

# Developing Media Market Systems to Address Agricultural Constraints

## A Case Study from the ALCP Georgia

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## A Brief Introduction to the ALCP<sup>1</sup>

The Alliances programme, a market system development programme working in the livestock market system in Georgia, is a Swiss Development Cooperation (SDC) project, implemented by Mercy Corps Georgia and run in accordance with the M4P (Making Markets Working for the Poor) Approach. The programme began in 2008 in Samstkhe Javakheti, Georgia. Alliances Kvemo Kartli was opened in 2011, with a second phase awarded to Samstkhe Javakheti. In 2014, the second phase of an expanded Kvemo Kartli was merged with a new branch of the programme in Ajara and a two-year monitoring and sustainability phase in Samstkhe Javakheti to form the Alliances Lesser Caucasus Programme (ALCP). From 2014 Alliances management, programming and operations were fully harmonized under the ALCP. The programme has achieved substantial scale and systemic change well beyond the initial designated programme areas and targets and has devoted itself to learning, excellence and participation in a global community of practice in Market Systems Development, including being twice successfully audited by the Donor Committee for Enterprise Development (DCED) Standard for Results Measurement. It has furthered learning and practice in Women's Economic Empowerment and harnessed market systems programming to generate significant impact in transversal themes with a 54% average of female usage and access across all interventions. From October 2008 to March 2017, 444,417 income beneficiaries generated 39.95 million USD (92.94 million GEL) in aggregated net attributable direct and indirect income for farmers, businesses and employees. For more detail go to [www.alcp.ge](http://www.alcp.ge)

<sup>1</sup> From Alliances Caucasus Programme (2018) *Biannual Report - April 2018 to September 2018*, p. 6

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## ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AB	Alliance of Broadcasters
ABBA	Ajara Beekeepers Business Association
ALCP	Alliances Caucasus Programme
FS&H	Food safety and hygiene
GARB	Georgian Association of Regional Broadcasters
GPB	Georgian Public Broadcaster
GRMA	Georgian Regional Media Association
JRC	Journalism Resource Centre
LHP	Livestock and Honey Producers
MSD	Market Systems Development
SDC	Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Mass media is an industry built on disseminating information at scale, and it is often one of the first information industries to penetrate rural areas. As such, it can be a powerful tool for development programmes whose goal is to improve rural households' access to information.

However, whilst many development programmes are happy to *use* media, few invest their resources in *developing* media. This can lead to development itself undermining media, as media is most effective when it does more than just disseminate information from sponsors to its audience. Independent and sustainable media gathers information from multiple sources, including from its audience, and produces content relevant to their needs and priorities.

The Alliances Caucuses Programme (ALCP) in Georgia was established to increase incomes and employment for small-scale livestock and honey producers (LHPs) in rural Georgia by developing the agricultural markets they participate in. In the early stages of the programme, the ALCP found that a lack of access to reliable and relevant agricultural information was negatively impacting rural farmers and beekeepers' participation in agricultural markets, leaving them disadvantaged in negotiations with informal traders and largely excluded from formal markets.

The ALCP identified a demand for agricultural media content among LHPs but decided that instead of sponsoring agricultural content to address information constraints – an unsustainable, though common, solution – they would try to change the way media works.

Their approach was to demonstrate to mass media players that if they independently produced the kind of agricultural content that was in demand by rural households, they would tap into a large audience, their ratings would go up, and they would be able to attract commercial advertising revenue, increased sales, or (in the case of public media) a greater proportion of the public media budget.

Meanwhile, by airing and publishing agricultural content, media would provide LHPs with a way to learn about new practices, technology, input supply markets, regulations and consumers, as well as to verify market prices, strengthening their negotiating positions, and increasing their incomes.

The ALCP started their work by partnering with individual newspapers, regional television stations and a national television station who agreed to pilot agricultural media products, supported by funding for equipment and intensive technical mentoring from the programme. As the quality of these media products improved, ratings rose, and the media outlets' capacity to produce content independently and sustainably also grew.

Scale of impact was achieved through these media products. However, scaling beyond the ALCP's partners was a challenge, as systemic constraints in the media systems prevented significant copying from new media entities without them also receiving intensive support. The ALCP therefore began working in the supporting functions of media, most notably in partnering with universities and associations to develop agricultural journalism training.

Results are impressive. Since 2008 the ALCP estimates that its media-related interventions have reached 287,261 households, representing 639,174 people, through television, radio, newspaper and online videos. About half of surveyed viewers report changing their agricultural practices as a result of information accessed through media and most of these also attribute income increases or other tangible benefits to these changes.

Furthermore, the ALCP no longer supports any media products, yet all those started in the last decade continue to be published and developed independently, providing good evidence of sustainability.

The ALCP's work in media provides a number of lessons for other programmes, about both the challenges and the benefits of working with mass media to address information-related constraints in agricultural markets.

# 1. INTRODUCTION

Most development programmes work with information, but few seek to develop information systems, and fewer still work to develop media markets.<sup>2</sup> The Alliances Caucasus Programme in Georgia (ALCP<sup>3</sup>) is an exception. The programme has taken a multi-faceted, multi-sector approach to their work on information, including working with media partners. The results have been remarkable.

Agricultural journalism did not exist in Georgia a decade ago, when the ALCP began. No agricultural content relevant to small-scale farmers and beekeepers was broadcast or published at all and the quality of content that rural audiences consumed was either aimed at urban audiences or funded directly by donors and therefore short-lived and agenda-driven. The quality of regional and national media products was poor, rarely underpinned by expert information sources, and featured very little field-reporting. No agricultural content was targeted to a female audience.

Now, agricultural programmes are broadcast in every region of the country through both public and private TV channels and twenty regional or municipality newspapers include agricultural supplements, either in print or online. The quality and relevance of these media products has dramatically improved as media outlets have come to see rural producers as a key target audience, have understood the importance of gender-sensitised programming, and have learned how to produce field-based content supplemented by information from reliable sources. The agricultural media products that have started over the last decade are no longer funded by the ALCP and yet continue to be broadcast independently. Fourteen universities have incorporated, or are in the process of incorporating, an agricultural journalism module into their courses and to date 369 journalism students have studied agricultural journalism as a result.

Since 2008 the ALCP estimates that its media-related interventions have reached 287,261 rural households (62% of rural households in Georgia), representing 639,174 people, through television, radio, newspaper and online videos (many more have been reached through information embedded in other interventions).<sup>4</sup> The results of independent impact assessments<sup>5</sup> and an internal programme survey on information<sup>6</sup> suggest that about 45% of rural livestock farmers and honey producers access information about agriculture through media which can be directly attributed to the ALCP. Although direct attribution of income increases to media is difficult, self-reported data suggest that more than half of rural farmers in Georgia who access information about agriculture through media change their behaviour as a result of it, and most of these attribute incomes increases to the changes they made.<sup>7</sup>

The ALCP could not have achieved these results by applying a conventional approach to its work with the media. Too frequently, development programmes treat media as nothing more than a ready-made distribution network for information, paying media outlets to print articles or air programmes they have produced. By its very nature, media can reach a large number of people, relatively cost-

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<sup>2</sup> Taylor, B., Hitchins, R. and Burns, J. (2016) *Making Information Systems Work for the Poor: the case of media*

<sup>3</sup> The programme has gone through several iterations of name and the acronym ALCP comes from when it was called the Alliances Lesser Caucasus Programme. In its latest phase, it is called the Alliances Caucasus Programme but retains the acronym ALCP.

