

Information
In Alliances

A Short Study



ALCP Alliances Lesser
Caucasus Programme

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June 2016

Citation:

Bradbury, H and Samkharadze, N. *Information in Alliances: A Short Study* (2016)
Alliances Lesser Caucasus Programme.

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The Alliances Lesser Caucasus Programme is a Swiss Development Cooperation funded Mercy Corps Georgia implemented market systems development programme working in the livestock markets systems of dairy, meat, wool and honey in Kvemo Kartli, Samtskhe Javakheti and Ajara regions in Georgia. For more information please visit www.alcp.ge.



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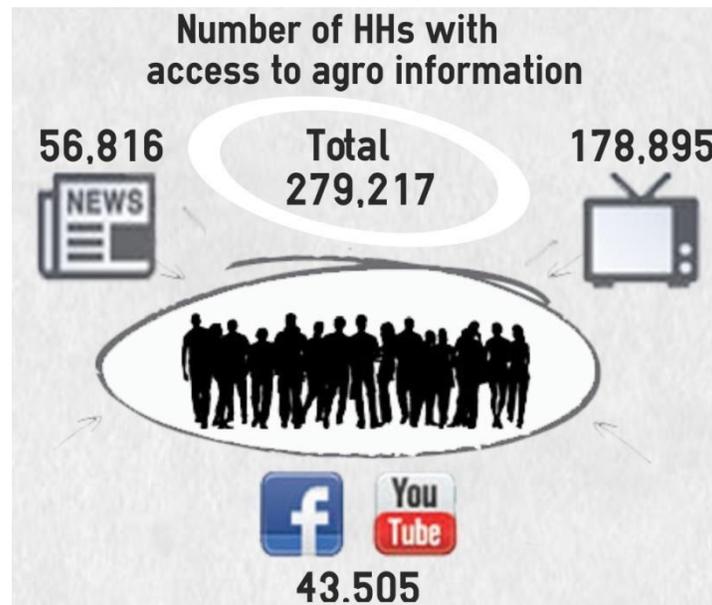


INFORMATION IN ALLIANCES

If you want to change the space, you have to change people's thinking and to do that you 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 has reached at least 279,217 individuals and their households. The estimates are conservative and do not allow for a copying rate between people which is estimated to be 2.6 other people receiving information for every person who has directly read or watched information.¹

The programme is currently focused on maximizing scale and deepening outreach to rural producers and inhabitants and changing how agriculture is reported and debated in Georgia, breaking cyclical and stale ideas to allow for new information and informed debate in the sector through working with the national media associations of television broadcasters and print journalists to develop the field of agri journalism.



BACKGROUND: ALLIANCES AND INFORMATION

Information can be said to be the one key facet which must be improved in any intervention.

Over fifty % of the Georgian population is 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) (June 2014) bringing with it the necessity that Georgia harmonizes its laws with those of the EU, agriculture has

¹ Bradbury H, & Samkharadze N, (2014) [*Serving a Rural Market: Quality Development and Product Delivery of Media to a Non Urban Audience*](#). Alliances Lesser Caucasus Programme. Georgia.

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 or M4P, 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 and growing online advisory, training and sales services shaped by and tailored 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 milking, vaccination, nutrition and hive maintenance have been developed with a research partner. In creating access to public goods for rural inhabitants particularly in issues related to livestock farming and gender a key area of focus for the programme, information access and transfer is paramount. In facilitating access to decision making for women, municipal women's resource centres and access to community decision making primarily involve enabling women to exit an information vacuum and exercise agency in the use of new knowledge for their own and their families benefit.

SHAPING THE PUBLIC SPACE

Create belief in what is possessed and what is possible.

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 rather than overt 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 and 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. 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. It will promote understanding of the true ecological value of the region in tandem with

ongoing rural livelihoods and galvanize of diverse actors. Above all, it will reflect beauty and positivity back to the Georgians themselves.

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 untouched, the intervention would also facilitate further scale and outreach.

