Regional GeoODK Training, Masaka, Uganda.
Organized by the University of Maryland in partnership with Lutheran World Relief (LWR), Sustainable Enterprises for Trade Engagement (SENTE), and Gutsinda Development Group

April 12th and 13th, 2016 University of Maryland (UMD) in partnership with Sustainable Enterprises for Trade Engagement (SENTE), a Lutheran World Relief (LWR) program led a training in Masaka, Uganda to implement regional data collection for food security monitoring across Central 1 region, Uganda using AgriSense-STARS tools.

The objective of the training was to pilot crop condition monitoring using tools developed by the AgriSense-STARS project across the Central 1 region, building off already existing capacity developed through SENTE program. The Pilot is to acquire monthly field data collection on crop conditions for food security monitoring. This training marked the inception of an invaluable partnership between UMD, LWR, and Gutsinda to establish a multi-platform data collection initiative for livelihood, food security, and crop condition monitoring providing near real time data to key decision makers and stakeholders with the goal of improving livelihoods for smallholder farmers across Uganda.

PARTICIPANTS: The training facilitators included Catherine Nakalembe and Christina Justice, Faculty Specialist’s at the University of Maryland, Bruce Kisitu, Project Management Consultant at Gutsinda Development Group, and Georgina Nakubulwa, SENTE program manager. Workshop participants included 68 Village Extension Agents from across the Masaka region. The training agenda and list of participants are attached.
SUMMARY:

UMD in partnership with SENTE is piloting a regional food security monitoring program across the Masaka region involving 68 Village Enterprise Agents (VEA’s) collecting agricultural and food security information using the GeoODK application developed through the University of Maryland and smartphone infrastructure already present through the LWR SENTE program.

Field data collection will be targeted at Central 1 regions’ three main food security crops of maize, beans, and coffee. VEA’s are already collecting livelihood data using smartphone technology provided through the SENTE program. This data collection through partnership with the University of Maryland will be expanded to crop condition and food security monitoring over the growing season 2016 to collect near real time data on such things as pests, disease, growth stage and market price.

Left: Map of Current Submissions by SENTE Agents of pre Season form showing a Pre-Season Assessment from Ssekandi Authman (VEA) from Kitende Village Rakai District

The training was opened by Georgina Nakubulwa and introductions exchanged between training leads and SENTE projects’ Central 1 VEA’s. The initial discussion focused on the current status of the livelihood focused data collection that the VEA’s are implementing across Central 1 region.

A project overview was given by Catherine Nakalembe from The University of Maryland focusing on the current efforts of UMD through the Bill and Melinda Gates funded AgriSense project to implement a food security and crop condition monitoring data collection campaign across pilot regions in Tanzania. These efforts by the UMD AgriSense group are focused on linking field data collected by extension agents from representative sites across the Tanzanian regions with quantitative satellite data on vegetation conditions to create a data portal from which timely and representative data on food security and crop conditions can be compiled and used by key stakeholders to inform agricultural and policy decisions, agricultural development initiatives, and markets.
The electronic data collection forms to be collected over the growing season were reviewed by the group as a whole and discussion sessions were held to review and provide feedback on the accessibility and accuracy of the forms developed. Each participant was given the opportunity to voice input on the data collection forms they will be using in the field collection campaign. Additional questions were added and edited to be directed to the concerns of the VEA’s.

After completion of the training on Wednesday April 20th facilitators Catherine Nakalembe, Christina Justice and Bruce Kisitu traveled with VEA Byamykama Jackson to Lwengo District to observe field data collection in action. Jackson collected Pre-season and In-season forms for 2 Farmers in Byembogo B Village.

Nutrient deficiencies were found due to heavy rain and flood events in the district for the months of February and March. Recommendations were given to the farmer to replace and conserve nutrients in the soil both in the coming months if rains persist and long term including planting agroforestry trees throughout the field to help to replace nutrients leached from the soil. Feedback from the VEA focused on the need for improved data collection devices but found the forms to be user friendly and representative for his district.

**CHALLENGES:**

Challenges and considerations brought up in the open discussion with VEA’s are listed below:

1. Need for improved data collection devices with larger screens to ease data entry, with higher processing power and battery life in the field.
2. Further development of the Officers network through support to savings groups and diversifying income generation sources
3. Development of microfinance opportunities
4. Establishing appropriate performance based incentives for data collection.

**OUTCOMES**

VEA’s agreed on the importance of crop condition and food security monitoring for their districts and expressed their excitement and willingness for the data collection campaign. Additionally, participants were motivated by the efforts of the project to make direct links
between near real time data from the field and decision and policymakers - giving a voice to the concerns of the farmers.

By bridging this information gap, timely and representative data on crop condition including pest, disease, and food security related concerns can be responded to quickly and effectively with the aim to improve the livelihoods of smallholder farmers.

The survey tools were improved following input from the VEAs. The participants understood and appreciated each question asked in the surveys.

**WAY FORWARD**

This training marks the inception of an invaluable partnership between UMD, LWR, and Gutsinda to establish a multi-platform data collection initiative for livelihood, food security and crop condition monitoring providing near real time data to key decision makers and stakeholders with the goal of improving livelihoods for smallholder farmers across Uganda.

The field data collection underway in Masaka will serve as the pilot for further expansion across additional regions with the goal to provide a representative and comprehensive food security and livelihood near real time data portal for the whole of Uganda.

*Report Compiled By: Christina Justice and Catherine Nakalembe*