



FEED THE FUTURE

The U.S. Government's Global Hunger & Food Security Initiative



Micro-Franchise Model for Last-Mile Seed Delivery in Kenya



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The pilot of the micro-franchise model in Kenya was implemented by S34D consortium partner:



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Feed the Future Consortium Partners in the Feed the Future Global Supporting Seed Systems for Development activity:



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ACRONYMS

BHA	Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance
CRS	Catholic Relief Services
DFSA	Development Food Security Activity
DiNER	Diversity for Nutrition and Enhanced Resilience
EU	European Union
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
HH	Households
IFDC	International Fertilizer Development Center
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
ICRISAT	International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics
NGO	Non-governmental organization
PASP	Private Agricultural Service Provider
PICS	Purdue Improved Crop Storage bags
QDS	Quality Declared Seed
RAICES	Restorative Agriculture in Communities for Economic Sustainability
S34D	Feed the future Global Supporting Seed Systems for
RFS	Bureau for Resilience and Food Security
SILC	Savings and Internal Lending Communities
SVFs	Seed Vouchers and Fairs
UBALE	United in Building and Advancing Life Expectations
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
VBA	Village Based Agents
VSLA	Village Savings and Loan Associations

1. Introduction

The Feed the future Global Supporting Seed Systems for Development (S34D) activity is a five-year activity (2018-2023) funded by the Feed the Future Initiative through the Bureau for Resilience and Food Security (RFS) and by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) through the Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance (BHA). This activity aims to enhance access to a full range of crop and seed choices and provide options to maximize farmers' responsive decision-making and planning for production. The activity is implemented by a consortium of partners led by Catholic Relief Services (CRS), including International Fertilizer Development Center (IFDC) as the Formal Seed Systems lead responsible for (a) designing and implementing innovative last-mile delivery options, seeking to build integrated seed supply mechanisms involving formal and informal seed systems and (b) building the capacity of last-mile supply actors in the seed value chain, with a particular focus on legume crops as well as root and tuber crops and other non-maize cereal and fodder crops.

2. Business Model for Improving Seed Distribution through the Formal Seed System

The formal seed system is the main pathway for certified seed delivery in sub-Saharan Africa and has been described as “a framework of institutions linked together through a combination of components and processes of production, multiplication, storage, and marketing of improved varieties of specific quality along with the interactions and support to make seed available to a particular end user” (FAO and ICRISAT, 2015). The backbone of the formal seed system is the network of agrodealers that span the region, offering various products and services to farmers. In order to increase the reach of quality seed to rural small-scale farmers, innovative models that can bridge the vast gap between service providers and rural small-scale farmers must be adopted.

In developing seed delivery prototypes, the rural small-scale farmer market segment must be targeted as a viable business opportunity by value chain actors using innovative approaches, while considering awareness, access, affordability, and availability as key aspects to the penetration of improved seed varieties in this market segment. As the micro-franchising model was established, the following attributes were incorporated:

1. **Scalable:** The model must be scalable; otherwise, it would be of little use to other small-scale farmers in the region beyond the project area.
2. **Sustainable:** The model must be resilient beyond the project period and market dynamics.
3. **Incorporate quality and standards:** The model must ensure safety, drive overall performance, and be acceptable to the regulatory authorities and the various stakeholders involved in the value chain.
4. **Utilize locally available grassroots expertise:** The model must consider the skills and knowledge available at the rural level, while striving to be inclusive and gender neutral.

2.1 Description of the Micro Franchising Prototype Model for Last-Mile Seed Delivery

Micro-franchising is a subset of the franchising concept, which refers to smaller scale or even single person enterprises that distribute standardized branded products and services. A micro-franchise network offers existing businesses a road map to penetrate the market in the last mile through partnerships with locally based micro-entrepreneurs by offering them access to supply chains,

equipment, products, finance, training, branding, and marketing, with a strong support system built into the business model.

2.2 Rationale for Micro-Franchising Model Prototype

Farmers at the last mile require a myriad of products and services, which would not make economic sense for a single product or service provider to engage in profitably. However, through the micro-franchising model, farmers' needs can be met sustainably by a network of rural micro-franchise entrepreneurs linked to a product or service provider higher up in the value chain. An existing, well-established business in the seed industry, such as Freshco Seeds, relates to rural entrepreneurs who provide quality seeds to the last mile farmer. This partnership can reach a group of customers in an economically sustainable manner, which otherwise would not have been possible.

