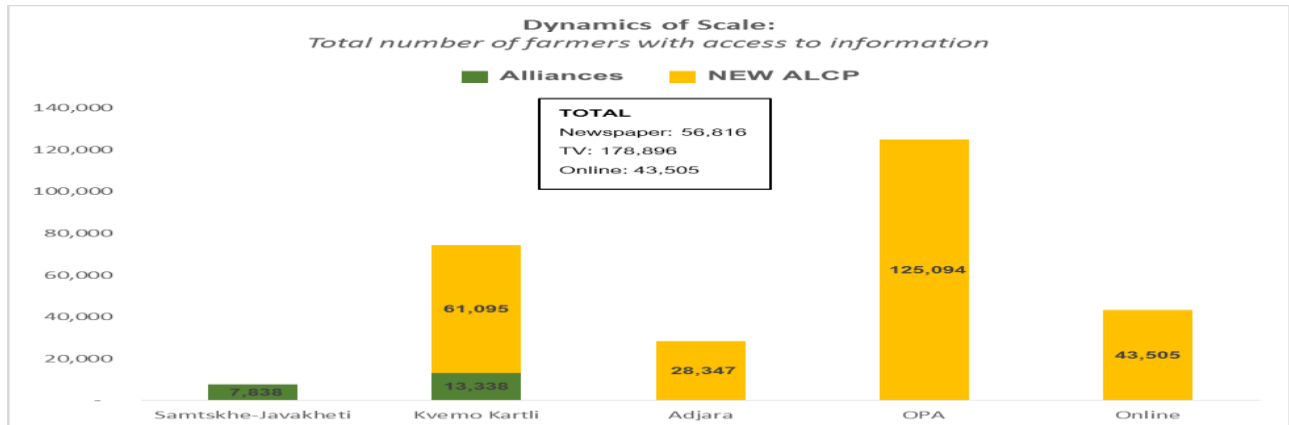
BREAKING THE DEADLOCK: FACILITATION OF THE GEORGIAN REGIONAL MEDIA ASSOCIATION OF BROADCASTERS (GARB) AND GEORGIA REGIONAL MEDIA ASSOCIATION OF PRINT JOURNALISTS (GRMAR)

The two national media associations for print media and broadcasters were formed 2002 and 2004 respectively by independent journalists to represent and advocate for print and TV media across Georgia. The associations cover 24 local newspapers with 60, 000 readers and 20 local TVs with 200,000 viewers in most All Regions of Georgia. The print and TV journalists had received training and experience relating to local government, social, economic and budgeting issues, but not agriculture. The predominantly youthful cadre of journalists were characterized by low capacity to recognize and understand let alone report on the often complex and technical issues arising in Georgian agriculture. Perhaps more importantly they themselves had been influenced by the stale and cyclical reporting related to agriculture and could find no inspiration in it. A key part of the intervention was to prove to them that real agri journalism was a complex mix of dynamic social issues and technical understanding of crucial importance in a country with such a high proportion of the population dependent on and connected to agriculture. Following the approach to the media associations and the negation of an offer, an international agricultural journalist was commissioned to deliver trainings to forty five print and TV journalists. The development of agri-journalism modules to be added to the journalism curriculum in six universities was also initiated. It was also emphasized in the training, that agriculture in Georgia and the lives of rural people were the nexus of so many of the most pressing debates of our time. Far from being the dry province of machinery and fusty academics it is the living breathing space where the rural urban divide, resource use, climate change, gender relations and youth migration to name but a few, are played out.

The question could and should be asked, why not begin with these large scale agents in the beginning. The answer is that the greatest challenge in undertaking information interventions with the media is the generation of appropriate content. When the programme approaches as a facilitator it must have something to offer. Newspapers and particularly TV are content greedy. Over six years the programme had built up a network of people, businesses, content and knowledge that hadn't existed in the space before. An example being food safety and hygiene an issue relevant to every woman milking a cow and producing cheese in Georgia, but one which had previously only been reported verbatim as dry food safety and hygiene edicts and the fear of closed markets, rather than relevant information for practical application. Six years on with a flourishing medium tier dairy sector sourcing from small holder farm women and a food safety and hygiene & BDS service sector, appropriate content was on offer. Without this as a foundation the expanded intervention would not have been possible.

The beauty of training a national press is that they do their own promotion. The programme maintained its usual low visibility, but on the first day of training the Minister of Agriculture arrived to address the trainees on how important an initiative this was, which was duly reported across the country. Following the training the country has seen an explosion of informative and audience appropriate reports about agriculture, resulting in 50 articles in the first month, focused on topical issues such as brucellosis, animal health, farm hygiene and EU regulations.

¹ Save for the national public broadcaster agricultural magazine programme *Perma* (Farmer) However the ratings system used by the public broadcaster only measures the number of viewers in urban conurbations of over 40,000 thus the programme has to date not been able to accurately estimate viewer coverage outside the programme area. The growth in the programme since facilitation began are based on urban ratings, surveys within the programme area, face book numbers etc Current ratings are 27,000 Households, which means 70,200 individual viewers.



