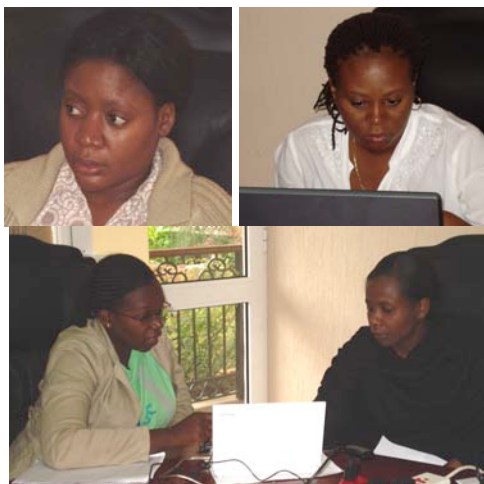


**Market Intelligence Managers;
Providing a Rural Communication
Network in East Africa**

by Stella Mukhaye¹



From top left: Grace Walusimbi, Mary Haule, Stella Mukhaye and Cheryl Chelule at the Regional Business Convention

There are five Market Information Managers (MIMs) who work in Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda using the Mobilinfo platform, which acts as the hub for the market information networks of AgriTrade (Kenya), AgriNet (Uganda) and Tanzania. During the recent Business Convention in Entebbe, Uganda all the MIMs met to learn more about the platform and to give their input to guide the development of the service. This impact story is based on an interview with Stella Mukhaye and the work of all the MIMs at the Business Convention.

My job as Market Intelligence Manager, AgriTrade, Kenya

My name is Stella Mukhaye; I have a degree in agriculture and experience in marketing and information technology. My job is to collect market information, decode and disseminate it. Each morning I collect information, which I get from the Information Board Managers (IBMs) from the various parts of the country; the major markets especially. SMS messages

come in from Monday to Friday from the main markets, and two or three times a week from smaller towns on their market days. I get the information through SMS to my phone, I decode the information, analyse it and then I transform the market information that I receive into an SMS bulletin which is coded to save letters of the SMS text. Through SMS I can send 160 characters; that is information on ten commodities in two groups; vegetable prices on Monday, Wednesday and Friday and cereal prices on Tuesday and Thursday. If a client or someone in our network wants information on a particular commodity we can accommodate this. We have already made changes to include more commodities and do the cereal/ vegetable split. I give the towns and the produce three-letter codes and convert the prices so that all the produce is priced per kilogram. I use Mobilinfo, our platform, to send the bulletins to all our IBMs. Market information goes out in the morning at 11:00, so it is important that the IBMs send in their price information early. IBMs who do not send in their SMS on time do not get information back from AgriTrade. I put all the price information into a database, which includes the trends for the market prices in the different markets for various commodities during the year.

The regions that we receive market information from are the major markets in Kenya: Nairobi, Mombasa, Nakuru, Eldoret, Kisumu and Bungoma. We also get information from some of the other smaller markets; Wote in Eastern and Busia in Western. The recipients of our bulletins are the IBMs, our Regional Managers and the National Marketing Company members of Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda -including the MIMs of Uganda and Tanzania.

Training IBMs

The IBMs have been trained to go to the market and collect price information, especially in the wholesale markets. Some of them I've trained myself; I've gone with them to the markets and I've shown them how to collect the prices. They collect a maximum of three prices and then they do an average of the three prices they have collected for each of the commodities. We agree to exchange information; they send their market prices to me and I send them the AgriTrade bulletin, so that they can have all the market prices to

¹ Interviewed by Anne Dennig in November 2009

display on their information boards.

Advantages of Our Service

The AgriTrade market intelligence service is reliable. The prices are accurate because the IBMs go to the market and see what is really there. The SMS bulletin includes all the prices, not just the price for one commodity for each SMS but prices for all the main commodities in one SMS. Our platform is different from the others because it has an SMS bulletin with all the main markets and all the main commodities for the specific days.

The Mobilinfo platform is easy to use because once you have keyed in the names and you've put in the SMS bulletin, you just send it once to all the recipients. It shows you the number of people that it has sent to and also it keeps a copy of all the information that has been sent out and all the recipients that have got the message. So you can track back.

MIMs Developing the Service

It is useful for me to be in touch with the other MIMs from the network because some of their prices are helpful to our Kenyan IBMs and Regional Managers, especially when we are doing business between the countries. It is also important to exchange experience with the other MIMs, which we were able to do at the Regional Business Convention in Entebbe. We discussed topics to make our service standard over the three countries; these included standardized market and commodity codes. Market codes will be shown by three capital letters; commodity codes are to be denoted by lower case letters and all prices will be given in kgs. We also requested a system to be developed for the IBMs to directly send their SMS to the platform using a code e.g. *150* space message. This will save time for the MIMs; at present the messages come individually to our phones and we have to copy this information onto the Mobilinfo platform.

Selling SMS Subscriptions

The major new development that all the MIMs are working on is the sale of market information SMS subscriptions. In Entebbe we worked on the cost of SMS bulletins and how we should launch the market intelligence business through advertising to sell general and specific bulletins. We will be targeting

producers such as farmer groups and businesses sourcing commodities. We will start by sending free subscriptions for one week to potential customers to interest them in our market intelligence service.

Here is an example of an advertisement that we have put on one of our information boards in Nairobi.



MARKET COMMODITIES & THEIR PRICES

AgriTrade1/12/2009 mai26NBI 26MSA 32ELD 35KSM
 bea53NBI 47MSA 64ELD 90KSM soy65NBI 60MSA 72ELD
 70KSM gre100NBI 65MSA 80ELD 100KSM ric60NBI
 120MSA 156ELD 90KSM

This is an SMS that tells you the prices of various crops in various markets in Kenya.

The message means:

- It comes from Agritrade
- It is for the date 1/12/2009
- mai means Maize. It is 26ksh in Nairobi, 26 in Mombasa, 32 in Eldoret and 35 in Kisumu.
- bea means Beans. It is 53ksh in Nairobi, 47 in Mombasa, 64 in Eldoret and 90 in Kisumu.
- soy means Soybeans. It is 65ksh in Nairobi, 60 in Mombasa, 72 in Eldoret and 70 in Kisumu.
- gre means Greengrams. It is 100ksh in Nairobi, 65 in Mombasa, 80 in Eldoret and 100 in Kisumu.
- ric means Rice. It is 60ksh in Nairobi, 120 in Mombasa, 156 in Eldoret and 90 in Kisumu.

AgriTrade can send you each morning at 11:00 a.m. these prices with the current market price of the morning.

For one full month (except Saturdays and Sundays) it costs Ksh 340.

To subscribe for **FREE for one week** contact the Information Board Manager in your market who will register you.

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