

Project under FARM Responsive Mechanism

Project: “Improvement of access and information provision through mobile consultancy office operation”

Project Partners: Public organization “Partnership”

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Government of Alberta Specialists

Final Summary Report

March – September, 2007

Executive Summary

The goal of the project was provide rural dwellers and small household plot owners, who live in remote areas with easy access to qualified advice, information and consultation. The project achieved this goal by establishing a mobile consultancy office, which consisted of 60 consultants whom provided consultations, advice, seminars and workshops in a number of different areas including: agronomy, livestock, agribusiness, entrepreneurship, business registration, testing and a host of other agriculture related topics. The mobile office visited different villages regularly (not less than once in two weeks) and rural people received timely access to information on a variety of agriculture and rural development topics.

The operation of the office is supported by local authorities, local NGO (“Partnership”) and local businesses (Centre for entrepreneurship development). This coordination has resulted in the sustainability of the mobile office post FARM funding. Due to the success of the project, the local government has allocated money in their local budgets to support the operations of the mobile office. In addition, NGO Partnership in order to ensure the sustainability of the operations has developed a business plan and looked at a number of different funding activities to supports its operation including fee for service and subscription services. NGO partnership has developed an effective and cost efficient method of delivering important services to rural dwellers in the Luhansk oblast.

Background and Rationale for the Project

During implementation of the project “Development of Information Marketing Network for Small Household Plot Owners” “Partnership” recognized that farmers in villages, especially in isolated villages lacked timely and qualified agriculture and business related information. “Partnership” realized that many rural dwellers in the Luhansk oblast are not able to travel to the major rural centers and therefore are not unable to access information which is predominately accessible in rayon and oblast centers. The services that rural dwellers cited as unavailable to them included: business registration, obtaining of permits and licenses, consultations on business development and business plans preparation.

“Partnership” initiated the development of a mobile consultancy service to be provided to rural dwellers located in remote communities, as a response to the needs identified by “Partnership”. The mobile office would provide rural dwellers to easy accessible, affordable, flexible and qualified advice on a regular basis.

Achieved Project Goal and Objectives

Improved outreach and the provision of quality information and consultations for rural people in remote locations.

Feedback obtained from users of the mobile office services indicated that clients found the services of the mobile office useful and appreciated the easy access to quality information. Furthermore, client feedback indicated that clients felt that they had more opportunity for economic success because of access to basic tools and information.

Introduced and testing of innovative approach to consultancy provision – mobile consultancy office.

The mobile consultancy office approach was tested within in the Luhansk oblast, feedback from clients have been positive, in addition, local government administration have expressed their support for the concept. The next step for “Partnership” is disseminating the concept throughout the oblast.

Local authorities and other controlling bodies were involved in mobile office creation and development.

Positive relations were developed with local government administrations. Local governments were actively involved in the creation and development of the mobile consultancy approach and as a result they have expressed their commitment to supporting the concept and expanding its scope to other regions. Furthermore, the local government has allocated funds within their budget to support this initiative.

Both agriculture and non-agricultural businesses were involved in mobile office creation and development.

Local businesses and local entrepreneurs participated in the creation, development and official launch of the mobile office. Their support, knowledge and experience was key in the creating useful and practical services. Moreover, a number of local businesses supported the mobile consultancy office with financial donations and have indicated that they will continue to provide support in the future.

Increased income of rural people through provision of qualified and timely advice and consultation.

It is too early to measure if the income of the clients have increased, however a number of the clients who have had access to consultations, workshops, seminars and trainings have begun to adopt new practices, have introduced new technologies and have started preparing business plans, with the hope of future financial gains.

Outcomes and Results

Identification of the needs and priorities in rural communities

Partnership in conjunction with the mobile teams conducted a survey of rural dwellers in order to collect information about the needs of the community and generate interest in the mobile services. 1200 people were questioned, 1000 copies of questionnaire results were published. The results of the questionnaire guided the development of services to be delivered in the respective communities.

Mobile Team Created

60 specialists from a variety of different backgrounds were trained and a mobile office teams were formed. Specialists included representatives from social, entrepreneurship and agriculture departments of the rayon administration, representatives from the private sector and members of a number of non-governmental associations.

The mobile teams participated in a series of trainings, beginning with a series of team building exercises and then continued with a series of training on agriculture issues, business registration, marketing issues and working with authorities. Furthermore, the team looked at various alternatives to ensure the sustainability of the mobile office.

List of mobile office services developed.

Members of selected communities participated in the developed of the services to be provided by the mobile consultancy teams. Services were grouped in two categories:

- Commercial – service provided to ensure financial viability of the office. These included: agribusiness and entrepreneurial services.
- Non commercial services – services that should be provided by the state. They included: agronomic, livestock, social and business oriented types of services.

Mobile Team Delivered Services to Rural Communities

- 118 people trained in preparation of business plans.
- 92 people received business registration knowledge
- 83 people attended workshops on new technologies and products.
- 88 representatives of village councils trained in business registration and obtaining permits.
- 20 communities visited during the road show. The road show presented different types of services as well as various consultations were given in non pilot settlements. It raised a lot of interest from people.
- 10 thematic visits were organized on the following themes: business registration, permits, land issues, social benefits, water supply, obtaining business loans.

Relationship building with local governments

- **Four two day workshops were conducted.** Mobile team specialists worked with selected key local authorities to ensure the successful operation of the mobile office. Participants included: heads and members of village councils, heads of rayon of the agricultural department of the rayon administration, the heads of rayon and oblast employment centres. The workshops were an opportunity for government administrators to learn about agriculture extension and the benefits, and also to garner support for the mobile office. 112 people participated in the workshops – 53 men and 59 women.
- **Eight round tables with local council heads were conducted.** The roundtables aimed at improving relations with local authorities and developing plans for the mobile in each community. 80 people participated, participants included: active community members, local farmers, representative of rayon administration.
- **Money allocated in local budgets for mobile office.** Money has been allocated from the 2008 budget, under the budget line “SME development programs, social programs in rural areas” to support the mobile consultancy services.

Canadian Partner Contribution

“Partnership” is very pleased with the partnership with Canadian specialist Jack Hazelwood. The visit of Mr. Hazelwood was successful and raised profile of the mobile office. Meetings held with local authorities were important as they moved forward relations and improved their understanding of mobile office concept. Mr. Hazelwood’s outside view was constructive and the practical information he provided was very useful. “Partnership” hopes to continue their relationship with Mr. Hazelwood and seek out his advice in the future.

Conclusion

The project was successful in establishing mobile consultancy services in the Luhansk Oblast. The mobile teams are providing useful and practical advice to rural dwellers who have had very limited access to information in the past. One of the major achievements of the project has been the community driven approach that was taken. “Partnership” was successful in bringing together key stakeholders into this initiative – rural dwellers, community leaders, local governments, NGOs and the business community. The community approach will ensure the sustainability of the mobile services as the main stakeholders have witnessed the positive outcomes that have been achieved and having been involved in every stage of project implementation which has created a sense of ownership among the stakeholders. The business community and the local government have expressed their commitment to ensure the sustainability of the mobile consultancy services.