<sup>4</sup> Impact figures are based on data measured up to April 2017 and only relate to rural households. An estimated 60,000 urban households were also reached. Furthermore, agricultural information is embedded in other programme facilitated interventions which have reached an estimated 248,000 households. These figures are not included in order to mitigate the risk of double-counting. Georgian household data is taken from <http://www.geostat.ge>, accessed 17<sup>th</sup> December 2018.

<sup>5</sup> Here and throughout this case study this refers to the impact assessments of programme work done in Samtskhe–Javakheti (2016), Kvemo Kartli (2016) and Ajara region (2017). These impact assessments were made available to the author by the ALCP team.

<sup>6</sup> Alliances Caucasus Programme (2018) *A National Review of Information Impact in Alliances, 2008-2018*

<sup>7</sup> See Section 4 for details and references.

effectively. This makes media attractive to development programmes who wish to disseminate their messages to otherwise hard-to-reach populations.

The problem is that in agreeing to these pay-to-play arrangements, development programmes inadvertently undermine the role a free press plays of independently investigating public interest stories, and in doing so, holding powerful individuals and organisations to account. Paying for programme minutes or column inches causes media outlets to lose independence, and hence credibility with their audience, and simultaneously reduces their need to pursue commercial streams of revenue, undermining both their sustainability and their function in a democratic society.<sup>8</sup>

Some Market Systems Development (MSD) programmes have taken a different approach, recognising that sustainable intervention requires *developing* media systems, not just *using* them. The ALCP is a rare example of a programme that has attempted to apply MSD principles to work with media. Other examples include Fit-SEMA which worked in Uganda to introduce business programming to radio,<sup>9</sup> ENABLE which worked to introduce business programming to media houses in Nigeria<sup>10</sup> and Samarth which worked to introduce agricultural programming to radio in Nepal.<sup>11</sup>

It was the ALCP’s application of MSD principles to agricultural markets that led them to work with media in the first place, and it is their effort to carry those principles through to their work with information in general, and media in particular, that makes the ALCP an important programme to learn from.

## The ALCP Programme

The ALCP, an MSD programme working in the livestock and honey sectors in Georgia, is a Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) project, implemented by Mercy Corps Georgia. It has been running for ten years, over four phases, growing in regional focus with each phase, as the table below shows.

Figure 1: Phases of the ALCP

Years	Regional Focus of Programme
2008-2011	Georgia: Samtskhe–Javakheti
2011-2014	Georgia: Samtskhe–Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli
2014-2017	Georgia: Kvemo Kartli and Ajara with ongoing monitoring in Samtskhe–Javakheti
2017-2021	Georgia: all regions; Armenia: border and other regions; Azerbaijan: border and other regions

The programme’s goal is to increase incomes and employment by reducing exclusion from agricultural markets among small-scale livestock and honey producers (LHPs) by developing and strengthening the markets they participate in. The programme works in the meat, wool, dairy and honey sectors, and in numerous interrelated markets that impact on these sectors.

In line with the principles of MSD, the ALCP does not direct programme resources towards fixing presenting problems but instead investigates what the root causes of those problems are and seeks to identify people and organisations with the motivation and capacity to address those problems in a

<sup>8</sup> See Anderson, G. and Kibenge, O. (2004) *Making Development Newsworthy*

<sup>9</sup> Anderson, G. and Elliott, D. (2007) *The role and impact of radio in reforming the rural business environment in Africa: A study of private FM radio in Uganda*

<sup>10</sup> The Springfield Centre; Adam Smith International (2013) *Making Media Work for the Poor: Enhancing Nigerian Advocacy for a Better Business Environment Case Study*

<sup>11</sup> Joshi, S. (2017) *Measuring impact in Nepal’s media market system*

systemic way. Programme resources are then directed towards catalysing systemic change through partnership with those people and organisations, with the goal of influencing systems to be more inclusive of LHPs – both male and female, of all ethnicities – on an ongoing basis.

## 2. HOW AN AGRICULTURAL PROGRAMME CAME TO WORK IN MEDIA

### Diagnosis: uncovering information constraints

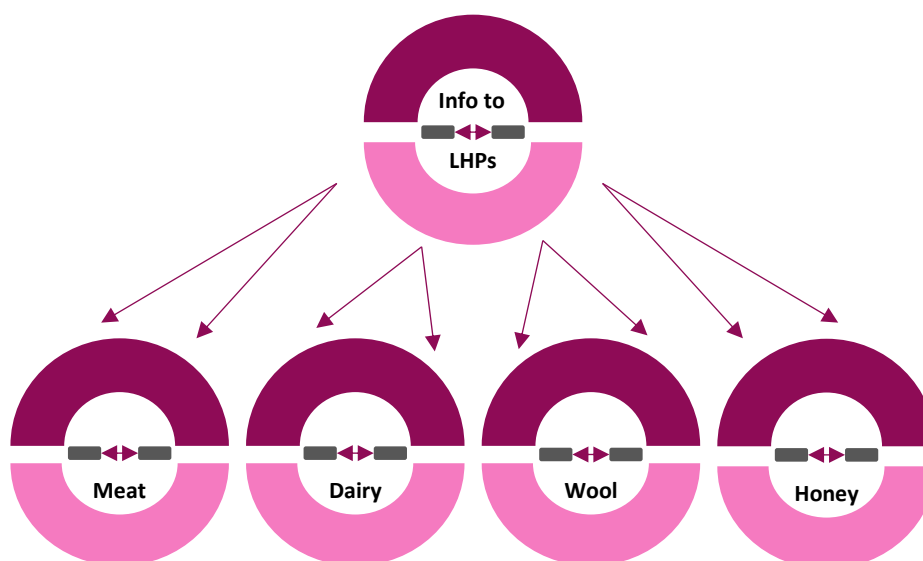
The ALCP was not originally commissioned to achieve any explicitly information-oriented targets. However, as an MSD programme, the ALCP is research-driven, and its research showed that a common constraint in agricultural markets was lack of information among LHPs about production and input services (supply), market prices and regulations (exchange) and consumers' priorities (demand). Box 1 provides an example of the types of information constraints that beekeepers faced.

