ICCO REGIONAL WORKSHOP ON INTEGRATED MANAGEMENT OF COCOA PESTS AND PATHOGENS IN AFRICA

Introduction to the use of “CocoaLink” platform to enhance feedback from farmers in research, development and extension of farmer centered technologies

April 17th, 2013 : Oak Plaza Hotel, Accra

H. Sona Ebai
World Cocoa Foundation
What is CocoaLink?

**Background: Low-tech Innovations**
- Established in 2011
- Uses mobile technology
- Communicates practical, critical, agricultural and social information to rural cocoa farmers in Ghana

**Key Features**
- Provides free and timely text messages on farming, social needs, health and marketing to improve income and livelihoods
- Two-way: Farmers receive texts and voice messages and are able to submit queries on specific issues.
- Weekly farmer education: CocoaLink Extension Agents
- System encourages communication among farmers
- Enhances government extension, including responding directly to farmers’ information needs
Approach and Achievements

- Designed for COCOBOD to assume responsibility for operations after three years
- Designed and implemented in partnership with local organizations
- Strong collaboration with COCOBOD Extension Agents in the field
- Facilitator & Extension Agent Training
- Over 16000 farmers registered via mobile and short code networks, 1/3 are female farmers
- Beneficiaries are from 561 Communities in 25 Districts in Ghana.
- Over 230,000 SMS focusing on cocoa agronomy, malaria and child labour delivered since July 2011

- Farmer-Farmer and Farmer-Expert network enhancing information sharing
- System encourages communication among farming communities and evolves in response to farmer feedback.
- Additional private partners joining the partnership
CocoaLink teaches functional literacy to ensure that farmers and their families can make use of the system.

CocoaLink trains farmers in information management to be able to maximize the benefit of the service.

CocoaLink works with local groups and community networks to ensure system sustainability and quality outcomes for the farmers.
Cocoa Farming is the primary source of income for over 700,000 households in Ghana.

Funds earned from cocoa farming are often the parents’ only contribution to children’s education expenses.

Strengthening the families’ financial position enables increased enrollment and attendance.

Increased school enrollment and attendance is the most reliable measure of reduced child labor on the farm.

CocoaLink messaging focuses on livelihoods and community development.
Key Results to Date

- Mobile ownership has increased in pilot communities from 84% during baseline in 2011 to 93% in 2012
  - Higher increase in ability to perform key mobile functions in pilot communities than control
- 40% of farmers in pilot communities used their mobile phones to discuss agricultural production related issues compared to less than 20% in control communities
- 68% of farmers in pilot communities used mobile phone to communicate with an Extension Agent at least once a month; 29% do so twice a month
Feedback Summary

- 100% of the respondents applied the information on safe agrochemical spraying and harvesting processes.
- 96.3% followed the instruction on pruning in their farms.
- The messages on child labor had the least adoption figure of 55.6%.
- There is the need to restructure the current child labor messages.

"CocoaLink has helped me to follow the farming practices step-by-step due to the weekly SMS. I no longer waste agrochemicals due to the Educational Sessions." Quote from farmer.
CocoaLink as an Early Warning System

• Multiple parties could get informed instantly by phone on disease or pest symptoms to watch out for
• Farmers in different locations can easily report on ‘strange’ symptoms or manifestations they identify on their farm
  - farmers can take pictures of these ‘strange’ events and immediately send onto the CocoaLink platform using smart phones
• Intensity and concentration of a particular sign can easily be linked to a particular group/community of farmers
Expansion

• **Ghana:**
  – Scale up to 100,000 farmers by 2014
  – Scale up CocoaLink’s technology and build an efficient technical support system within COCOBOD for sustainability
  – Voice message system expansion

• **Cote d’Ivoire:**
  – Launching CocoaLink in Cote d’Ivoire – Mid-year 2013
  – Program partnership with CCC
  – Implementation partnership with ANADER
Expansion Challenges

• Selection of communities – takes time and coordination, with existing programs and partners

• Training of Field Agents – costs and time

• Updating the content of messages require constant involvement of research and extension agencies

• Cost of the two-way messages? Sustainability: Lack of a subsidized short code to receive feedback from farmers

• Software and hardware – capacity of the platform to handle more load

• Farmer level: network failure; recharging phones

• M&E will become complex as number of farmers registered increase
Thank you!