

## FACET:

Fostering Agriculture  
Competitiveness  
Employing Informa-  
tion Communication  
Technologies

FACET, an associate award under the **FIELD-Support LWA**, is a USAID/Africa project designed to help Missions in Sub-Saharan Africa use Information & Communications Technologies (ICTs) to improve the impact of their agriculture projects.

### Examples of how ICT Applications can address development problems in agriculture sector include:

- Market Information Systems (MIS);
- Farmer extension services;
- Supply chain applications;
- Commodity Exchange and Warehouse Receipt Systems; and
- Mobile Financial Services.



Photo credit: FHI 360

Agriculture development is one of the main challenges facing Sub-Saharan Africa. While more than 85% of the population is engaged in agriculture, much of it is still rain-fed and subsistence oriented. Information and Communications Technologies (ICT) have a major role to play in improving the competitiveness of agricultural value chains, increasing efficiencies, lowering costs, and increasing the scale of operations, among others. Increasingly, development programs are leveraging ICTs to improve practices, for example through bar coding to facilitate bringing goods to market, text messaging of commodity prices for better informed producers, and the utilizing cell phones to connect producers and buyers.

The Fostering Agriculture Competitiveness Employing Information and Communication Technologies (FACET) associate award, managed by FHI 360 is funded by USAID/AFR/SD/EGEA—the partnership that oversees the design and implementation of USAID's Global Hun-

ger and Food Security Initiative for sub-Saharan Africa. Designed to be interactive and collaborative, FACET provides technical assistance to improve competitiveness and productivity across agriculture sub-sectors through the use of ICTs as tools to enhance the functioning and competitiveness of agricultural value chains and facilitate trade in agricultural products across Sub-Saharan Africa.

In line with USAID Administrator Rajiv Shah's call for an increased focus on evidence-based interventions, documentation and learning dissemination, FACET is incorporating lessons learned and best practices to build collaborative relationships. To achieve its objectives, FACET has two key program components:

- Knowledge sharing across Missions regarding sustainable and scalable approaches using ICT; and
- Short-term technical assistance to projects to help them improve their uses of ICT.



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## Designing Scalable and Sustainable Market Information System for Grain Markets in Malawi

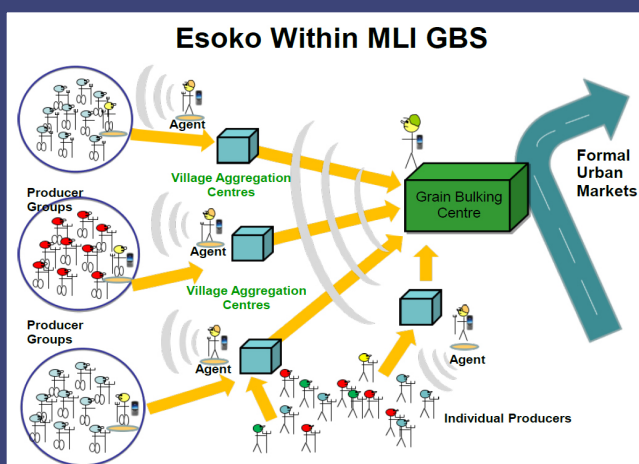
In 2010, FACET provided technical assistance to USAID's Market Linkages Initiative (MLI) which aims to increase commercial integration of smallholder staple food producers into national and regional markets in order to promote growth in food staples and food security. In particular, MLI was seeking to build more efficient trading networks that link farmers to buyers. Since information is the binding factor that needed to be integrated into 15 grain bulking systems (GBS), MLI needed a flexible, scalable business solution that would also be financially sustainable.

The FACET technical assistance assignment, led by partner ACDI/VOCA, focused on supporting the MLI project to design and implement a Market Information System (MIS) that would:

- Support the business operations of formal traders;
- Support rural traders and producers to be better informed and engaged; and
- Could be used by NGO's and farmer organizations to link-in farmers.

The activity identified Esoko Malawi as the most appropriate provider to work with stakeholder groups and design and deploy a customized, sustainable solution. Esoko Malawi is working with the private sector to integrate information and logistics systems so that producer groups at the village level and their intermediaries have more efficient access to the 15 central grain bulking centers. Some of the features the ICT-enabled MIS may include are:

- Dynamic inventory and volume tracking by SMS;
- Posting of offers to buy & sell;
- Limiting access to private networks of suppliers/distributors; and
- Tracking and payment of enumeration activities.



## FACET Program Partners:



**FHI 360's** Information Technology Applications Center (ITAC) is a recognized leader in applying ICT to accelerate economic and social development that provides self-sustaining solutions that help governments, private companies, and civic institutions leverage the most appropriate mix of technologies to meet their goals.



**ACDI/VOCA** has extensive experience in providing targeted technical assistance to USAID mission staff and development practitioners, performing value chain analyses, conducting trainings on approach, methodologies and best practices, and developing strategies collaboratively with Mission personnel and implementers for effective and sustainable agricultural value chain interventions.



**Action for Enterprise** has developed a framework for program design that reflects state of the art practice in value chain methodology. This approach combines the strengths of value chain analysis with participatory methods for identifying sustainable market-based solutions that promote MSME and industry competitiveness.



**IRIS Center, University of Maryland College of Agriculture & Natural Resources (UMD-AGNR)** is a US research firm with over 20 years of experience in international development. IRIS is an increasingly well-known research and advisory assistance center in development and institutional reform.

*The FIELD-Support Leader with Associates is an 8-year cooperative agreement awarded by the USAID Microenterprise Development Office to improve the state-of-the-practice of microfinance and microenterprise development. FIELD-Support is implemented by FHI 360 and a consortium of 27 development partners. Learn more at <http://kdid.org/projects/field-support>.*

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