*Box 1: Information constraints in the honey sector*

The honey sector in Ajara region provides a pertinent example of how information affects a core market. Honey production is an important source of potential income for many rural households in Ajara. However, a lack of technical knowledge about honey production, bee care and disease created inefficiency, raising costs and lowering the quality and quantity of honey produced. Beekeepers also lacked information about rules in the honey sector, such as technical standards required for quality certification, export regulations, and Food Safety and Hygiene (FS&H) standards. They had little information about consumers' priorities and new market opportunities. Female beekeepers' access to information was even more constrained, as beekeeping is a predominately male activity in Georgia. The programme realised that a lack of reliable access to accurate, up-to-date information was causing underperformance in multiple supporting functions of the honey market.

Information constraints were not unique to the honey market. Market diagnosis in every core agricultural market in the programme (meat, dairy and wool in addition to honey) and multiple supporting markets (such as Food Safety and Hygiene, veterinary inputs, nutrition and breeding), in every region the programme has expanded into over the last decade, suggested that if LHPs could access better agricultural information, they would be able to improve the quality, quantity and price of their products, as well as to significantly reduce losses they were experiencing, thereby improving their ability to generate income. Diagnosis also indicated that information constraints particularly affected women, who had less access to information about agricultural practices and markets, which

*Figure 2: The provision of information to LHPs was a constraint to multiple supporting functions in multiple markets*





resulted in them having less influence within agricultural value chains and less control over the household resources that were generated through agricultural markets. This was particularly relevant to dairy markets where women play a key role as producers (see Box 4).

Consequently, improving LHPs' access to quality information became a priority and the programme moved from treating information solely as a cross-cutting theme, embedded within each of its interventions, to adding improved access to appropriate information on agricultural practices and markets as an explicit and differentiated goal of the programme (see Figure 2).

### Deeper diagnosis: research into information provision

Having discovered that a lack of information was one of the root causes of LHPs' exclusion from profitable agricultural markets, the programme began research to understand how the provision of information was operating at the time and why (this became baseline data) and to identify who would have the incentives and capacities to provide better information to LHPs.

The programme found that LHPs got most of their agricultural information from neighbours and friends. Women had less access to agricultural information through informal networks as informal gatherings of men (*birja*) were an important means of information dissemination. The ALCP's gender surveys showed that women were also less likely to participate in village community meetings or to travel to regional, or in some cases even municipal, centres, further constraining their access to information. Informal norms around gender roles, particularly among Azeri and Armenian ethnicities, who often did not speak Georgian or Russian, affected the flow of information through social networks.<sup>12</sup>

Both men and women watched agricultural news items aired on the main TV news channels, but these were mostly concerned with government initiatives and there were few other examples of agricultural journalism in mass media. Farmers and beekeepers occasionally got information from shops, vets and vet pharmacies, though as they had to travel to Tbilisi or other urban centres to access these services, men had greater access than women to these information sources. From 2013, local government agricultural outreach offices were established in municipality centres; they kept databases of livestock producers and could communicate with them through village representatives and community meetings about government legislation, but they did not have the capacity to provide other agricultural knowledge.<sup>13</sup> LHPs often had no other source of information about price than that which buyers gave them, which left them disadvantaged in negotiations.

Overall, information poverty was shown to have multiple facets which affected different sources of information differently. Access to information, trust and relevance of the available information to rural farmers' needs were found to be the main problems, with access to information affecting women more severely than men.

Part of the reason a solution to the information problem had not emerged in the market thus far was that improving information would require an upfront investment (in market research and building dissemination networks, for instance), but urban businesses tended to either dismiss rural farmers and beekeepers as constituting too insignificant a proportion of the market to be worth investing in or romanticise them "as upholders of national and cultural values to be abstractly preserved."<sup>14</sup> Neither media nor retail businesses accurately understood the potential value to their businesses that Georgia's large rural population represented, so urban-centric business and media norms persisted.

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<sup>12</sup> It was often assumed that if people did not speak Georgian, then Russian would suffice. However Azeri and Armenian women in particular often did not speak Russian either.

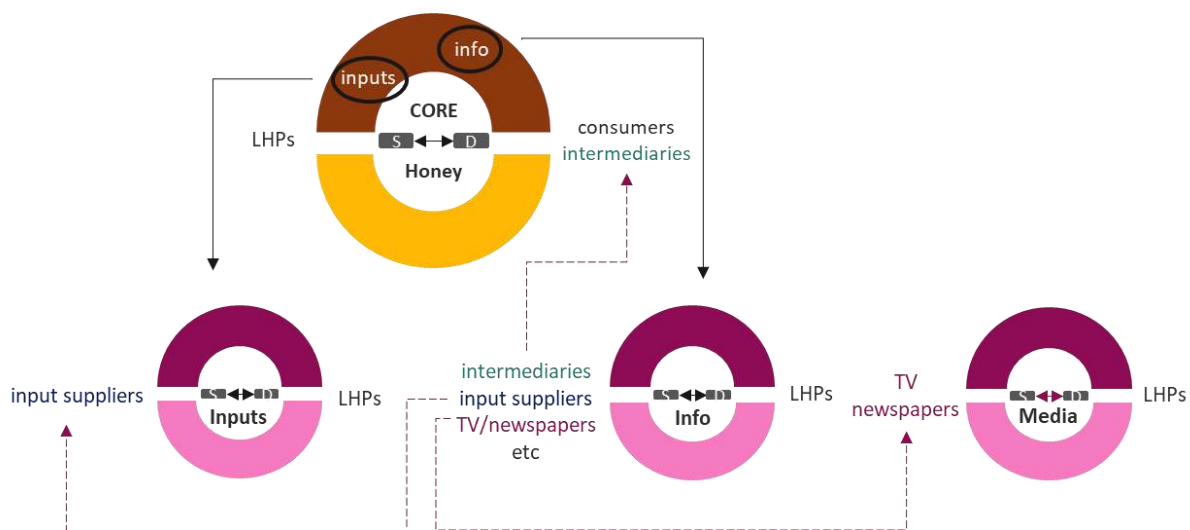
<sup>13</sup> As soon as they were established these were targeted by donor funded programmes as a means to reach the rural population, resulting in conflicting initiatives.

<sup>14</sup> Bradbury, H. and Samkharadze, N. (2014) *Serving the rural market: quality development and product delivery of media to a non urban audience*, p. 6

## Vision: addressing information constraints

The ALCP considered the incentives and capacities of different players who provide (or could provide) agricultural information and decided that their vision for a functioning, inclusive information environment was a multi-player one. As many of these players were embedded in different market systems (see Figure 3), this vision meant intervening in information in a variety of market systems, including both input supply and media markets.