GARB (GEORGIAN REGIONAL MEDIA ASSOCIATION OF BROADCASTERS) & GRMA (GEORGIAN REGIONAL MEDIA ASSOCIATION OF PRINT JOURNALISTS)

Far from being the dry province of machinery and fusty academics it (agricultural journalism) 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 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 audiences of 45,818 readers and 20 local TVs with 117,060 viewers in most 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 agro 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. 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.

Following the approach to the media associations and the negotiation of an offer, an international agricultural journalist was commissioned to deliver trainings to forty five print and TV journalists. The development of agro-journalism modules to be added to the journalism curriculum in six universities was also initiated, a new discipline, lasting one semester with a total of 15 credit hours. The course tutors who are also heads of the Department of Journalism in the universities received training on course delivery.

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.

WHY NOT BEGIN AT THE TOP?

The question could and should be asked, why didn't the programme 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.

HARNESSING SOCIAL MEDIA

Market systems are dynamic, information flows should be dynamic too, social media allows for the most dynamic interaction of individual and information yet.

The programme had been facilitating online content through with its clients from 2011 but limited access to internet and computers restricted the outreach of these efforts to farmers. However as soon as it became apparent that a new trend of internet access for rural inhabitants people was developing through the use of 3G/4G networks and smart phone use the programme looked to develop content that would suit this new mode of delivery to rural producers.

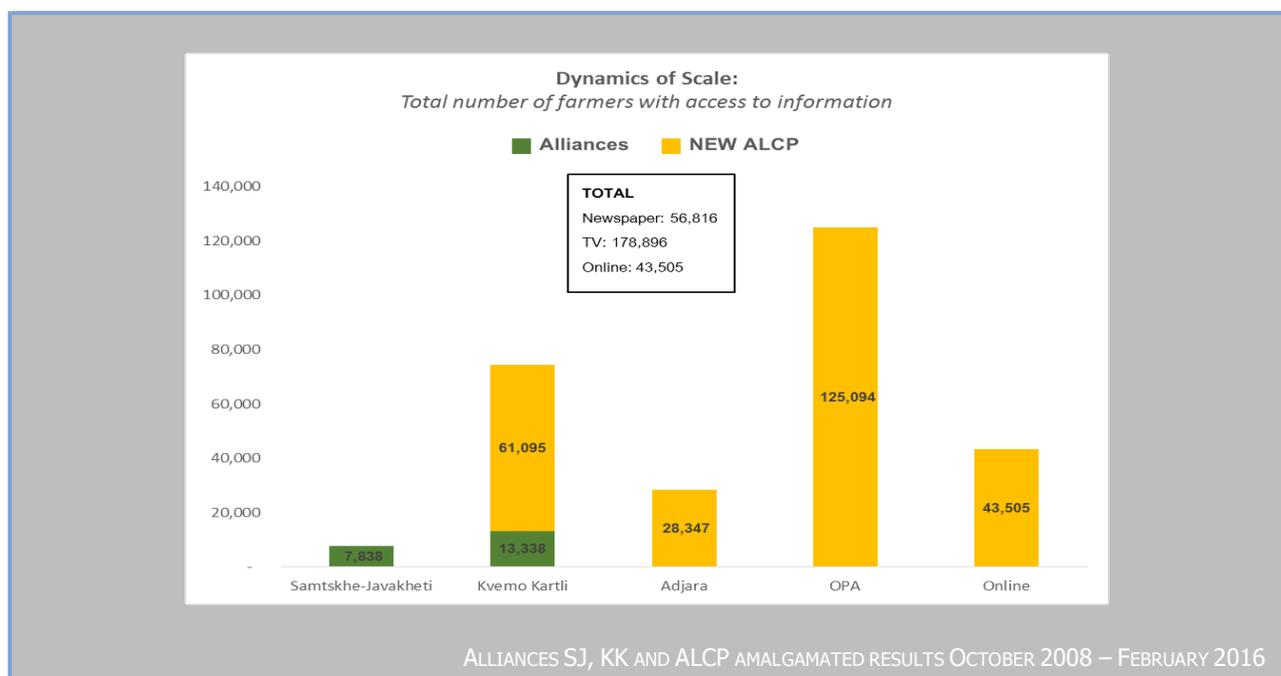
Box 1: Creating Online Content for Farmers

