

Documentation on digital platforms



Introductory Note

This fact sheet has been produced as part of a study to map innovative methods and tools in agricultural advisory services in West and Central Africa. This study was commissioned by CORAF/WECARD (the West and Central African Council for Agricultural Research and Development) and carried out by RESCAR-AOC (the West and Central Network for Agricultural and Rural Advisory Services) across 13 West and Central African countries.

The overall objective of the study was to compile a descriptive directory of innovative agricultural advisory methods and tools for scaling up agricultural technologies and innovations in West and Central Africa.

Several individuals within CORAF, RESCAR-AOC, and beyond, across the 13 countries covered by the study, contributed to the success of this initiative. We extend our gratitude to everyone involved for their contribution.

1. Overview of the digital platform tool

An agricultural digital platform is an online interface that gives farmers access to a variety of services and resources, enabling them to manage their farms more efficiently and sustainably. Platforms contribute to the digital transformation of the agricultural sector by offering farmers tools to improve productivity, access new markets and benefit from services tailored to their needs. They act as a point of convergence between agricultural producers and the various stakeholders in the value chain, such as distributors, service providers and consumers. The development of digital platforms in the agri-food sector is redefining the ways in which agricultural production is marketed and consumed (Grain de Sel, 2018).

2. Brief description of the types of beneficiaries supported by digital platforms

Digital platforms are open to all categories of farmers. However, it is difficult for farmers who do not have a high level of education to use them. Digital platforms are used much more by technicians, who use them to find the information they need to provide to farmers. The videos and various documents on these platforms are most often downloaded and made available to growers through other channels.

3. Goal of digital platforms

The main function of digital platforms is to promote the sharing and use of agricultural training videos. These videos cover a range of topics relating to plant, animal and forestry production.

In the case of 'Access to Agriculture', the videos cover the following areas: Grains; Root, Tuber & Banana; Vegetable; Legumes; Fruit & Nut; Other Crops; Livestock; Aquaculture; Sustainable Land Management; Plant Health; Equipment; Business Skills; Approaches; Others (all in French).

In the case of the Burkina Faso Ministry of Agriculture's 'Agritube', the videos cover the following topics: Grains; Tubers and roots; Fruit and vegetables; Legumes and oilseeds; Agricultural mechanisation; Agricultural inputs and regulations; Seed production; Manufacture and use of organic inputs; Innovative technologies; Crop pest management; Agri'Voucher.

4. Impacts of digital platforms

Digital agricultural platforms are playing a growing role in improving farmers' yields by facilitating access to vital information and optimising farming practices. They provide farmers with accurate weather data, technical advice, financial services and market opportunities, contributing to better decision-making and more efficient farm management. In terms of productivity, Feed the Future (n.d.) claims that independent studies have shown yield improvements of up to 170%. The contribution of NpAg (innovation and digitisation for agriculture) to improved productivity is said to be associated with better weather forecasts, recommendations for fertiliser use, or simply making it possible to purchase improved inputs (Feed the Future, n.d.).

The effects of NpAg on incomes have been observed regularly over the last decade and ranged from 2% to 20%, but with some positive outliers of up to 60% improvement in incomes (Feed the Future, n. d.).

The number of farmers subscribing to digital agricultural services has increased by 40-45% per year over the past three years.

(www.microsave.net/fr/blog/2020/05/28/levolution-de-leconomie-de-la-plateforme-agricole). The African Development Bank (AfDB) reckons that 33 million people have

already signed up to digital agricultural services such as weather forecasts and access to markets.

(www.microsave.net/fr/blog/2020/05/28/levolution-de-leconomie-de-la-plateforme-agricole). The 'Accès Agriculture' platform has 90 million users, 266 entrepreneurs in 18 countries, and more than 4,500 videos on agro-ecology, with content in more than 100 languages (<https://www.accessagriculture.org/fr/global-use>). The 'Accès Agriculture' platform has 90 million users, 266 entrepreneurs in 18 countries, with more than 4,500 videos on agro-ecology, with content in more than 100 languages (<https://senegal.un.org/fr/123751-84-000-producteurs-s%C3%A9n%C3%A9galais-ont-re%C3%A7u-les-tous-premiers-conseils-agricoles-de-la-plateforme>). The 'Agritube' platform of Burkina Faso's Ministry of Agriculture contains a variety of videos in five languages relating to plant, animal and forest production (<https://agritube.gov.bf/>). The M-Louma digital platform, which has been operating in Senegal since 2012, has 75,000 registered users (Grain de Sel, 2018).

5. Technologies and innovations promoted through digital platforms

Digital platforms (such as Agritube, Accès Agriculture, etc) enable agricultural knowledge to be disseminated rapidly and on a large scale. They offer multimedia content (videos, tutorials, discussion forums) that makes it easier for farmers to learn on their own. A wide range of technologies are disseminated, including conservation agriculture, climate-smart agriculture and efficient irrigation techniques. According to Rogers (2003), digital platforms accelerate the adoption of new technologies by reducing the distance between experts and farmers. Thanks to the demonstration effect offered by videos, farmers can visualise techniques and implement them more easily.

6. Average Implementation Costs of digital platforms

The cost of developing and using ICT varies enormously depending on the infrastructure and extent of coverage (Saravanan et al., 2015). For applications such as social media, the cost can be as little as a few dollars for devices and data charges, whereas for complex applications such as web portals, e-learning platforms, apps, expert systems or decision support system development, the cost can be several million dollars (Saravanan et al., 2015). According to these authors, it would take an average of US\$300 to US\$2,000 to create a basic website, US\$2,000 to US\$10,000 to integrate a content

management system (CMS), and between US\$10,000 and US\$60,000 for a sophisticated web portal with added functionality. To these costs one should also take into account the maintenance of web portals, which also comes with a considerable price tag. An expert system can cost between US\$1,000 and US\$10,000, depending on its design, the software and the size of the content.

7. Strengths and limitations of digital platforms

Digital agricultural platforms offer numerous benefits for the farming sector, but also have certain limitations. They provide easier access to information, reduce production costs, facilitate and improve the traceability of agricultural products, and help to strengthen farming communities. ([How can digital technology be used in agriculture to improve farm management, from production to marketing? - francenum.gouv.fr](#) in French). The limitations of digital platforms include the difficulty of accessing infrastructure, the lack of digital skills among farmers, the cost of procuring digital devices, and the confidentiality and security of data. ([Boost the adoption of digital tools by small farmers](#) in French) (Royer et al., 2020).

8. Prerequisites for success and the role of the various stakeholders in the success of digital platforms

The use of digital platforms requires an appropriate technological infrastructure, including a stable and fast Internet connection (ITU, 2021), suitable equipment (smartphones, tablets, computers) (FAO, 2020) and appropriate network coverage, particularly in rural areas (World Bank, 2019).

To adopt digital platforms, farmers need to be familiar with digital tools and new technologies (UNESCO, 2022), be aware of cybercrime and understand good digital practices (OECD, 2021).

To ensure effective use, platforms must offer content tailored to farmers' needs (FAO, 2021; FAO, 2020; CTA, 2018).

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