Figure 3: Players in the “provision of information” supporting market are embedded in other markets



Given that the ALCP’s goal was to increase incomes, it was important that LHPs did not just access, but also applied and benefited from improved information. To achieve this goal, the programme addressed each information constraint by intervening in several different information distribution channels so that, for example, a farmer receiving livestock husbandry advice in a veterinary pharmacy would also hear and read similar advice in a TV programme and a newspaper article. This gave the ALCP the following strategic advantages:

- **Repetition** – unlike more material resources, information might not be ‘received’ the first time it is ‘given.’ Hearing information repeated from different sources meant LHPs were more likely to trust it, retain it, pass it on to others and act on it.
- **Triangulation** – a healthy information environment is one in which individuals can engage critically with information, question its validity and verify or refute it through other sources. Developing independent streams of information gave LHPs the opportunity to triangulate information.
- **Complementarity** – each type of information provider had different incentives and capacity to access, develop and disseminate different aspects of agricultural information. By developing complementary rather than just competing information distribution channels, information providers could use each other’s information to improve their own.
- **Resilience** – each of the markets agricultural information was embedded in faced their own constraints. By using multiple strategies to provide better information to LHPs, the ALCP mitigated the risk of recurring information poverty if some interventions were undermined by external factors.
- **Synergy** – the combined effect of working with different players in distinct market systems was greater than any player could achieve on their own. Similarly, improving the way these different information channels worked had synergistic benefits for different intervention areas.

Annex 2 uses the honey sector to show how ALCP's multi-player strategy worked in one of the programme's core sectors. It shows how each constraint was addressed by multiple strategies and how each of these intervention strategies also affected constraints in other supporting functions, creating synergy with other intervention areas.

### 3. WORKING WITH MASS MEDIA SYSTEMS

#### Why media?

The ALCP started working within mass media systems because they were trying to improve provision of agricultural information to small-scale farmers and beekeepers, but mass media channels are unusual actors to look to for the provision of technical information about agricultural practices and markets.<sup>15</sup> Why did the ALCP consider working with the media?

Firstly, although LHPs had very little access to agricultural information through TV, the research showed that it was viewed as an important source of general information and that it was being widely accessed in rural areas by both women and men. In fact, TV was the largest and – in the perception of LHPs – the most important formal information dissemination channel.

The fact that both men and women LHPs saw TV and newspapers as sources of technical information was important because it indicated that there was a demand for agricultural journalism and that if it existed, it would be widely accessed and acted upon. Media could potentially change perceptions, increasing LHPs' confidence to take risks and invest in practice and technology changes.

Secondly, media already had an extensive dissemination network in place; both national and local channels had the proven capacity to reach rural farmers at scale. Furthermore, TV channels' and newspapers' incentives are explicitly scale-oriented. Media gave the ALCP a way to reach scale and to do so without information being passed between numerous players and potentially corrupted in the process.

Although rural LHPs had much less access to newspapers than TV, these were frequently cited as being an important potential way of getting information, and an early pilot intervention with a newspaper in the Samtskhe-Javakheti of Georgia had demonstrated that including agricultural information in a local newspaper could increase sales,<sup>16</sup> so the potential for providing information through newspapers was also deemed worth investing in.

Thirdly, mass media has the potential to address far more than "provision of information" constraints. For example, if mass media began to prioritise agricultural programming to increase ratings with a rural audience, it would do more than just improve agriculturalists' access to relevant information. It would also provide an advertising platform for businesses to reach small-scale producers, improving access to inputs. Positive media coverage could change consumer perceptions potentially generating a greater demand for products supplied to enterprises by small-scale LHPs. Perhaps even most importantly, it could provide LHPs with a public forum for their views and a means of holding other players accountable.

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<sup>15</sup> This is because in many contexts technical information about agricultural practices does not have mass appeal that can compete with entertainment, news and other programming and because specialist technical information is usually only relevant to a segment of the audience, so other viewers may switch to competing media channels when technical information is presented. Furthermore, in many contexts, audiences do not trust media to provide accurate technical guidance. The context in Georgia (marked by agricultural information poverty, little competition from other media players and high reliance on information from TV – see 'Background and Baselines') was such that technical information did drive ratings, even in mainstream mass media. ALCP's interventions were also about changing perceptions, not just about providing technical information.

<sup>16</sup> Market Alliances Against Poverty (2011) *Southern Gates Newspaper: Product Diversification and Commercialization in a Non-Commercial World*

The ALCP were opportunistic and adaptive. As a development programme with international donor funding, they were perceived by the media industry as the type of player who might pay to promote their message through media outlets. Although the ALCP were unwilling to engage on that basis, they recognised an opportunity and decided to experiment with persuading media outlets to try a more commercial, viewer-oriented model.

## Background and Baselines

### Media in Georgia

Georgia's media legislation is liberal. Media freedom is both enshrined in the constitution and protected by laws which ban censorship and media monopolisation.<sup>17</sup> Indeed, Georgia's legislative framework guaranteeing freedom of the press is among the strongest in the region.<sup>18</sup>

However, implementation of this progressive legislation remains problematic. In 2009, when the ALCP began intervening with media outlets, media freedom in Georgia had declined from the preceding years, and there had been serious infringements on journalists' rights following Georgia's conflict with Russia.<sup>19</sup> Although progress has been made, the media in Georgia remains highly politically polarised and journalists frequently self-censor in their reporting.<sup>20</sup>

Media independence is frequently distorted by sponsored content as well as by political affiliations. Advertisers expect to be able to influence content when they sign large contracts with media outlets, and international donors exacerbate the problem by funding pay-to-play content. Political polarisation extends to the advertising market and to ratings monitoring companies, both of which are weak and urban-centric. Georgia's two largest television ratings companies report conflicting data: one appears to report favourable data for pro-government outlets and the other for pro-opposition outlets.<sup>21</sup>

Training for journalists exists in universities but these are also urban-centric and thanks to the polarised environment, there is little demand for independent investigative reporting. Consequently, many journalists' skills are underdeveloped, such that even politically balanced reporting is often superficial. In 2009, a shift towards more specialised journalism was starting to occur, but specialist programmes were sponsor-funded and unpopular, and so have not been sustained.<sup>22</sup>

Interestingly, political polarisation affects regional media less than urban media; both TV programmes and newspapers in rural areas tend to be less biased and cite a wider range of sources than their urban counterparts. However, poor ratings data, informal norms around "pay-to-play" sponsorship and a weak, urban-centric commercial advertising market have combined to create a vicious cycle in which private regional media are reduced to dependency on grants from donors and NGOs, in exchange for which they publish sponsored, agenda-driven content. This damages their chances at credibility and popularity, keeping audience ratings low (which in any case cannot be accurately measured), and undermining any advertising offer they might otherwise make to the private sector. Consequently, regional media outlets have unstable and unreliable income streams which lead, in turn, to further dependency on grants and sponsorship.

