

Developing Media Markets to Address Agricultural Constraints

A Case Study from the ALCP Georgia

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CONSOLIDATED CASE STUDY

This version presents a brief summary of the ALCP's work with mass media systems in Georgia. Please see the full case study, by the same title, for references, sources, diagrams, and fuller explanations. It is available on the ALCP website (<http://alcp.ge/>) and the Springfield Centre website (<https://www.springfieldcentre.com/>).

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A Brief Introduction to the ALCP¹

The Alliances programme, a market system development programme working in the livestock market system in Georgia, is a Swiss Development Cooperation (SDC) project, implemented by Mercy Corps Georgia and run in accordance with the M4P (Making Markets Working for the Poor) Approach. The programme began in 2008 in Samstkhe Javakheti, Georgia. Alliances Kvemo Kartli was opened in 2011, with a second phase awarded to Samstkhe Javakheti. In 2014, the second phase of an expanded Kvemo Kartli was merged with a new branch of the programme in Ajara and a two-year monitoring and sustainability phase in Samstkhe Javakheti to form the Alliances Lesser Caucasus Programme (ALCP). From 2014 Alliances management, programming and operations were fully harmonized under the ALCP. The programme has achieved substantial scale and systemic change well beyond the initial designated programme areas and targets and has devoted itself to learning, excellence and participation in a global community of practice in Market Systems Development, including being twice successfully audited by the Donor Committee for Enterprise Development (DCED) Standard for Results Measurement. It has furthered learning and practice in Women's Economic Empowerment and harnessed market systems programming to generate significant impact in transversal themes with a 54% average of female usage and access across all interventions. From October 2008 to March 2017, 444,417 income beneficiaries generated 39.95 million USD (92.94 million GEL) in aggregated net attributable direct and indirect income for farmers, businesses and employees. For more detail go to www.alcp.ge

¹ From Alliances Caucasus Programme (2018) *Biannual Report - April 2018 to September 2018*, p. 6

Introduction

The Alliances Caucuses Programme in Georgia (ALCP) is a rare example of a programme that has applied Market System Development (MSD) principles to work with media - TV stations and newspapers - to address constraints in agricultural markets. The results have been remarkable.

Agricultural journalism did not exist in Georgia in 2008, when the ALCP began. Since then the programme estimates that its media-related interventions alone have reached 287,261 rural households (62% of rural households in Georgia), representing 639,174 people, through television, radio, newspaper and online videos.² Surveys suggest that about half of rural livestock farmers and honey producers (the majority of whom are women) are now accessing agricultural information through media and that two of the three most popular channels for agricultural information are ALCP-facilitated media products. More than half of rural viewers surveyed by the ALCP say they have changed their behaviour as a result of agricultural information from media, and most of these report tangible benefits, including income increases, as a result of these behaviour changes.³ As of 2018, these media products continue to be published independently, without funding from the ALCP.

How an agricultural programme came to work in media

The ALCP is a Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation programme, implemented by Mercy Corps Georgia. Its goal is to increase incomes and employment among small-scale livestock and honey producers (LHPs) by developing and strengthening dairy, meat, wool and honey markets.

The programme was not originally commissioned to achieve any explicitly information-oriented targets. However, market diagnosis suggested that if LHPs could access better information about agricultural markets and practices they would be able to reduce losses and improve the quality, quantity and price of the products they sold. Consequently, the ALCP made improved access to information on agricultural practices and markets an explicit goal.

Deeper diagnosis: research into information provision

Once the ALCP had recognised the importance of information, they began to investigate how LHPs were currently getting agricultural information (this became baseline data) and to identify who would have the incentives and capacities to provide better information to LHPs. They found that male farmers and beekeepers got most of their agricultural information from neighbours and friends, often through informal men's gatherings (*birja*). Men (who were generally more mobile than women) also got some information from shops, vets and vet pharmacies but they had to travel to Tbilisi or other urban centres to access these services. LHPs often had no source of information about price other than that which buyers gave them, which left them disadvantaged in negotiations. Both men and women watched agricultural news items aired on TV but the ALCP found only two other examples of programmes featuring agricultural content. In both cases, the quality of programming was poor, and the content lacked relevance to rural LHPs. Other agricultural content in mass media was limited to short-term, donor-funded campaigns. Overall, access to information, trust and the relevance of the available information to rural farmers' needs were found to be the main problems, with access to information affecting women more severely than men.

Why mass media?

