



Providing information via mobiles to women farmers

Findings from Ashoka's work on agriculture and nutrition

Issue No. 1

Executive Summary

There is a high degree of interest in leveraging the ubiquity of mobile phones for social good. Ashoka survey of 2100+ women farmers in rural Karnataka and Odisha highlights some challenges faced in using phones as a last-mile solution for reaching women.

Challenges:

- Less than 14% of women own a mobile phone
- Less than 1% keep a mobile phone with the whole day and 82% cannot use the phone to do anything but receive calls.
- Less than 2% send or receive text messages

Access¹



Usage¹



Solutions:

- Many women have access to their husband or son's phones during 3 pm to 5 pm and 9 pm to 11 pm. Send info relevant to women's activities and crops at this time.
- Women are 50 times more likely to pick a call than to read a message. Use pre-recorded messages to disseminate info.
- Create a hub-and-spoke model of info/service delivery, with a woman leader having access and ability to use a phone (e.g. para vet).
- On average, every active SHG has 2 women farmers with a mobile phone. Train these women to give agri-info or services through their mobile phones to other members.

Practitioners' Guide

Follow these steps to make your intervention more gender responsive:

1. Do a survey to check ownership, access and usage of phone. (You can use the Ashoka survey!)
2. Is there a particular time of the day when most women use a phone? If yes, send them info at that time.
3. Are women members of an active Self Help Groups that meets regularly? Identify a mobile phone user in these groups who can use her mobile phone to provide info to other members..
4. Does the community have a cadre of local women leaders, such as para-vets or ASHA workers? Train them on use of mobile phones and develop a hub-and-spoke model around them.
5. Use pre-recorded audio messages instead of text messages, preferably with some entertaining music before or after.

Are you a practitioner who has something to add to this list? Write to us !

Context

Women constitute 37% of agriculture workforce and provide 40% of farm work. Women farmers work in severely constrained environments with less access to assets, inputs and services than men farmers.

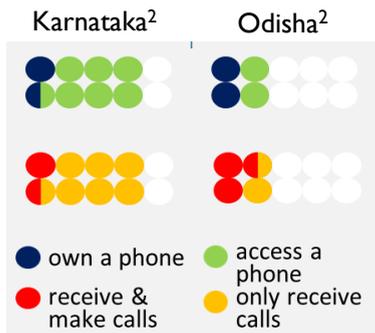
Per FAO, if women had the same access to resources as men, they could increase yields on their farms by 30%. This could raise total agricultural output in developing countries by 4%, which could in turn reduce the number of hungry

people in the world by 17%¹.

Ashoka's survey shows that only 21% of women farmers receive agri related information from any source, including their husbands.

Mobile phones offer a powerful opportunity to provide services and information to small holder farmers. However careful thought must be given to selecting relevant information and the method of dissemination through mobile phones.

Ownership, Access and Usage



Only 13% and 23% women farmers own a mobile phone in rural Karnataka and Odisha, respectively.

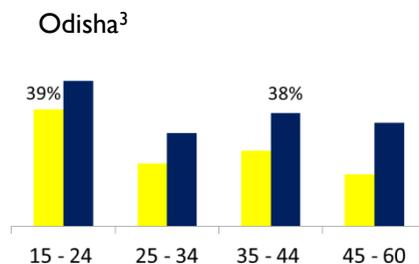
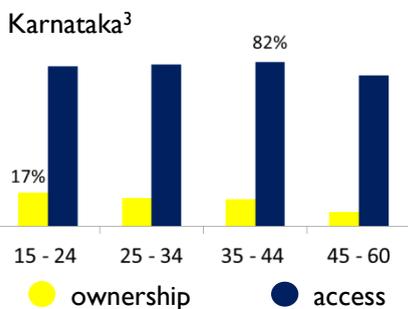
While ownership of phones is higher in Odisha, total access to any household phone is lower. One possible explanation for this could be greater outward migration of male household members in the taluks surveyed in Odisha.

Almost all women who have access to a phone know how to receive a call. Most women who own the phone know how to make calls as well.²

Age-wise trends

Younger women farmers are more likely to own and use the mobile phone for making calls. The access

to a household mobile phone remains more or less constant across age groups.



Profile of a Nirmala Kumari*

Nirmala Kumari is a landless and illiterate woman livestock keeper in Duni, district of Rajasthan. She does not own a mobile phone. Her husband has a mobile phone but it is usually out of balance; she uses the phone only once a week when her migrant brother in law calls from the city.

How can she access information regarding best agricultural practices?

Pashu Sakhis of Srijan

Ashoka Fellow Ved Arya's organisation SRIJAN has designed a Pashu Sakhi program which builds capacities of local women farmers to become agri service providers for other farmers in their village. They provide paid services locally such as information about best practices and medicines for animal diseases.

Every Pashu Sakhi gets a mobile phone in her induction kit. She uses the mobile phone to communicate with other Pashu Sakhis, experts, veterinarians and SRIJAN's field officers. She clicks photographs of the animals and shares it in the group meetings. Sometimes she also receive calls with queries from other women farmers.

* Composite profile

What services are relevant to women farmers?

Women are typically responsible for crops such as livestock (73% of livestock keepers in India are women) and labor intensive or consumption crops such as vegetables and millets. Within cultivation women do the majority of work in activities such as weeding, transplanting and post harvest processing.

