



GARBAL



Case studies

Community circulation of information: understanding it and making the most of it in the case of the 'GARBAL' service MODHEM+

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Context

The 'GARBAL' telephone service has been launched as part of the 'Mobile Data for Moving herds Management and Better incomes in Burkina Faso' (MOD-HEM+) project, funded by the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands (EKN). The service, which can be accessed by dialling 777 via the Orange Burkina Faso operator, aims to provide advice and information to farmers and livestock breeders, particularly in the most remote rural areas. Despite its wide accessibility, data on the use of the service reveals a significant under-representation of livestock farmers, women and young people, who are at the heart of the project's target audience.

A service for male farmers who head households?

The usage data shows that a large majority of calls are made by men who say they are farmers. The less resilient segments at the heart of the project's targeting, i.e. livestock farmers, women and young people, are clearly under-represented in the data.

Of the **329,727** calls for which we were able to identify the occupation, gender and age group of the caller, the vast majority (**61%**) were made by middle-aged male farmers (referred to here as "adults").

For all calls, **259,106** different¹ numbers were identified, **55%** of which were men and **13%** women (**33%** of calling numbers could not be associated with a gender, in most cases because they were group calls).

¹

¹For a revised target of 230,000 (113% of target achieved).

We note a reduction in the proportion of calls made by men to **52%** in 2021, as well as a positive trend in the proportions of calls made by women (from **11%** to **17%**), young men and women (from **13%** to **19%**) and male and female agropastoralists/breeders (from **6%** to **10%**).



However, these figures do not reflect the actual use of the service:

- **Lack of categorisation:** Rural populations generally combine several activities, making it difficult to categorise them strictly as farmers, herders, agro-pastoralists or pastoralists. In addition, the terminology "herder-pastoralist" has become stigmatising in the current context of insecurity. Callers may be reluctant to identify themselves as such and may therefore prefer to be referred to in another category.

- **« Invisible » use:** The testimonies show that there is a well-established and apparently widespread dynamic of sharing information and pooling costs, resources and efforts to access information. The person requesting the service is not necessarily the direct user of the service, and even less the only user. On the contrary, it may be a group of people.

Community circulation of information and inclusion:

Although the GARBAL service usage data shows an under-representation of certain groups, the testimonies gathered highlighted the existence of widespread information-sharing practices within communities. This informal dissemination of information, often through social networks and interpersonal relationships, constitutes what might be termed the ‘invisible’ use of the service.

Various cases have been identified :

- **Within the household:** One or other of the members will contact the service and share the information with all the members of the household.
- **In friendship/social networks:** Information sharing through interpersonal relationships can be particularly important, especially for women. Social circles thus play a definite and unassessed role in the dissemination of information.
- **In the context of transhumance:** In the case of livestock farmers, the phenomenon seems to be particularly important and structured. During transhumance, herders work with community relays, often members of herders’ organisations, who are in contact with a large number of herders. These networks are essential for communication on the move. According to eyewitness accounts, this informal dissemination of information is very widespread. In a way, it’s part of the services offered by the breeders’ organisations: membership of the organisation gives you access to a network of contacts.

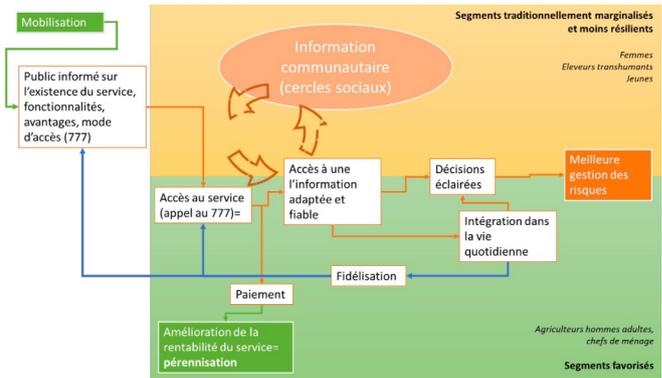


Figure 1: Community information and “invisible” use of the service

In this way, these parallel information systems create “invisible” uses that can enable traditionally marginalised and less resilient segments in particular to benefit significantly from information. The scale of this phenomenon has not yet been measured, but it could be considerable.

The community circulation of information removes barriers to access for these groups. These include cost, but also technology, particularly for women and young people, who have less free access to mobile phones. Even if the service is available on a basic phone, in some cases women may not have full freedom to make calls. It should also be pointed out that during transhumance, farmers do not always have access to the Orange network in the remote areas they pass through. So they “juggle” between the different networks available and contact the community relays who can call the service for them.

These parallel uses therefore help to promote the inclusiveness and impact of the service, without making any economic contribution to its operation.