The results are that regional media outlets tend to have little technical equipment and few funds to maintain the facilities they do have, underdeveloped skills in producing content, a poor

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<sup>17</sup> IREX (2018) *Media Sustainability Index: Georgia*; Mikashavidze, M. (2018) *Georgia - Media Landscape*

<sup>18</sup> Freedom House (2018) *Georgia Profile*; IREX (2018) *Media Sustainability Index: Georgia*

<sup>19</sup> IREX (2009) *Media Sustainability Index: Georgia*

<sup>20</sup> Freedom House (2018) *Georgia Profile*

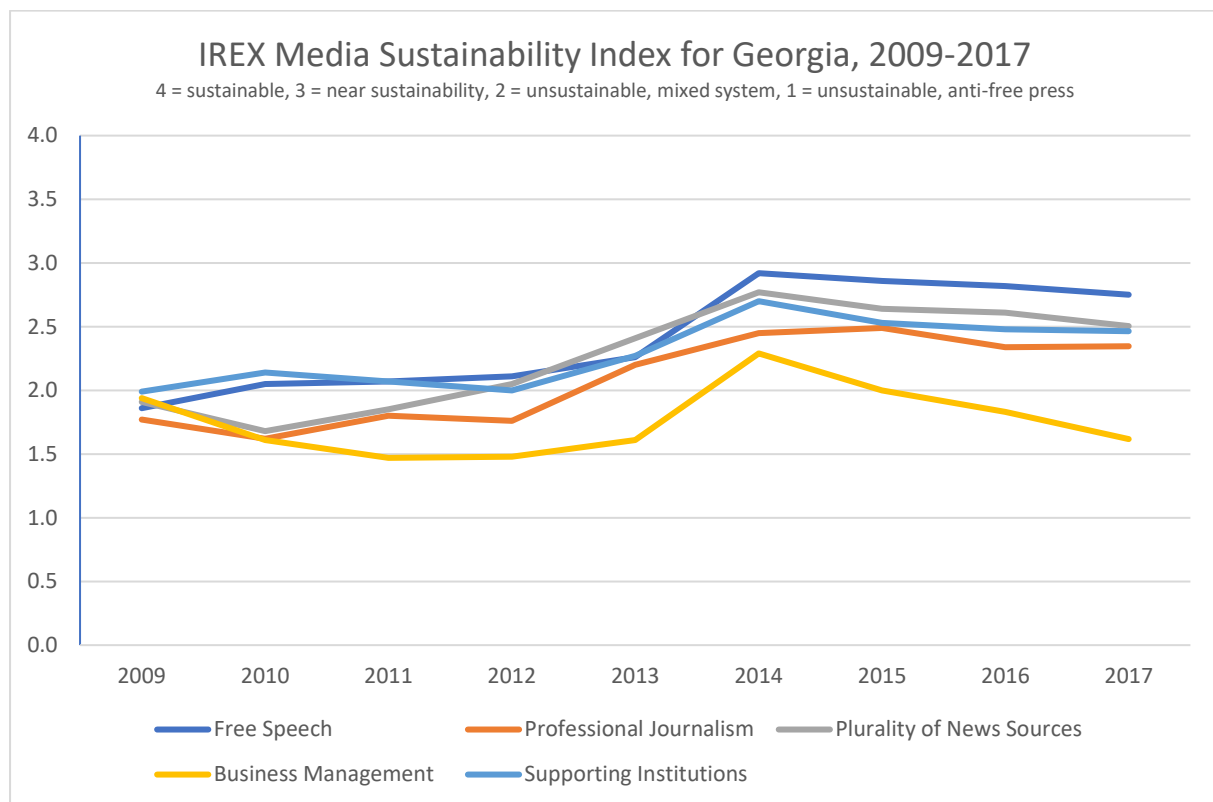
<sup>21</sup> IREX (2009) *Media Sustainability Index: Georgia*, conversations with the ALCP staff, interviews with Georgian media professionals

<sup>22</sup> IREX (2018) *Media Sustainability Index: Georgia*, conversations with the ALCP staff

understanding of audience priorities and a lack of familiarity with commercial media models. Similar systemic constraints are present in public broadcasting media systems too.

According to the Caucasus Resource Research Centre, in 2009, 89% of rural respondents rated television as their main source of information, 8% as neighbours, friends and family, 1% as newspapers and 0% as online sources (very few Georgians listen to the radio). However, 32% of rural respondents did say they read a newspaper at least once a week. Different questions were asked in 2017, but the number of rural households who own a colour TV rose from 69% in 2009 to 94% in 2017, and 27% of rural households reported having access to the internet from a personal computer in 2017, indicating considerable change.<sup>23</sup> As Figure 4 shows, some progress has been made in indicators of a sustainable, independent media in Georgia, but many challenges remain.

Figure 4: Media Sustainability Index for Georgia, 2009-2017



### Baselines for Agricultural Journalism

The ALCP’s intervention goal in media was to introduce agricultural journalism as a sustainable, audience-driven specialism within a free press. Prior to their interventions, they found only two examples of agricultural journalism in Georgia other than the occasional short-term, donor-funded campaign and general news stories. *Chveni Ferma*, which later became *Perma*, aired by the Georgian Public Broadcaster (GPB) started independently of the programme in May 2010 and reported mainly on large commercial, primarily crop-based, farmers. *Me Var Fermeri* was aired on the public Ajara TV channel and used an entirely studio-based format to report mainly on planting and gardening. Both had male hosts and predominately featured stories about male agriculturalists. As public channels, both GPB and Ajara TV were mandated to report on agricultural topics but they mainly catered to an urban audience, contributing to a general idealisation of the countryside but doing little to meet rural audiences’ needs.

<sup>23</sup> Caucasus Resource Research Centre (2009) *Caucasus Barometer 2009 Georgia*; (2017) *Caucasus Barometer 2017 Georgia*. Freedom House figures suggest that internet penetration has nearly doubled in Georgia since 2011.

Other than reporting on legislative changes or government initiatives on the news,<sup>24</sup> no commercial channels or newspapers included agricultural content unless they were paid to do so on a pay-to-play basis. As there was little information about ratings and a weak advertising market, firms in rural areas relied on word of mouth to reach potential customers and media outlets relied on funding from donors and government subsidies. Figure 5 shows rough baseline figures for access from the ALCP’s focus group surveys. Even when people did access some agricultural information through media, for example through general news stories, they still cited the lack of information these sources provided.

Figure 5: Agricultural information baselines, by source and region

Region and Research	Personal relationships		Television, including general news		Newspaper, including general news	
	M	F	M	F	M	F
Samtskhe-Javakheti, 2011 <sup>25</sup>	77%	78%	23% men, 22% women, for both			
Kvemo Kartli, 2011 <sup>26</sup>	51%	32%	78%	22%	10%	7%
Ajara, 2014 <sup>27</sup>	61%	52%	71% (at least)	90% (at least)	26% (at least)	23% (at least)

## The ALCP’s Intervention Strategies in Mass Media

The ALCP interventions in broadcast and print media have spanned nearly a decade, beginning in 2009 with a local newspaper, progressing to partnerships with newspapers and local TV channels in other regions and eventually reaching national coverage through a national television programme.

Unlike in other sectors, the programme did not start their work in media by diagnosing, mapping and analysing mass media market systems. This is because their original intent was not to improve the way media works in Georgia, but rather to find players who could address the information constraints they had identified, which would in turn improve the way the core agricultural markets work for rural farmers and beekeepers.