The ALCP's work in media was one of several complementary strategies used to improve LHPs' access to relevant, trustworthy, agricultural information. The team recognised that media – especially TV – was already being widely accessed in rural areas by both women and men and was already viewed by LHPs as an important potential source of agricultural information. This indicated that LHPs would be likely to access, trust and act on agricultural information embedded in media

² An estimated 60,000 urban households were also reached through media. See Box 3 in the full case study for details of the interventions in online media; this consolidated case study focuses on interventions in broadcast and print media.

³ For references and further details see Introduction, Section 4 and Bibliography of the full case study.

content. Scale is also built into TV channels' and newspapers' incentives, meaning the ALCP could potentially address information constraints for a large number of LHPs efficiently through media.

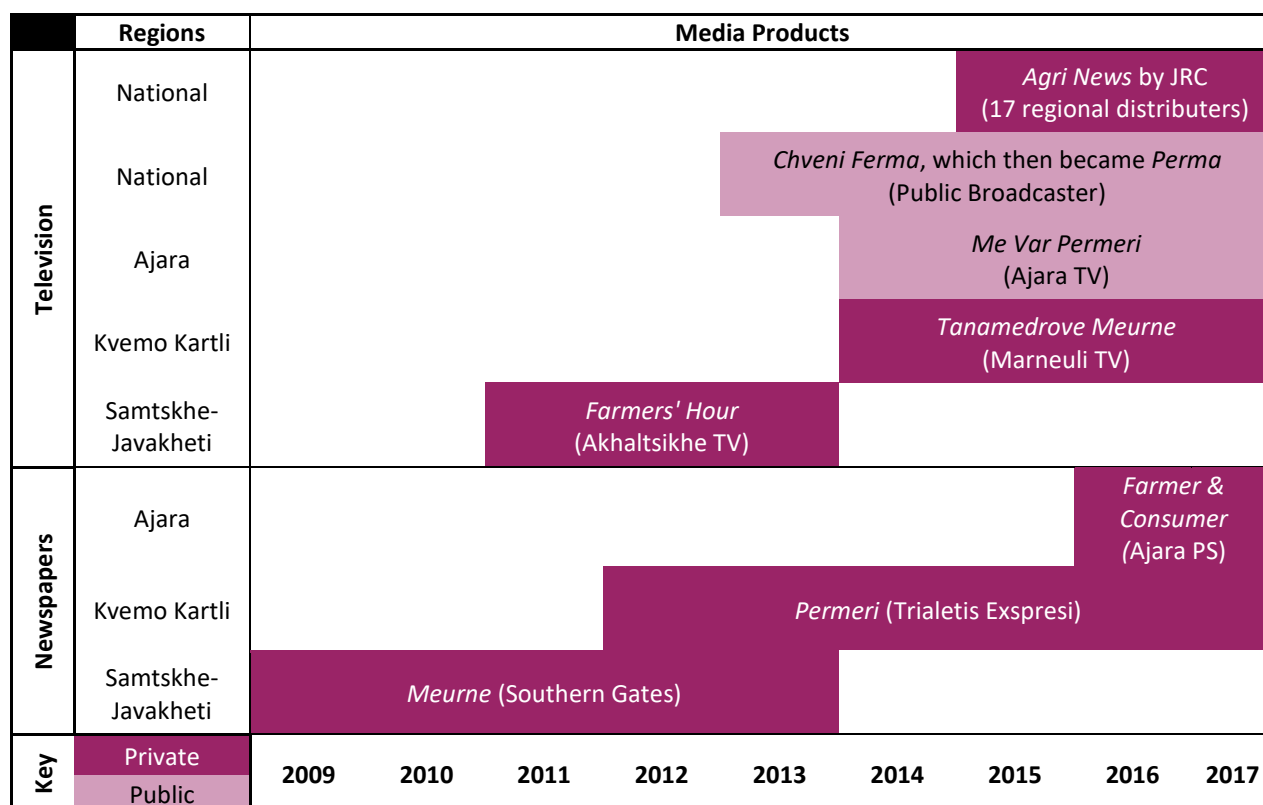
Working with mass media systems

The ALCP's vision was that media entities would publish quality, independent, agricultural content relevant to LHP's needs that would drive ratings and sales from a rural audience. In order to do this sustainably and successfully, media partners would need to produce content that increased their audience size and generated income from advertising sales (for private media) or public budget (for public media) instead of relying on sponsor-funded content. The activities the ALCP team took to achieve this vision can be understood through the "Adopt, Adapt, Expand, Respond" framework.⁴

Adopt: will the innovation be adopted by programme partners?

