

Newspaper clipping:

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SMS facility cheers farmers

By NANCY MWAPE

ZAMBIA National Farmers Union (ZNFU) says the short message services (SMS) crop marketing facility introduced by Celtel Zambia for rural farmers has scored 85 per cent success rate.

ZNFU deputy executive director, Ndambo Ndambo, said the facility had enabled farmers know people who were in the market to buy their products and current price offers by buyers for various commodities using their phones.

Mr Ndambo said this at the United Nations Development Programme launch of report on *“Creating value for All: Strategies for doing business with the poor”* held in Lusaka last week.

He cited maize, soya beans, goats, beef and groundnuts as some of the most highly demanded commodities by buyers using the SMS facility.

“The SMS facility has improved small-scale farmers’ access to markets, better prices for commodities and enabled them access profitable markets where they are available,” he said.

He said farmers were able to negotiate for better prices and know where, when and what price to sell to the buyer.

He said ZNFU was slowly seeing an end of what had been a predatory agriculture marketing system against small-scale farmers.

Mr Ndambo said the major challenge facing farmers was that only Celtel was currently operating the system though Cell-Z had come on board and was still testing the facility.

He said it would have been nice to have all the three mobile phone operators coming on board to help rural farmers with information dissemination.

He said users wanted more commodities to be on the system, adding that ZNFU was currently investigating the possibilities of including horticultural commodities, stock feed and transport.

He also added that there was need to spread the system regionally for regional market information.

“Improving national and regional market access for producers and processors remain one of the key investments ingredients. There is nothing better than helping put money in the farmers’ pocket,” he said.

Mr Ndambo said the near-absence of public extension services provision and poor rural infrastructure remained a major challenge to rural farmers.

“Most small-scale farmers still lack access to up-to-date, cost-effective and actionable market information due to poor rural communication and transport infrastructure,” he said.

He said this had resulted in farmers becoming vulnerable to unscrupulous traders, as they are reduced into price-takers of what was below the market rate.

Newspaper Clipping:

BDS-VP creates 10,000 jobs - ZDA

By NANCY MWAPE

ZAMBIA Development Agency (ZDA) says the Business Development Services Voucher Programme (BDS-VP) launched last year has created 10,000 jobs by 4,000 small and medium-scale enterprises (SMEs).

The BDS-VP is a K24.7 billion programme aimed at contributing to sustainable development of micro, small and medium-scale enterprises (MSMEs).

The BDS-VP programme is being facilitated in partnership with Zambia National Farmers Union while the Zambia Chamber of Small and Medium Business Associations is implementing the programme.

ZDA director for MSMEs, Wundi Matoka, speaking in Lusaka said BDS-VP was jointly financed by Royal Netherlands government (K12.5 billion), Finish government (K7.5 billion), United Nations/International Labour Organisation (K700 million) and Zambian Government (K4 billion).

Mr Matoka said the programme had resulted in increased production in 5000 SMEs operations, increased profitability in 4,000 SMEs and product development.

Mr Matoka said the aim of the programme was to enhance growth of MSMEs through facilitating their access to efficient and effective demand driven BDS and contribute to economic development and poverty reduction.

The project has an establishment phase which runs from November 2007 to December 2010 during which it will be operational in 20 districts.

Mr Matoka said the project was going on in Livingstone, Petauke, Mumbwa and Kasama for four months before it could be rolled out to 16 other districts.

He said the BDS-VP was being coordinated and monitored by ZDA while a private fund manager was managing the voucher system.

Mr Matoka said the advantage of BDS-VP model was the provision of services to MSMEs in accordance with what they need at any particular time.

He also pointed out that ZDA was yet to establish a trade and industrial development fund designed to provide various financial products to MSE in rural areas.

Newspaper clipping:

UNDP launches business promotion report By NANCY MWAPE

THE United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has launched “Growing inclusive market report” aimed at raising awareness and to disseminate information on how business collaboration with Government and civil society can contribute to human development.

The report launched in Lusaka last week, represents a multi-stakeholder initiative that seeks to inspire and provoke private sector to action.

The report highlights 50 studies by researchers predominantly from developing countries, demonstrating pursuits of both revenues and social impact by local and international small and medium-sized companies.

Launching the report dubbed “Creating value for All: Doing business with the poor”, UNDP officer in charge, Abdul Hannan said the initiative grew out of a need to unleash entrepreneurship and literature for a better understanding of how market-based approaches to human development could do good for people living in poverty while also being good for business.

Mr Hannan said the report first launched in Paris on July 1, 2008 would also be launched in Washington DC by the UNDP administrator Kemal Dervis this week.

He said the idea of launching the report in Zambia was to add value to the work the UN systems was doing with the private sector at the global and national level in support of Millennium Development Goals.

He the UNDP was also supporting national efforts to re-energise the domestic microfinance industry based on comparative experience in over 20 countries.

“We know that social and economic empowerment of the poorest of the poor will not be easy to achieve, especially in remote areas, without liquidity provided by micro financial instruments such as micro-credit and micro-industry,” he said.

Giving an overview of the report, International Labour Organisation director, Jerry Finnegan said though the report was global, the benefit to Zambia was that she could keep up with experiences at world market.

Mr Finnegan said it was important for Zambia to recognise how issues in the report fit in the country’s MDGs and Fifth National Development Plan.