Reconciling sustainability and inclusion:

The community circulation of information has important implications for the sustainability of the GARBAL project. While this informal dissemination can widen the service’s audience and strengthen its impact, it also raises challenges in terms of managing the quality of the information and maintaining the costs associated with a wider audience. Guaranteeing the financial viability of the project while ensuring equitable access to information for all members of the community therefore remains a crucial challenge.

The challenge of sustainability lies in the ability to take account of this informal circulation of information when designing business models. While direct users, mainly farmers who are heads of household,

are the visible face of the service, it is crucial to recognise that many other beneficiaries, particularly livestock farmers, women and young people, access information via community relays. These indirect users, while not directly contributing to the profitability of the service, are essential to ensure its inclusiveness and widespread impact within communities.

Making the service profitable must not compromise its accessibility and inclusiveness. A balance must be struck to ensure that the initiative remains accessible to all, while exploring viable economic models. From this perspective, the community circulation of information can be seen as an asset for promoting inclusion, even if it does not contribute to making the service profitable.

Avenues to explore:

Expanding the user base is crucial to increasing the profitability of the service, by seeking to reach a critical mass of users who are prepared to bear the costs of making contact and communicating. To ensure effective mobilisation, it is essential to combine this effort with initiatives to improve the accessibility and functionality of the service, as well as the quality and relevance of the information to meet users' needs.

• Mobilising and expanding the user base:

To improve the accessibility and functionality of the service, taking into account feedback from users in order to respond more precisely to their specific information needs.

Implement adaptive management tools to ensure a feedback loop between the information on offer and users' needs, enabling content and service functionalities to be adjusted in real time.

Build user loyalty by offering exclusive benefits such as special promotions, training or rewards, to increase engagement and stimulate positive word-of-mouth within communities.

• Integration of community relays:

Identify and characterise official community relays, such as local leaders, grassroots organisations and professional associations, to better understand their role and influence in disseminating information.

Consider financial or non-financial incentives, such as premium memberships or specialist training, to encourage the active contribution of community relays to making the service profitable.

• Social network analysis:

Carry out an in-depth analysis of social networks within rural communities to understand how information circulates, which communication channels are most effective and which groups are most influential in disseminating relevant information.

• Assessment of the impact on inclusion:

Assess the extent to which marginalised target groups, such as livestock farmers, women and young people, benefit from the information shared through community circulation, by putting in place specific monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to measure this impact.

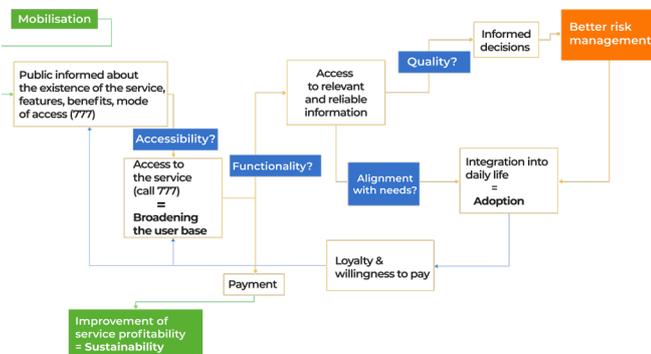


Figure 2: Link between mobilisation and sustainability of the service

Various avenues can be explored to ensure the economic sustainability of the service, while understanding and integrating the community circulation of information.



Conclusion

The community circulation of information, as a phenomenon rooted in social dynamics and solidarity networks, plays a crucial role in the sustainability and inclusiveness of digital services such as 'GARBAL'. It reveals the complexity of interactions between direct users of the service and indirect beneficiaries within rural communities. By understanding and valuing this informal flow of information, initiatives such as 'GARBAL' can better respond to the diverse needs of communities, particularly traditionally marginalised groups such as pastoralists, women and young people. This not only enhances the social impact of the service, but also ensures its long-term economic viability.

In short, the community circulation of information is an essential lever for promoting the inclusion and sustainability of digital services in rural contexts. By integrating this dynamic into the design and management of initiatives, it is possible to create solutions that are more effective, more equitable and better adapted to the real needs of communities, thereby contributing to sustainable development and improving the living conditions of rural populations.

- **Developing inclusive business models:**

Exploring economic models that take into account the community circulation of information, promoting the inclusion of all target groups and avoiding the marginalisation of certain categories of users, particularly the most vulnerable.

- **Promoting community participation:**

Continue and increase the number of consultation forums and engagement sessions to gather the needs and preferences of end users, actively involving community members in the design and implementation of the GARBAL service.

- **Ongoing monitoring and evaluation:**

Set up a change-oriented monitoring and evaluation system based on the stories of the players rather than on figures to monitor the effectiveness of the community's circulation of information and adjust strategies according to the phenomena observed, in order to ensure that the project remains focused on the community's real and changing needs.







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