The ALCP began by supporting regional media partners to develop relevant field-based agricultural content for themselves. Media partners contributed staff time, use of existing equipment, and fuel for field-based reporting trips, while the ALCP contributed new equipment, technical advice and links to their agricultural partners who provided relevant material to report on – a key asset for content-hungry newspapers and TV stations.⁵ The ALCP also highlighted the importance of gender-sensitized content, pointing out that by producing content that women seek out and share, media outlets could boost their ratings even more. The results were a marked increase in ratings and engagement, demonstrating the potential of a large rural audience. As Figure 1 shows, the ALCP's partnerships in media grew gradually, enabling programme staff to learn, iterate and build credibility over time.

Figure 1: Chronology of media products facilitated by the ALCP



⁴ See Nippard, D., Hitchins, R. and Elliot, D. (2014) *Adopt-Adapt-Expand-Respond: a framework for managing and measuring systemic change processes*; Taylor, B. (2016) *Systems and Systemic Change - Clarity in Concept*

⁵ See Annex 2 of Alliances Caucasus Programme (2018) *A National Review of Information Impact in Alliances, 2008-2018* for details of the contributions ALCP made to each media partner. See Box 3 in the full case study for details on how the ALCP supported media partners to develop content without the programme paying for it directly.

Adapt: will programme partners sustain the innovation?

Over time, the ALCP was able to reduce their support to media partners, who increasingly relied on their local contacts for agricultural information and, thanks to improved ratings, were gradually able to invest more resources in content production. Encouragingly, there were also signs of partners developing agricultural media services and products not mentioned in the original partnership vision. For example, several TV programmes started social media pages to interact with audience members and answer farmers’ questions. Gender-oriented programming was also sustained. For example, a third of stories on the national agricultural programme *Perma* feature rural female agriculturalists. As of 2018, the ALCP is no longer actively involved in supporting any partners’ media products yet all are still aired or published in some format.

Expand: will the innovation spread through the system?

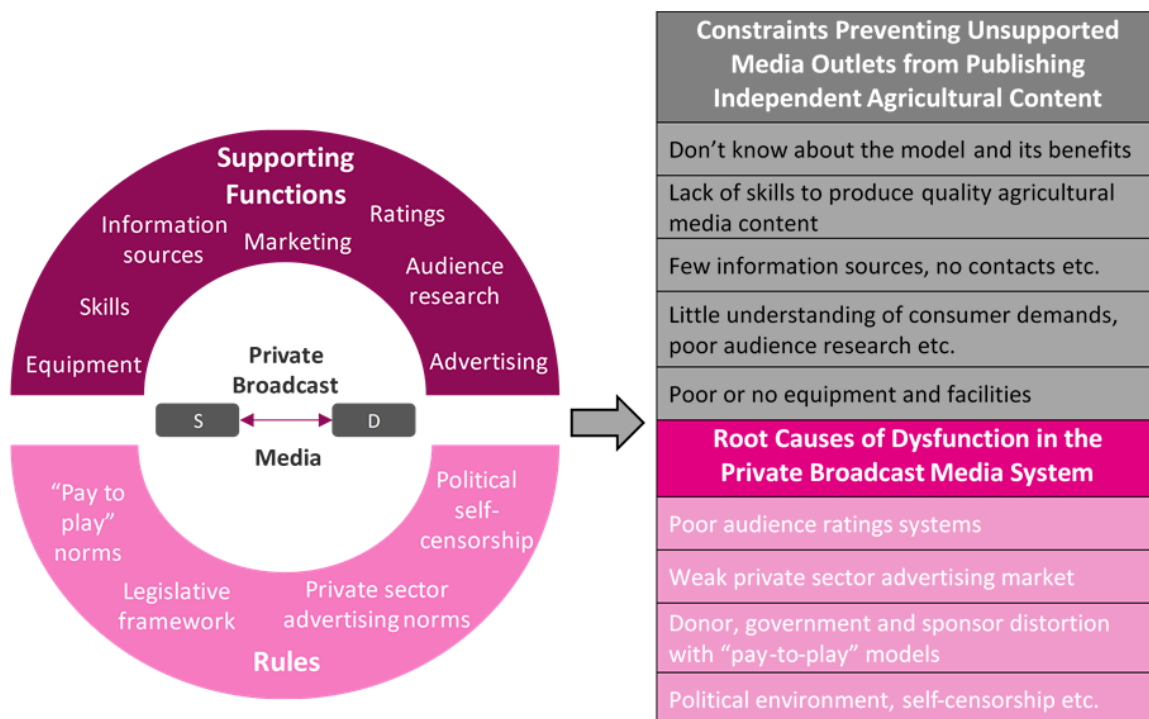
Ideally, the ALCP’s media partners’ successes would stimulate other media players to produce agricultural content themselves, to compete for ratings. Cases of this did occur. However, there was little competition in Georgia’s regional media markets and, more importantly, new players could not copy the ALCP’s partners because they too were constrained by a lack of resources, underdeveloped skills and no links to information sources, just as the programme’s partners had been.