The focus of the partnerships is timely delivery of certified seed suitable for the agroecological zone to agro-dealers, intensive distribution by motorcycle riders, and farmer training on good agricultural practices for the selected crops of interest in the S34D project.

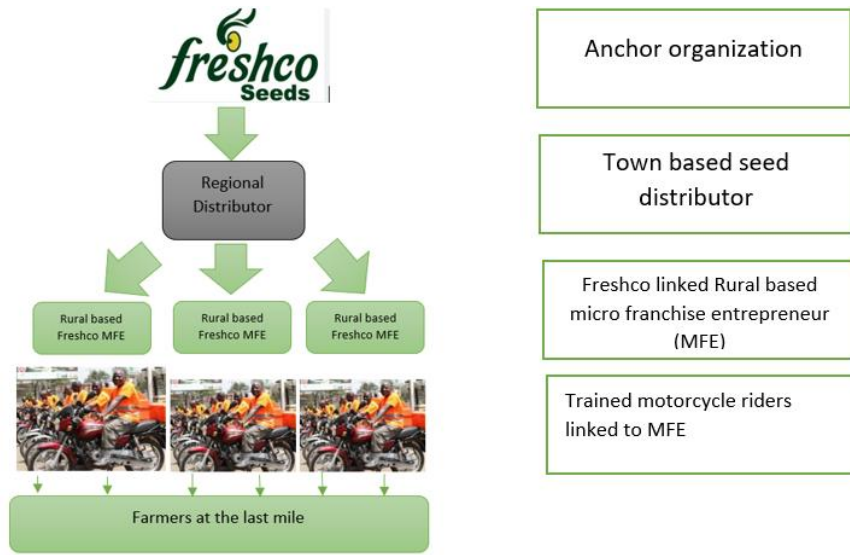
“When I look at the crop I have in the field, I am very happy that I know I am going to get a good harvest this season of sorghum and green gram. I am happy that I was able to get good seed and advice at the nearest agrodealer to my home, which is within walking distance. Come next season, I am going to go back for some more of that Freshco seed.”



Margaret Kagendo with her sorghum crop grown from seeds purchased at Mikimani Market

2.3 Rollout of the Micro-Franchising Model Prototype

IFDC rolled out the micro-franchise model prototype in the lowlands of Tharaka Nithi in Eastern Kenya, a semi-arid region. Through IFDC's previous work, the region was found to have farmers that are poorly served yet have the potential to increase their productivity and incomes, provided a seed delivery system could address their needs. This was especially applicable to the seeds of interest in the S34D project – legumes and other non-maize cereals, such as sorghum and millet.



The prototype targeted improving service delivery to farmers, particularly those that are underserved by existing service providers. These make up the customer base for the branded micro-franchisees. Other beneficiaries of the business model included the micro-franchise holders themselves.

2.4 Value Chain Actors Involved and Activities Undertaken

All value chain actors involved in the pilot of the micro-franchise model roll out are listed in the table below.

Value chain actor	Activity	Dates	Attendance	Reference document in Annex (Attendance list)
Freshco Seeds	Private sector anchor organization in the prototype	Various	Freshco staff	N/A
Agro-dealers	Last-mile agro-dealer training activity, Marimanti town	Sept. 14, 2020	31 agro-dealers and 11 CBO members	Annex 1. Agro-dealers, Boda boda and farmer meeting in Eastern Kenya Embu and Tharaka Nithi 13th - 19th Sept 2020
Motorcycle riders	Training activity on seed handling during transportation	Sept. 17, 2020	15 motorcycle riders	
Agro-dealers	Town-based distributor/agro-dealer meeting, Embu town	Sept. 18, 2020	15 agro-dealers	
Farmers	Farmer training: pre-season	Sept. 17, 2020	108 farmers	
Farmers	Farmer training: mid-season	Jan. 18-21, 2021	99 farmers trained over a four-day period (to remain in compliance with COVID-19 protocols)	Annex 2. Agro-dealer and farmer meeting attendance in Eastern Kenya Embu and Tharaka Nithi 18th - 23rd January 2021
Agro-dealers	Last-mile agro-dealer training activity, Marimanti town	Jan. 22, 2021	24 agro-dealers and 24 CBO members	
Agro-dealers	Last-mile agro-dealer training activity and validation meeting, Marimanti town	March 26, 2021	14 agro-dealers and 16 CBO members	Annex 3; Agro-dealers meeting in Marimanti On 26th March 2021

2.4.1 Anchor organization: Freshco Seeds

Freshco Seeds was identified as an ideal anchor organization for piloting this model, as they were seeking to expand their presence in the region. Their product portfolio also aligns with the crops that the S34D program focuses on – legumes (cowpeas, beans, soybeans, green gram), non-maize cereals

including drought-tolerant varieties (sorghum, finger millet), and a wide variety of others that are important to small-scale farmers (<http://www.freshcoseeds.co.ke/>).