However, as in all other sectors, the ALCP was committed to intervening sustainably, and to avoiding the donor distortion effects so common in Georgian media. The latest IREX report on Georgian media notes that “The slight increase in [the Supporting Institutions] score from 2.46 to 2.51 reflects ongoing efforts by support organizations and donors to foster sustainable media in Georgia, compensating for what the industry cannot accomplish on its own.”<sup>28</sup> The ALCP’s vision was not to prop up an industry which could not survive on its own, but rather to introduce high quality agricultural journalism to media in a sustainable way.

In order to achieve that in the Georgian media environment, the programme recognised that they would need to invest some time in supporting media partners to adapt from their existing models (sponsor-funded content) to more sustainable ones (commercial media model or sustainably funded public media) and to develop a value for free, investigative journalism that uses multiple sources to provide balanced, independent reporting. The programme activities the ALCP team took to achieve

<sup>24</sup> These reports were often related to the EU-Georgia Association Agreement which came into force in July 2016. This agreement included the requirement to harmonize legislation with that of the EU. In the livestock sector this mainly impacted FS&H regulation and therefore drove greater formalisation of food production.

<sup>25</sup> Market Alliances Against Poverty (2011) *Gender Analysis of the Alliances SJ Program Area*

<sup>26</sup> Market Alliances Against Poverty (2011) *Alliances Kvemo Kartli: Focus Group Survey*

<sup>27</sup> Alliances Lesser Caucasus Programme (2014) *Focus Group Survey Ajara*

<sup>28</sup> IREX (2018) *Media Sustainability Index: Georgia*, p. 11

this can be understood through the MSD “Adopt, Adapt, Expand, Respond” (AAER) framework which describes different processes by which an innovation is introduced to and embedded within a market system.<sup>29</sup>

The specific innovation that the ALCP introduced was slightly different for each media market system they worked in – public broadcasting, private broadcasting, and private newspapers. In all cases, though, the model was to introduce independent, quality, field-based agricultural journalism relevant to a rural audience, which would drive ratings or sales for the media organisation and simultaneously provide LHPs with better information and means of representation. The media products developed included a variety of segments relevant to rural farmers and beekeepers, such as stories on small-scale producers, reports on topics relevant to LHPs, and short, technical instructional videos or articles.

For *newspapers*, the model was to produce and print an agricultural supplement to include with the paper and to change the sales model from subscription-only to including retail points in rural areas. By meeting a demand for agricultural information and by increasing access and visibility, the paper would sell more copies. Not only would this increase one stream of income, it would also provide papers with a platform to increase another: commercial advertising. Greater revenue would provide further resources to increase capacity and continue improving the quality of journalism.

For *private television stations*, the model was to produce similar content in the format of a high-quality agricultural TV programme. By meeting demand for increased agricultural information, the programme would drive ratings, giving its journalists greater negotiating power for the broadcaster’s budget and equipment, and giving the broadcaster a platform for selling advertising slots commercially. This money could be reinvested in increasing capacity, as with newspapers.

The model for *public television stations* was similar, though their incentives were different as they were mandated to provide agricultural content relevant to rural Georgia as part of their obligation as a taxpayer-funded institution. However, ratings were important to public television programmes too, as they had to compete against other programmes for airtime and budget which were determined by ratings.

## Adopt: will the innovation be adopted by programme partners?

The ALCP’s first challenge in achieving their vision was to build a working relationship with media entities on the basis of their incentives for developing sustainable, independent media, rather than on the basis of funding content. In most cases, the programme had no problem in choosing partners as there were so few media entities serving rural audiences at the time. Programme staff had identified and spoken to media representatives during their market analyses, so they returned with the results and presented the business case for developing agricultural content that would engage a large, rural audience who had expressed a demand for it. The ALCP also laid down their inviolable rule: “we will not pay for broadcasting time or column inches.”

Unsurprisingly in such a donor-distorted environment, media partners did not immediately accept this. When it became apparent that the programme really would not fund content directly, they suggested that perhaps the programme would fund salaries instead. When this was also denied, most partners asked for equipment, such as a camera that could be taken to the field or a van for transportation. As a lack of access to equipment was constraining quality and preventing journalists from conducting interviews in rural areas, the ALCP staff were willing to work with this suggestion as

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<sup>29</sup> See Nippard, D., Hitchins, R. and Elliot, D. (2014) *Adopt-Adapt-Expand-Respond: a framework for managing and measuring systemic change processes*; and Taylor, B. (2016) *Systems and Systemic Change - Clarity in Concept*

an entry point, on the condition that their partners also adopted other innovations, starting with an audience research survey.

The ALCP also required co-investment from their media partners. Usually, partners contributed staff time, use of existing equipment, and fuel for field-based reporting trips, while the ALCP funded new equipment and provided technical advice and useful contacts.<sup>30</sup> These first phase partnerships started small, so that neither party were undertaking too much risk. The ALCP's intervention team worked closely with the partner, supporting them to conduct their own consumer research, analyse the results, begin field-based reporting and develop agricultural content, linking journalists to the ALCP's partners in agricultural sectors who gave them relevant material to report on (see Box 2).

*Box 2: Developing media content instead of paying for it directly*

Media organisations' need for new content never ends. In a sustainable media sector, media managers overcome this problem by hiring skilled journalists to generate independent content that will capture large audiences' attention. That attention is then sold to advertisers to generate the income that pays journalists' salaries and thus funds ongoing content creation. As Joseph Pulitzer succinctly put it, "Circulation means advertising, and advertising means money, and money means independence."<sup>31</sup>

In less well-functioning sectors the content challenge is harder to overcome. The ALCP found that as media organisations had relied on sales of airtime or column inches to donors and sponsors for both income and content generation, their understanding of audience demands and their skills in independent content production had not been developed. Furthermore, journalists had few expert information sources to help them generate content as the rural agricultural sector was also underdeveloped prior to the ALCP's involvement.

The ALCP took a stepped approach to developing media partners' capacity to produce content. In the very early stages, they provided field equipment, supplied ideas for agricultural content from their market research, taught media organisations how to conduct their own consumer research, suggested examples of quality agri-journalism from other countries, and sometimes accompanied journalists on their first field trips to interview farmers. They also highlighted the importance of gender sensitized content, pointing out that by producing content that women seek out and share, media outlets could reach even greater audience numbers.

Most importantly, the ALCP's interventions in agricultural sectors led to a much stronger network of agricultural experts who understood the rural market, so the programme was also able to improve content by linking media with Georgian technical consultants who provided expert information about topics such as FS&H, animal diseases and agricultural technology. By linking journalists to programme partners in the livestock and honey sectors the ALCP ensured journalists had entry points to understanding rural agricultural realities and could unearth relevant material to report on. These relationships became key assets for content-hungry media partners.<sup>32</sup>

As the media interventions developed, the ALCP was able to exit their support of individual media partners, who had become adept at generating relevant content and relied on their local contacts for agricultural knowledge. The ALCP then intervened in the supporting institutions that affected independent content generation such as skills training for journalists (see 'Respond').