Unlike in other sectors, the programme had not started their work in media by fully diagnosing, mapping and analysing mass media market systems. This is because their original intent was not to improve the way media works in Georgia, but to find players who could address the information constraints they had identified, which in turn would improve the way the core agricultural markets work for rural farmers and beekeepers. However, they discovered that unless they addressed systemic constraints in the mass media systems, they would not be able to expand their successes.

Respond: which supporting functions need to be addressed to support the innovation?

As systemic constraints were preventing new media outlets from publishing independent agricultural content (see Figure 2), the ALCP decided to intervene in the supporting functions of the mass media systems (the ALCP focused on the constraints in grey in Figure 2).

Figure 2: Expansion of ALCP interventions was limited by systemic constraints in media markets



To increase visibility of the benefits of producing agricultural content and inspire new media entities to invest in agri-journalism, the ALCP partnered with two associations to deliver multi-day training

courses to journalists from across the country. The training introduced a wider group of journalists to individuals and organisations in the agricultural sector, several of whom have since become indispensable agricultural information sources in the media market more broadly.

The programme then partnered with the Journalism Resource Centre (JRC) to develop an agri-journalism module and address the skills constraint in media markets. To date, fourteen Georgian universities have incorporated, or are in the process of incorporating, this module into their curriculum. So far, 369 students have studied agricultural journalism as a result.

To address resource constraints, the ALCP partnered with the JRC to produce a programme called *Agri News* and distribute it to regional media stations to air alongside local news. *Agri News* offers quality, up-to-date agricultural information, which in an information-poor environment, is popular. This provides regional media with an entry point to develop more independent content themselves.

In many ways the JRC has replaced the ALCP as the innovator and driver of change in agricultural journalism, showing that agricultural journalism is becoming a permanent part of media systems. Wider dysfunctions (such as poor audience ratings monitoring and distortion from pay-to-play models) remain a risk, but as the JRC and other supporting institutions are strengthened, they are in a better position to address the root causes of wider media dysfunction for themselves.

Key lessons to learn from the ALCP's approach

The key to scale and sustainability often lies in supporting systems. The ALCP was able to increase the scale of their impact by intervening several market systems away from their core markets. For example, by facilitating universities to train journalists, the ALCP could increase the number of media organisations affected, and thus the number of LHPs receiving agricultural information.

The road to successful intervention in supporting markets is paved with pilots. It is especially important to test a theory of change with pilots when working several market systems away from the core, as there are so many assumed links between an intervention and its intended outcomes. For example, the ALCP tested media's potential for addressing information constraints, and training's effectiveness in addressing media constraints, before beginning to work with universities.

Systemic constraints need to be addressed in supporting markets. Having demonstrated the effectiveness of their strategy, the ALCP had to address systemic constraints in mass media systems before it could expand its interventions. Whenever moving into work in a new system, programmes should diagnose that system and use their research to determine which systemic constraints in the supporting market need to be addressed to sustainably achieve systemic change in the core market.

Research should drive programme strategy. The ALCP's work with media was driven by diagnostic research which suggested that media could address agricultural information constraints in the Georgian context. The ALCP tested the evidence, found media to be effective, and designed creative, context-specific interventions on the basis of their findings.

Programming for gender and ethnicity amplifies success. By identifying the unique needs of women and men in different ethnic communities, and the different strategies needed to reach these demographics, the ALCP has been able to increase media reach for their partners and increase economic empowerment for women and ethnic minorities as well as for men among LHPs.

Conclusion

The ALCP has applied MSD principles to their work with media, focusing on media's incentives for reaching a rural audience and addressing the constraints that had previously prevented them from doing so. By focusing on sustainability and scale, the ALCP has been able to introduce the discipline of agricultural journalism to Georgian media, improving LHPs' access to agricultural information and thereby strengthening their positions in agricultural markets, enabling them to increase their incomes and reduce their risks. Through this work the ALCP has achieved a remarkable scale of impact that can claim to have changed the media landscape in Georgia.