The company has dealt with large distributors in the towns of Meru and Embu, with little activity in the rural areas beyond this. Distributors were responsible for further penetration of their certified seeds; however, these were not reaching farmers located further out in the villages along the last mile. The **micro-franchise model** offered them a good opportunity to try out an innovative approach for getting their brands in front of rural-based small-scale farmers. After linking Freshco to the last-mile agro-dealers, they proceeded with their sales and distribution activities as per their company operations without any assistance from IFDC. They have continued to do this and are still utilizing the networks that were formed because of the program.

Activities that were conducted jointly in the field with Freshco included:

- Various agro-dealer trainings.
- Motorcycle rider training on seed handling.
- Farmer training.
- Setup of demonstration plots, in conjunction with county agricultural officers, lead farmers, and a local agro-dealer.

Feedback from Freshco

- The micro-franchise model has helped them engage with agro-dealers and farmers, whom they would not have targeted had they only been dealing with their distribution network of town-based wholesalers.
- They have been able to get firsthand feedback from last-mile farmers and agrodealers who have trialed their certified seed varieties suitable for that agroecological zone. Previously, customer feedback was limited to what the wholesalers told them about their products. Now they can adjust their messaging to accommodate farmer training needs.
- Freshco Seeds was unable to meet the demand created in that season, as they exhausted their stocks of Kat Bean 56 after overwhelming response to their trainings. They reported selling four metric tons (MT) of Cowpeas, five MT of Bean Kat x, and four MT of Green Gram N26, including three MT of Sorghum Gadam, in a region that they had not previously targeted. This gives them confidence to increase their production in subsequent seasons and expand activities in the areas that they had previously neglected.
- Interacting directly with farmers has enabled them to demonstrate the benefits of using certified seed as opposed to farm-saved seed. The approach of using one variety of certified seed enables farmers to harvest a uniform crop. They know this will get a better price in the market, as opposed to harvests from mixed varieties when using farm-saved seed or seed from the local markets.

2.4.2 Agro dealers

The main discussions and training objectives centered around improving the availability of different varieties of certified seeds of interest and the business challenges involving engagement with the various trading partners from seed companies, distributors, and wholesalers.

- i. Unfavorable prices of certified seed from agro-dealers.
- ii. Limited variety of certified seed available from local distributors.
- iii. Insufficient access to good agricultural practice information by farmers.

- iv. Lack of proper crop management information by farmers.
- v. Lack of access to information on quality pest management practices.
- vi. Inadequate access to effective extension services from government or private sector.
- vii. Insufficient access to markets for farmers for their produce.
- viii. Lack of access to certified seeds from seed companies despite demand.
- ix. Need for training by agro-dealer on good seed storage techniques on their premises.
- x. Challenges in transporting inputs to farmers, especially during the rainy season.

The proposed solution to overcoming these challenges and growing their businesses going forward was the **micro-franchise model**, which would help overcome some of the market-based challenges through direct linkages with seed companies in an economically viable and sustainable manner. The feedback survey indicated that there was hardly any relationship between last-mile agro-dealers and seed companies; making this connection would go a long way toward driving quality seeds and services to farmers.

Agro-Dealer Training Activities Undertaken in the Program

i. Last-Mile Agro Dealer Meeting, Marimanti – Tharaka Nithi, September 14, 2020

- Training of 31 agro-dealers and 11 CBO members, conducted by IFDC and Freshco Seeds.
- Topics covered:
 - Introduction to the objectives of the S34D program.
 - Introduction to the micro-franchise model prototype.
 - Introduction to Freshco Seeds and their variety of certified seeds of interest in the program.

Breakdown of Attendance (see Annex 1 for attendance list)

Attendees	Male	Female	Total
Agro dealers	21	10	31
Marimanti CBO	5	6	11
Total	26	16	42

Note: Participation by the CBO members in this meeting was crucial to the success of the program, because they are closely associated with agro-dealers, greatly help in disseminating information to farmers as lead farmers, and are also important for farmer mobilization in other associated activities.