<sup>30</sup> See Annex 2 of Alliances Caucasus Programme (2018) *A National Review of Information Impact in Alliances, 2008-2018* for details of the contributions ALCP made to each media partner.

<sup>31</sup> As cited in Starr, P. (2004) *The Creation of the Media: Political Origins of Modern Communications*, p. 257. This principle has since been backed up through research in numerous contexts.

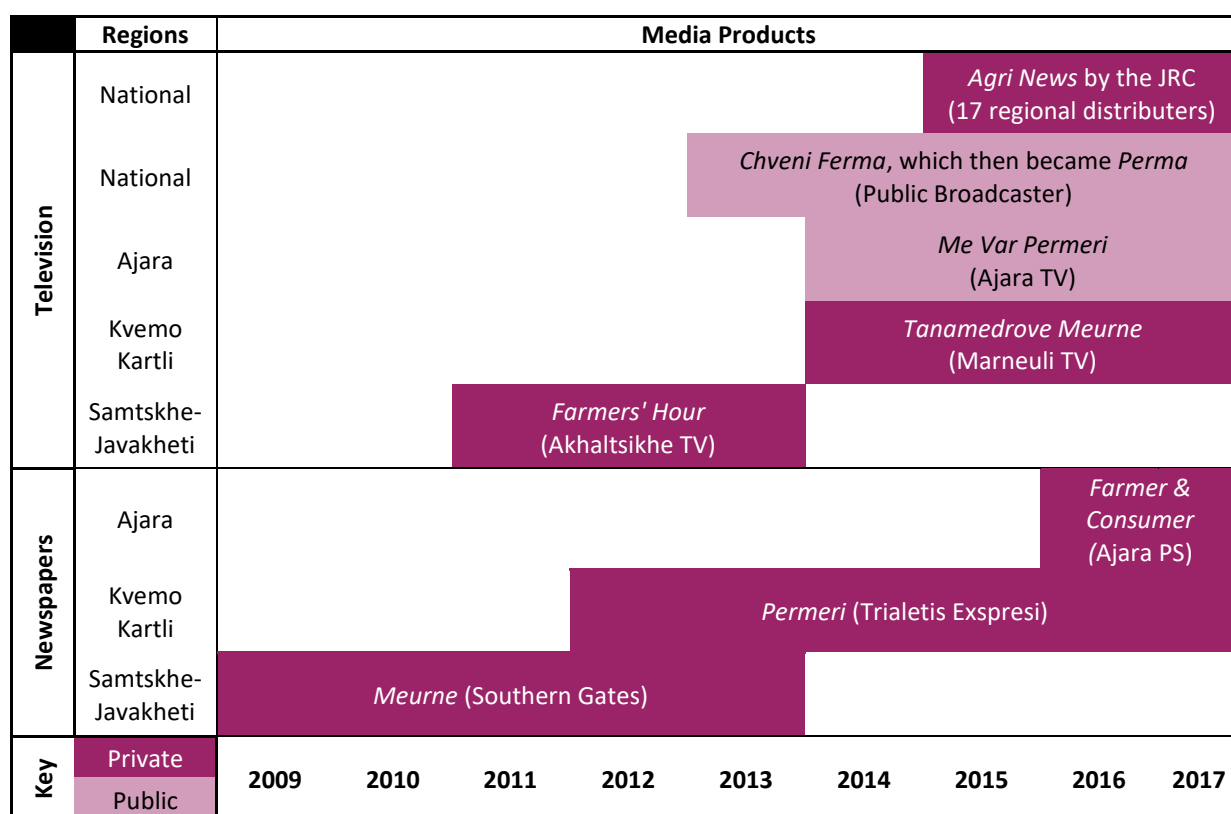
<sup>32</sup> See Bradbury, H. and Samkharadze, N. (2015) *Information in Alliances*, which explains how critical the ALCP's work in developing content was to their later ability to work with larger media partners who acted as scale agents. See also Bradbury, H. and Samkharadze, N (2016) *Information in Alliances: A Short Study*.



Although the quality of these early attempts to generate demand-driven agricultural reporting was modest, in such an information-poor environment they nonetheless increased ratings and engagement, quickly demonstrating the potential of a large, engaged audience of agriculturalists. With practice, coaching from the ALCP, and exposure to other examples of quality agricultural programming, these products improved in quality and grew in popularity. Many media partners then applied to the ALCP for a second phase of partnership, which focused on positioning and developing these media products further.

As Figure 6 shows, the ALCP’s work with media partners grew gradually. This was beneficial, as the ALCP were able to learn, applying the lessons from working with one media partner to new work with another. Meanwhile, as other interventions in agricultural markets developed, the ALCP were better equipped to support their media partners by connecting them to agricultural experts, consultants, input suppliers and producers who served or were supplied by rural consumers. This iterative internal capacity building is what allowed the programme to develop enough credibility to approach the GPB and successfully persuade them that their model was relevant to national public media, where stakes were higher.

Figure 6: Chronology of media products facilitated by the ALCP



### Adapt: will programme partners sustain the innovation?

The ALCP’s next step was to see whether their media partners who had adopted agricultural journalism into their content production with the ALCP’s support showed signs of ownership that would indicate that they would continue this innovation without support.

Encouragingly, there were numerous signs of partners developing services and products related to agricultural journalism that were not mentioned in the original partnership vision. Often this was stimulated by the demand of their customers. For example, as internet access increased in rural areas and LHPs came across agricultural videos lessons such as those produced by *Mosavali* (see Box 3), they began to demand that TV stations who were embedding similar lessons within their programmes host them online too. TV stations began to develop social media pages to interact with

their agriculturalist viewers and some also began broadcasting agricultural content on their own radio stations. One programme partner – Akhaltsikhe TV – started producing a second agricultural programme independently of the ALCP. *Perma* has retained the services of a consultant to answer farmers’ questions. Newspapers started publishing their agricultural supplements online.

As of 2018, the ALCP is no longer actively involved in supporting any partners’ media products yet all of the TV programmes that the ALCP facilitated still air. The newspaper agricultural supplements also still exist, though they are mostly published online now. This is likely a reflection of trends in media consumption, rather than a sustainability concern.

*Box 3: Websites and social media*

The importance and prevalence of online media has grown considerably in rural Georgia over the last decade, creating an opportunity for the ALCP to develop shareable online agricultural information to complement broadcast and print media.