Alliances SJ, KK and ALCP amalgamated results October 2008 – February 2016

IMPACT TO DATE

The media has shifted from almost no reporting on agriculture and with only short items included in the daily news, to integrated quality agricultural content in their programming. To date at 279,217 have consumed regular quality agri information through the facilitated media. 69% of farmers feel that they are in a stronger bargaining position with buyers since they have access to the information contained in the programme facilitated services (*TV programme Perma, Mameuli TV and Trialetis Expressi*), 67% of farmers feel that they have authority with knowledge to offer other farmers through informing them of giving advice on agriculture. 58% of farmers share and discuss information with other farmers getting from media services mostly on new regulation on cattle and vaccination.

The ALCP facilitated national farmers' programme *Perma* & its production team continues to expand its activities and has won a public tender to facilitate the 1st Public Broadcaster Radio to start agro radio programming by the end of October. The improved content of *Perma* and the viewing figures and production team expertise won them the tender. Agro trainings have stimulated Ajara TV agro programme *Me Var Fermeri* to change their content emphasizing more on Gender, FS&H, Beekeeping and animal diseases, they have started field reporting expanding into other regions, trust in the programme *Me Var Fermeri* has increased as the programme has started to portray the local farmers and challenges they face: animal diseases, lack of livestock nutritional resources and finances, wild animal's attacks on the cattle, etc. Male farmers have shown an interest in nutrition, veterinary and beekeeping, while women are more interested to watch and get information on cheese making and milking, resulting in increased number of viewers by 37% in 8 months period.

Social media for farmers (National TV programme Perma, Roki's website www.agro.ge, Mosavali's online tutorials)

Agricultural information has started flowing through social media, and online resources are becoming a source for rural people to access agro knowledge. The first enterprise featured in the TV programme *Perma*, Tsalka based cheese factory *Tzesari* has had 25,759 visitors on YouTube,

17% of the ALCP's direct beneficiaries watch *Perma*'s shows on YouTube on farm management, greenhousing, EU regulations regarding FS&H, good milking practice and preventive activities on animal diseases according to the Information Impact Assessment, 2015.; a 3 minutes video on Good Milking Practice featured by Mosavali 6,145 views in a month on their Facebook page; 36,400 unique visitors within 8 months launched have visited Roki's revamped website www.agro.ge, with daily updated agro news, information on inputs and services on Georgian, Azeri and Russian, over the last 2 months, before it had only 100/month.

Mosavali: Online Tutorials

In a pilot facilitation the ALCP worked with *Mosavali* a non-commercial organisation dedicated to farmer learning through short practical mobile and social media friendly video tutorials has created videos on vaccination, brucellosis, anthrax, foot and mouth, mastitis, good milking practice, combined feed, breeding and post calving. The videos have caused high interest in the social media, for example a 3 minutes video on Good

Milking Practice featured has 6,145 views in a month on their Facebook page, follow the link <https://www.facebook.com> All the videos are on their page <http://www.mosavali.org/>. Georgian Regional Media Associations for press and broadcasters have disseminated Mosavali's videos lessons among their member helping the local media in serving rural market. 6 universities (Batumi, Kutaisi, Gori, Telavi, Akhaltsikhe and Caucasus International University in Tbilisi) are on the way to an offering agro journalism course to the students and they are ready to include the videos in the study modules. The videos have a special section on website www.agro.ge and Journalist Resource Centre website www.jrc.ge is now in the process of putting on their website as an example of good reporting, Marneuli TV has started translating them into Azeri to target farmers living in Marneuli.

Agro Journalism

6 universities, offering academic programmes on journalism, mass communications and agricultural education, will incorporate specialized courses on agriculture journalism, focusing on providing students with the knowledge to cover the agricultural industry in an effective manner. For the First time, agro and media specialists began discussion on what kind of information students need to be aware of to report on agriculture, being aware for the first time as farmer as customer and consumer in a significant market and serving their needs. Agricultural Journalism will be a new discipline, lasting one semester with a total 15 credit hours. The course tutors who are also heads of the Department of Journalism in the universities have had TOT for two days about methodology of teaching the course. Follow the link of Imedi TV news on the event <http://imedi.ge>

It will take several months to integrate the course in the programme of Journalism; the first will be Gori's State University which will start from February. Many of them will start from September, 2016. As the tutors noted they see the possibility to integrate the course not only for bachelor's student but also for master's and not only for students of Journalism also for related faculties like Ecology, Environmental Protection, Business and Economy. The study modules have now electronic form will be put on the website www.jrc.ge (Journalist Resource Centre) which will be public.

Nino Chalaganidze, the Head of the Department of Journalism Caucasus International University in Tbilisi: 'Journalism departments have talked about developing sector specific journalism leading to the creation of qualified media professionals for years. The *Journalist Resource Centre (JRC)* and *Georgian Association of Regional Broadcasters (GRMA)* has now started the development of agro journalism facilitated by Mercy Corps ALCP programme funded by SDC. Today we had a discussion regarding the integration of a new agro-journalism module and amendments in the electronic manuals and curricula. The CIU Journalism Program has positively assessed the work done and is ready to participate in the next stage of activities.'

Influence in the development sector

UNDP VET, Eurasia Partnership Foundation and the EUENPARD programme is entering the media sector using the ALCP facilitated platform of GRMA and GARB for attaining their own programme objectives. The ALCP's ongoing facilitation concentrates on helping the two associations to manage these interactions in a way which ensures their sustainability and profitability (both financial and actual content and activity) for the benefit of the client, their readers and watchers and the sector as a whole in Georgia.