Agro Dealer Meeting participants at Marimanti – Tharaka Nithi

2.4.3 Motor riders

ii. **Motorcycle Riders Meeting, Gachuiriri Market, September 17, 2020**

- Training of 15 motorcycle riders, conducted by a local agro-dealer and IFDC.
- Topics covered:
 - Safe handling of seed and other agro-dealer products during transportation.
 - Customer service.

Breakdown of Attendance

All attendees were male. Motorcycle riding is reserved for males in rural areas. No females were identified to engage in this type of business. (See Annex 1 for attendance list.)

Feedback from the Motorcycle Rider Training

- The training was important because the riders usually do not know what they are transporting.
- The planting season, when they are needed by agro-dealers to transport seeds, is very short (around two weeks per season).
- Motorcycle riders are highly mobile; they move from center to center looking for work. The chances of finding the same person at the same center are low unless you call them for a delivery.
- Most riders are hired by owners of the motorcycles; they work for a daily commission depending on how much revenue they generate.

iii. **Town-based distributor/agro-dealer meeting, Embu town, September 18, 2020**

- Training of 15 agro-dealers who act as distributors of seeds and other products to rural-based businesses. It was important to get their buy in into the project as they are crucial to distribution systems and can greatly assist the seed companies in the introduction of seed varieties of interest in the market.
- Topics covered:
 - Introduction to the S34D program.

- Introduction to the micro-franchise model.
- Introduction to Freshco Seeds and their range of products.

Feedback from the Meeting

- Supply and demand of products is inconsistent from season to season.
- County governments and NGOs participate in market distortion practices.
- Distribution of free seeds directly to farmers denies seed distributors business, so they see no point in stocking the goods.
- Seed companies are unwilling to absorb excess stocks once the season lapses. Distributors are left with stock that ties up their working capital, making trading in these seeds a risky affair.
- Lack of a market for farmers' produce reduces the demand for these types of certified seeds.

Breakdown of Attendees (see Annex 1 for attendance list)

Attendees	Male	Female	Total
Agro dealers	6	9	15

iv. Last-mile Agro-dealer and CBO training, Marimanti – Tharaka Nithi, January 22, 2021

- Training of 24 agro-dealers and 24 CBO members.
- Topics covered:
 - Review of program objectives.
 - Review of the micro-franchise model with Freshco Seeds.
 - Training on Freshco seed varieties suitable for the region.
 - Field visits with agro-dealers and CBO members and training of farmers who planted Freshco seeds in their fields.

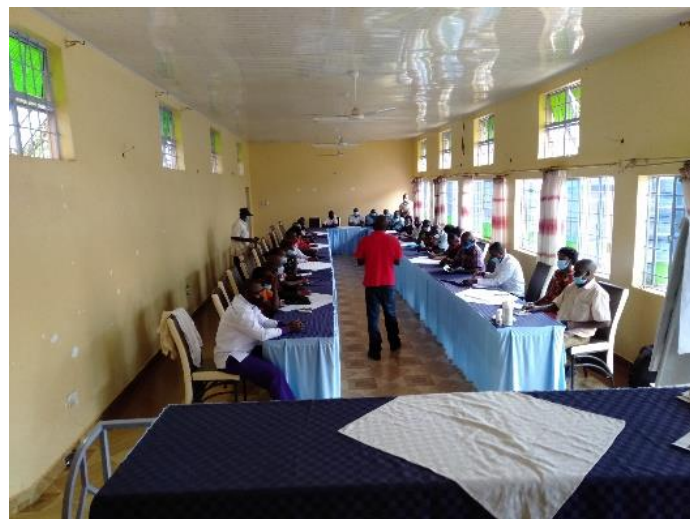


Breakdown of Attendees (see Annex 2 for attendance list)