Read more about women farmers' needs in future issues of the Ashoka Insights series.



Best Time of Day

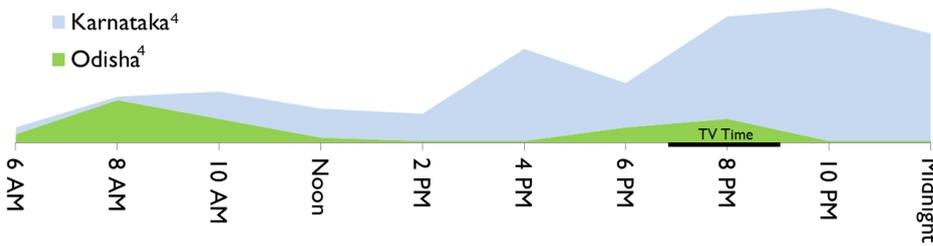
Less than 1% of women keep a phone with them all the time. However, most have access to a household phone for some time during the day.

Our survey shows that women have access to mobile phones typically from 3 - 5 pm and 7 - 11 pm in Karnataka and from 7 - 9 am in Odisha.

Don't compete with TV!

Women watch TV (17% of women farmers) between 7 - 9 pm in both the states.

Therefore, the best time to provide women farmers information is 3 - 5 pm and 9 - 11 pm in rural Karnataka and between 7 - 9 am in rural Odisha.



Don't miss the call!

During focus group discussions with women farmers we observed that they love to listen to their mobile service providers' promotion calls. They pick up the calls to listen to the songs and movie dialogues played at the beginning or end. We observed them putting their phones on speaker mode and listening to the music and dialogues for up to 15-20 minutes on auto-repeat while eating lunch or working!

This quaint behavior reflects a serious lack of entertainment options for women in rural India.

Can the agri-content be made more entertaining? Can it be disseminated in the form of a jingle? Or can every message be precluded and concluded by favorite music and movie dialogues to draw more women to pick their calls and listen through the entire message? Who knows, they might even start looking forward to calls from social enterprises!

What do you think about this idea? Write to us!

Incoming Calls are Ideal

72% and 34% of women farmers in rural Karnataka and Odisha respectively have access to a phone and can use it for receiving phone calls. But less than 2% of them can read or send text messages.

Therefore, disseminating information relevant for women farmers through pre-recorded calls can be 50 times more effective than through text messages.

Leveraging Women's Self Help Groups (SHGs)

There are 3.4 million SHGs in India which cover 80% of rural households and mobilize over 37 million women in groups of 10-20 members. 85% of these members are engaged in agriculture².

Our respondents reported that 70% of their SHGs meet weekly. 60% of the women reported that they prefer to receive info during SHG meetings.

Per our estimate, on average every active SHG group in rural Karnataka and Odisha has 2-3 mobile owners. These women can be trained to provide agri-info or services through their phones to other members of the group.



Shed some light!

16% of women farmers in rural Karnataka and Odisha use the torch feature on their mobile phones.

Thank you!

We thank Ashoka Fellow Vijay Pratap Singh Aditya for his suggestions on questionnaire design. We also thank Ashoka Fellows Dr. H. Sudarshan and Bibhu Mohanty for conducting the survey in Karnataka and Odisha, respectively.

About the Ashoka Survey on Agriculture and Nutrition

Ashoka surveyed women farmers and young mothers to understand their access to agricultural services, decision making powers, and nutrition related behavior. The survey covered over 4000 respondents in rural Karnataka and rural Odisha. Taluks were selected upon discussion with Ashoka fellows on the basis of prevalence of under-nutrition and their operational location. The villages and the households in a village were selected through randomization. The survey activity was conducted in collaboration with Ashoka Fellows who are using the survey insights to make their programs more effective.

The surveys were funded by Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and Swiss Re Foundation.

About the Program

Ashoka Innovators for the Public is a global community of world's leading social entrepreneurs (called Ashoka Fellows): 2700+ men and women, young and old, with system-changing solutions for the world's most urgent social problems. In 2012, Ashoka invited its Fellows working in the agriculture sector to join a common sectoral platform to explore opportunities for collaboration and collective action to address persistent challenges in the sector.

Ashoka Insights series is designed to share findings from Ashoka's surveys, field visits and research on agriculture and nutrition, especially the critical role of women in both.

Ashoka's Infiniti Platform

Infiniti is Ashoka's online platform for data collection, analysis and sharing. It interfaces with android tablets for real-time data collection and upload.. It is designed keeping in mind the special needs of citizen sector initiatives.

Subramanian Viswanathan
subbu@ashoka.org

For more information

Richa Govil
rgovil@ashoka.org

Garima Rana
grana@ashoka.org

Ashoka Innovators for the Public
<http://india.ashoka.org/farming>

References:

1. Women in Agriculture, State of Agriculture, 2010-2011, FAO
2. NABARD, GoI, 2007

Charts:

1. % women farmers who access (no of hours) and use (receive phone calls & make calls) mobile phones: average for Karnataka and Odisha
2. % women farmers who own a person phone, access a household level phone, can receive phone calls only, can receive and make phone calls : for Karnataka and Odisha
3. % women farmers who own and access a mobile phone across age groups : for Karnataka and Odisha
4. % women farmers who use the mobile phone for any purpose at different times of a day : for Karnataka and Odisha