Farmers needed production advice, how to milk, how to feed, breed improvement and advice and information on vaccination and disease that was even more specific than the print and TV advice that had been provided to date. Short 3 minute videos were therefore created, targeting specific technical topics that farmers could access online, in an easy to watch format, be watched as often as they needed and be able to participate in an online community of viewers.

In a pilot facilitation the ALCP worked with *Mosavali* a non-commercial organization dedicated to farmer learning through short practical mobile and social media friendly video tutorials. Videos on vaccination, diseases, good milking practice, combined feed, breeding, post calving and a series of videos for beekeepers have been created. The videos are proving extremely popular. 9 livestock videos have had 93,000 viewers in 9 months through Facebook and YouTube. The *How to Milk* video has had 34,000 views alone since it was posted. The latest video on [Georgian Honey Types](#) has had 64, 500 views and 1, 700 shares in a month. Interestingly impact figures have thrown up an interesting gender dynamic in which it appears women tend to use Facebook for watching the videos whereas men predominantly use YouTube.

They are being used by other media actors too. The media associations for press and broadcasters used the videos in their content and the 6 universities (Batumi, Kutaisi, Gori, Telavi, Akhaltsikhe and Caucasus International University in Tbilisi) are including the videos in study modules in their agro journalism courses. The videos are featured on the Journalist Resource Centre website www.jrc.ge and Marneuli TV has started translating them into Azeri to target farmers living in Marneuli.

Other information providers are also maximizing the outreach of the internet in addition to their regular broadcasts. [Perma](#)'s national agricultural magazine programme reaches 28, 000 per episode on average with repeat views on their internet channel. The first enterprise featured in this TV programme, Tsalka based cheese factory Tzesari has had 25,759 visitors on YouTube and 51,123 unique visitors have visited Roki's revamped website <http://agro.ge/> within 11 months of launch with daily updated agro news, information on inputs and services in Georgian, Azeri and Russian from a baseline of 100 visitors a month.



CHANGING MINDS CHANGING BEHAVIOUR

The media has shifted from limited reporting on agriculture with only short items on daily news, to integrating quality agricultural content in their programming. To date at least 279,217 HH's have consumed regular quality agri information through the facilitated media. In recent survey 69% of farmers feel that they are in a stronger bargaining position with buyers since they have had access to the information contained in the *TV programme Perma, Marneuli TV and newspaper Trialetis Expressi*, 67% of these feel that they have authority to offer other farmers advice or information on agriculture and 58% of farmers share and discuss information with other farmers. In a separate survey of *Trialetis Expressi* readers, 84 % of interviewed farmers 33% of whom were women stated that they had adopted new practices which they felt had increased their productivity and income including: timely vaccination,

preventive activities on animal diseases, cattle feeding and husbandry, the feeding of new born calves, market prices, new technologies in cultivation, bee keeping advice, improved livestock feeding, potato growing & timely vaccination.

The increased ratings of *Perma* and the expertise of its production team allowed it to win a public tender (October 2015) to facilitate agro programming on public radio. Agro trainings have stimulated Ajara TV agro programme *Me Var Fermeri* to change their content emphasizing gender, FS&H, Beekeeping and animal diseases, and they have started expanding their field reporting into other regions. Trust in the programme has increased since the programme began to portray the lives of local farmers and the challenges they face, resulting in a 37% increase in viewers over an 8 month period.

These changes are influencing the development sector. UNDP's Vocational Educational Training programme, the Eurasia Partnership Foundation and the EUENPARD programme have used the GRMA and GARB platforms post facilitation for attaining their own programme objectives related to the agricultural sphere. The programme itself has focused on supporting its clients to manage donor activity to preserve the integrity of their commercial operations.