Attendee type	Male	%	Female	%	Total attendees
Agro-dealer	17	71%	7	29%	24
CBO member	17	71%	7	29%	24
Total	34	71%	14	29%	48

v. Validation Workshop, Marimanti Town, March 26, 2021

- Training of 14 agro-dealers and 16 CBO members.
- Introduction to Dryland Seed Limited and training on their variety of certified seeds of interest to the program.
- Review of the S34D program and feedback on the micro-franchise model.
- Summary of feedback from agro-dealers indicate the following (see Annex 4 for full report):
 - Agro-dealers at the last mile view dealing directly with seed companies as being extremely beneficial to them in term of getting better prices for certified seeds and the ability to source more seed varieties; this is unlike the current situation, in which they must rely on town-based distributors and wholesalers.
 - The training programs conducted by seed companies that reach the last mile are focused on maize. Unlike the S34D program, there are no training programs that look at other seed varieties that would be beneficial to farmers.
 - Agro dealers and farmers can adopt new technologies, such as seed varieties, much faster when training is directed at the rural level instead of diffused through town-based distributors.
 - Use of motorcycle riders as a last-mile distribution service is very important for agro-dealers and, by extension, the farmers they serve. There needs to be a concerted effort to train these service providers, not just on seed but also on other farm inputs, which will improve overall customer satisfaction. Training directed at just two or three riders attached to agro-dealers can go a long way in improving service delivery. Seed is only required for a very short period by farmers; however, the service remains critical for other inputs.



Breakdown of Attendees (see Annex 3 for attendance list)

Attendee type	Male	%	Female	%	Total attendees
Agro-dealers	11	65%	6	35%	17
CBO members	12	75%	4	25%	16
Total	23	70%	10	30%	33

*The total number of attendees for this meeting was lower than targeted, because the government health authorities had issued very strict guidelines on meetings due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

2.4.4 Farmers

The main objective of the farmer training activities was to expose the farmers to new varieties of certified seeds available from seed companies that would perform well in their region. The activity involved linking the farmers to the local agro-dealers that carry those types of seeds and act as a point of contact for their extension service needs, including training on good agricultural practices relevant for their semi-arid climatic conditions.

Activities Conducted with Farmers

i. Farmer Training Embu County, Mbeere Sub-County, Gachuiriri Market, September 17, 2020

- Training of 108 farmers.
- Topics covered:
 - New certified seed varieties of interest available from Freshco Seeds.
 - Mobile-based identification of certified seed using sticker seed labels and short message service confirmation from Kenya Plant Health Inspectorate Service (KEPHIS).



Outside farmers' training. Everyone keeping social distance.

Breakdown of Attendees (participant list available in Annex 1)

	Gender		Age		Total
	Female	male	<35 years	>35 years	
Farmers training-Mbeere	87	21	15	93	108

Demonstration plots were identified by the training team as those of one of the lead farmers in the group (**Mrs. Julia Ngare**). In consultation with the other farmers, the following crops were settled upon for planting.

- Beans KAT 56
- KAT bean 1
- Cowpea
- Green Gram N26
- Sorghum Gadam

All the seed varieties selected fell under the focus crops of the S34D program. Freshco Seeds provided the certified seeds, and in conjunction with the county agricultural officers (involved in farmer training) including the lead farmer, the schedule for land preparation, planting, and maintenance of the crops over the next weeks was determined. The demonstration plots were then used for subsequent farmer trainings.



Mrs. Julia Ngare in her field

ii. Embu County, Mbeere Sub-County, January 18-19, 2021

Due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the farmer meetings had to be restructured in order to comply with the health guidelines issued by the government health authorities and to prevent the trainers and farmers from spreading the disease. The training took place over a four-day period,

with a maximum of 25 farmers per day per group at various farmers' fields, including farmers who had attended training and planted certified seeds.



Matakiri Ward, January 20-21, 2021



Mikimani Market Farmer Training

A total of 99 farmers were trained in the four days of January 2021 activity while observing strict COVID-19 protocols, as mandated by government health authorities. Breakdown of Attendees (attendance list is available in Annex 2)

Market	Male				female				Total attendees
	<35yrs	%	>35yrs	%	<35yrs	%	>35yrs	%	
Gachuiriri 1. (Kismaiyo market area)	0	0%	5	21%	7	29%	12	50%	24
Gachuiriri 2. (Gachoka market area)	0	0%	12	52%	2	9%	9	39%	23
Matakiri 1. (Mikimani market area)	1	4%	8	31%	4	15%	13	50%	26
Matakiri 2. (Muchuvi market area)	0	0%	7	27%	4	15%	15	58%	26
Total	1	1%	32	32%	17	17%	49	49%	99

2.5 Training Providers

Agrodealer and farmer training activities were carried out by the following teams:

- i. **Mr. Silas Macharia**, an agronomist working as the Sub-County Ward Agricultural Officer for the county government of Tharaka Nithi, conducted on-farm training focusing on conservation agriculture, which is very useful for the semi-arid region. Training material came from the county government. The principles of conservation agriculture covered included:
 - a. Techniques to minimize soil disturbance (using a subsoiler).
 - b. Permanent soil cover (applying mulch and growing cover crops, such as bean).
 - c. Integrated pest management (using traditional pest control methods, push-pull techniques in pest control, and predatory insects, as well as incorporating predator crops).
 - d. Crop rotation.
 - e. Others, including maintaining 10% tree cover in farms, thinning techniques in sorghum for better harvests, and using certified seeds recommended for the region.
- ii. **Mrs. Wamae Munya**, a trained agronomist and local agro-dealer (Munya Agrovet), conducted training on crop protection.
 - a) Identification of common pests and diseases.
 - b) Available compounds and application procedures.
- iii. **Mr. John Ndungu and Mr. James Muhia**, trained agronomists from **Freshco Seeds** conducted training on the following:
 - a) Introduction of new seed varieties of interest: Beans KAT 56, KAT Bean 1, Cowpea Green Gram N26, Sorghum Gadam)
 - b) Planting procedures and care for the crops.
- iv. **Ms. Pamela Mwangi**, trained agronomist from **Dryland Seed Ltd.**

- a) Introduction to various seed varieties of interest, including Sorghum Gadam, Kat Bean 1, Kat Bean 9, Kat X 56, Sorghum Gadam, Green Gram N26, Cowpea M66, and Cowpea K80.

Note: All training material was provided by their respective organizations.

3. Gender Inclusivity

An analysis of the farmer training attendance records indicates that meetings were attended by more women (74%) than men (26%). All were over 35 years of age, as they were the ones who were undertaking most of the farming activities in the rural areas.

Attendee type	Male	%	Female	%	Total attendees
First farmer training	21	19%	87	81%	108
Second farmer training	33	33%	66	67%	99
Total	54	26%	153	74%	207

However, the situation was reversed for the agro-dealer trainings, in which 60% of the attendees were male and 40% were female. CBOs member attendance was similar, registering an average of 72% of men and 28% women. This indicates a need to directly target women when it comes to matters of input supplies and community-based activities.

4. Lessons learned

- Agrodealers at the last mile can reach many farmers and distribute appropriate certified seeds. This is a game changer for companies that put sufficient effort into targeting them directly, instead of relying solely on distributors to penetrate the market.
- Farmers understand the need for new technologies in seed varieties and would readily embrace them with demonstrable evidence of their benefits and impacts. They are also willing to pay for these services when they are available nearby.
- Farmers have seen the impacts of climate change and seek to avert or mitigate these changes through new technologies, such as improved seed varieties.
- Linkages to markets are becoming increasingly crucial in farmers' decision-making process. New technologies should incorporate market linkages in their approach, as farmers seek to increase their incomes. Their appetite for risk in the adoption process will be dictated by market options for selling their produce.
- The age of farmers is steadily increasing. A concerted effort must be made to engage youth in agricultural business at various levels in the value chain.

5. Difficulties Encountered while Implementing the project

- During the implementation phase, an outbreak of COVID-19 occurred, which hampered our activities in the region. The various safety measures undertaken and requirements by the government health agencies immensely affected the planned activities with farmers and agro-dealers. Attendance of meetings had to be reduced from what was initially planned to remain in compliance with the directives issued by local health authorities.
- An erratic weather pattern in the region had a major effect on the demonstration plots that had been initially prepared, which necessitated replanting the crop. This interfered with the schedule of the farmer training activities in the area.
- The high mobility of motorcycle riders made it difficult to retain the same group of people for training over the course of our activities, as they were constantly moving from one job to another. It is understandable that the riders needed to look for other sources of income, as the planting seasons are very short, and the agro-dealers only require them for an intense one- or two-week period.

6. Suggestions on way forward

- Review the motorcycle recruitment and training component in the program. Agro-dealers and farmers all agree that the riders form an important part of their distribution activities in the villages. However, convening a consistent crop of riders to train on handling seeds is a challenge due to their high mobility. Any support should be directed toward the agro-dealers, who can then train a trusted group of riders that they can consistently rely on.
- Open the model to incorporate other important farm input providers, such as fertilizer and agrochemical companies. Farmers were very interested in how and what other farm inputs are required in the management of the crops that they were being trained on, especially in areas like crop nutrition, as well as pest and disease control.
- Create a catalogue of services to include in the micro-franchising concept. This would add a great deal of value for the agro-dealers and farmers, since farmers look for a variety of products and services from the same providers. Therefore, if the model could incorporate these in one offering, it would go a long way in providing quality services and products in a sustainable manner. Various service providers could come together to offer one integrated package for farmers, e.g., a seed and fertilizer catalogue for specific crops of interest, coupled with a mobile-based extension service element, from the firms involved.

7. Annexes.

Annex 1. Agrodealers, Boda boda and farmer meeting in Eastern Kenya Embu and Tharaka Nithi 13th - 19th Sept 2020

Annex 2. Agrodealer and farmer meeting attendance in Eastern Kenya Embu and Tharaka Nithi 18th - 23rd January 2021

Annex 3. Agrodealers meeting in Marimanti On 26th March

Annex 4. Success Stories from the S34D Micro-Franchise Pilot Program

AgroDealer

Duncan Kimathi is an agro-dealer based in Marimanti town, Tharaka Nithi county, a semi-arid region located in eastern Kenya.

Duncan, along with 30 other rural last-mile agro-dealers from the region, participated in the agro-dealer micro-franchise pilot program that seeks to increase the reach of quality certified seed through innovative models that can bridge the vast gap between service providers and rural small-scale farmers, with a particular focus on the promotion of legumes and other non-maize cereal and fodder crops.

At the agro-dealer trainings, Duncan was introduced to Freshco Seeds, a company looking for ways to penetrate the rural markets with their range of products. He became acquainted with Freshco's range of certified seed, which included sorghum, green gram, cowpea, and beans, and was trained on which varieties would perform well in the agroclimatic zone of Tharaka Nithi. After the initial training, Duncan was able to get direct access to Freshco's certified seeds that were previously unavailable in the region or had become too expensive for farmers to purchase through other channels. He also gained the knowledge necessary on how to advise farmers on their planting procedures and plant care throughout the season.



Duncan Kimathi, proprietor of Kairanya Farmers Centre in Marimanti town, Tharaka Nithi County

In the planting season that concluded in November 2020, Duncan was able to order and receive certified green gram and sorghum seeds worth Ksh 90,000 (\$900) for sale to his customers and he managed to distribute some of it through local motorcycle transporters to other agro-dealers much further afield, including Daniel Kithaka at Mikimani Market and Regina Marigu at Nkondi Market, both of whom are some 25-30 km away. These varieties of seed were previously unavailable in the region due to the long distance involved and unfavorable trading terms with the town-based agro-dealers in Meru.



David Kithaka, Daskin Agrovet Mikimani Market



Regina Marigo, Muchuvi Agrochemicals at Muchuvi market



Duncan is eagerly waiting for the start of the next season as he now has a direct source for certified seeds. He says that his farmers are pleased with the results and have committed to coming back for more of the seeds. He is also looking to grow his business further by acting as a supplier to other agro-dealers in smaller markets in the region. “The direct link and support I am getting from Freshco will help me build my business in the area with a wider variety of sorghum and green gram seeds, which is what farmers grow here in plenty.”

Farmer

Margarete Kagendo is a small-scale farmer residing near Mikimani Market in Nkondi Ward, Tharaka Nithi County. Margarete had previously attended the farmer training provided by Freshco Seeds, county government agricultural extension officers, and IFDC as part of the S34D project.

At the farmer training, various agrodealers were also in attendance to support the dissemination of information, advertise themselves, and sell products to farmers interested in trying out the certified seeds varieties that were being demonstrated. Margarete was linked with the closest agro-dealer to her farm that was working closely with Freshco Seeds. After the training, she purchased certified seed for two crop varieties, green gram, and sorghum, from the agro dealer at the start of the November 2020 planting season. Previously, Margarete used to plant her saved seed from previous harvests, which gave her low yields.

She planted the crops following the agricultural practices that were taught at the farmer training and received extension service support from Daskin Agrovet on pest management products. While the

rains were insufficient, she was pleasantly surprised that the crop still did very well, and she is looking forward to a bumper harvest of sorghum and green gram.

“When I look at the crop I have in the field, I am very happy that I know I am going to get a good harvest this season of sorghum and green gram. I am happy that I was able to get good seed and advice at the nearest agrodealer to my home, which is within walking distance. Come next season, I am going to go back for some more of that Freshco seed.”



Margaret Kagendo with her sorghum crop grown from seeds purchased at Mikimani Market