The challenge for the ALCP in capitalising on this opportunity was to identify a player who had an incentive to disseminate information to LHPs online. At first the programme funded the non-profit organisation Elva to further develop the online *Mosavali* platform. *Mosavali* (meaning ‘harvest’ in Georgian) publishes short technical video tutorials about agricultural practices on an online learning platform for smallholder farmers. The first 32 videos produced through this partnership proved so popular that *Mosavali* was able to secure funds to produce a further 113 videos. These videos had remarkable reach: as of December 2018, *Mosavali* has 22,000 followers and 850,000 views on Facebook and 2,595 subscribers and 175,100 views on YouTube. Unfortunately, this has not led to a sustainable private sector business model, having continued to be donor funded.<sup>33</sup> Nonetheless, viewers continue to share the videos and other organisations have begun to replicate the model. For example, one TV programme - *Agri News* – began producing agricultural instruction videos in response to viewer demands.<sup>34</sup>

The ALCP also supported the veterinary inputs company Roki to host an interactive online platform – [agroface.ge](http://agroface.ge) – with information on inputs and services, daily agricultural news and ‘how to’ videos. Its membership database includes agri-finance suppliers, input suppliers, donors, media entities, government bodies, and civil society organisations as well as farmers who interact through the platform. The website, which is available in Georgian, Azeri and Russian, is now independently financed by the company and to date has registered 3,790 users.

## Expand: will the innovation spread through the system?

The ALCP had experienced success in working with media partners to innovate in the provision of agricultural information, and the programme areas had good coverage of agricultural content in media products. Agricultural media remained inaccessible to most of the rest of rural Georgia though. The ALCP’s next challenge was how to scale their successes to other media players.

Ideally, other media entities would have seen the increased popularity that the ALCP’s partners enjoyed and decided to start producing agricultural content themselves in order to compete for ratings. Cases of this did occur. For example, one online newspaper began producing an agricultural supplement after seeing *Trialetis Expressi’s* supplement. As the regional media markets were so limited though, and as the commercial media environment was so distorted, there was often only one newspaper and one TV station in each local area. This meant there was very little of the kind of competition that would drive spontaneous copying. There was also little visibility between media outlets in the different regions and almost no reliable information on ratings. The ALCP realised that

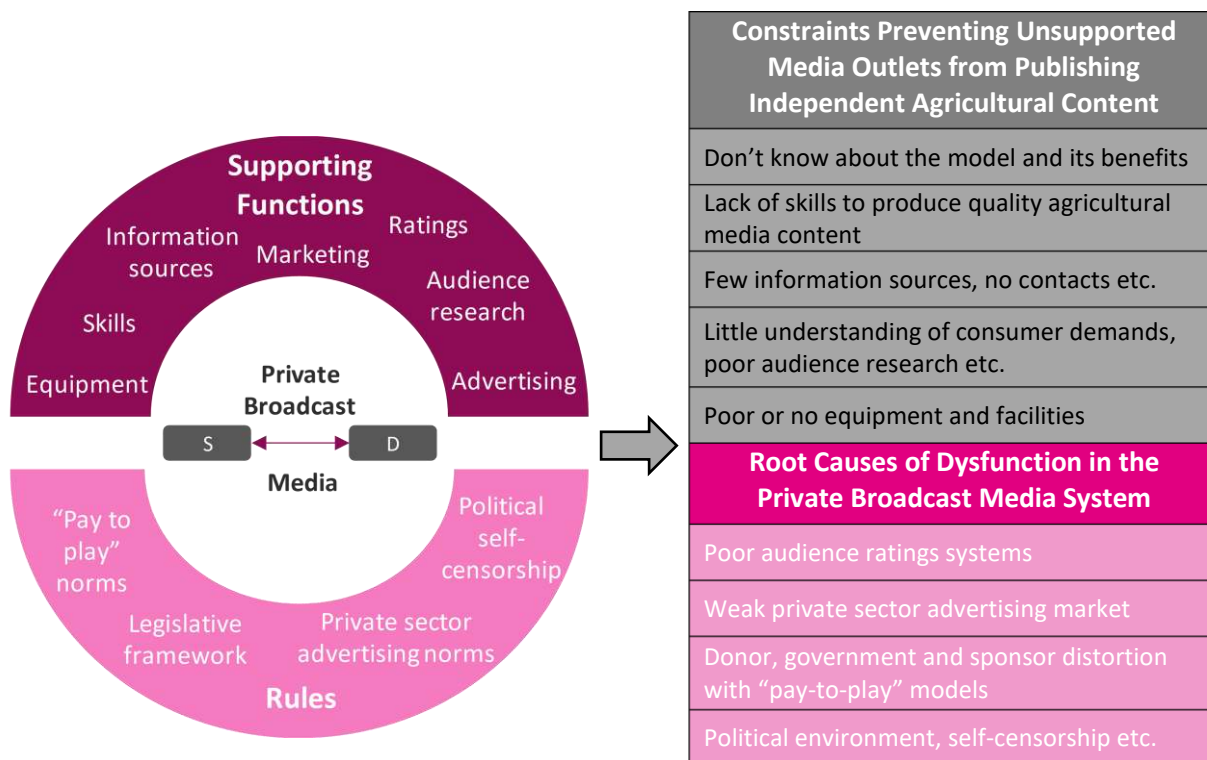
<sup>33</sup> Donors utilising the outreach of existing platforms has been stark here, leading to distortion of markets that could otherwise be sustainable.

<sup>34</sup> See the section on ‘Respond’ for more details about *Agri News*

to scale up, they were going to need to find a way to increase visibility of the benefits that their media partners experienced as a result of publishing agricultural content.

Even more importantly, the ALCP realised that the challenges their media partners had faced in introducing agricultural content were systemic constraints caused by underperforming supporting functions and rules in wider media systems (see 'Backgrounds and Baselines'). Figure 7 uses the example of the private broadcast system to show how the underperformance of mass media systems' supporting functions and rules led to the systemic constraints which prevented unsupported media players from publishing independent agricultural content themselves.

Figure 7: Expansion of ALCP interventions was limited by systemic constraints in media markets



Consequently, those new media entities that wanted to publish agricultural content needed similar support to that which the ALCP's partners had needed to overcome their capacity constraints, but it would not be sustainable for the ALCP to provide this support to new media entities on an ongoing basis. Therefore, in order for "Expand" to happen, ALCP needed to address these constraints by intervening in the supporting functions of mass media systems. The ALCP intervened to address the constraints in the grey table in Figure 7 in order to facilitate expansion (see 'Respond').

## Respond: which supporting functions need to be addressed to support the innovation?

The "Respond" part of the AAER framework refers to changes in supporting functions and rules which support an intervention's intended change. As systemic constraints were preventing unsupported media outlets from publishing independent agricultural content, the ALCP decided to intervene directly in the supporting functions of the mass media systems.<sup>35</sup> Figure 8 shows how the

<sup>35</sup> Otherwise, the intervention would hit a stalemate: players in supporting functions would not independently "respond" until a critical mass of media outlets began publishing independent agricultural content, but without a change in supporting functions and rules, this scale could not be reached.

specific interventions the ALCP did as their media work matured related directly to the systemic constraints (shown previously in Figure 7) which were preventing “expand” from happening.

Figure 8: Relationship between systemic constraints and the ALCP’s interventions

Constraints Preventing Unsupported Adoption of Agri-Journalism Model	The ALCP Intervention
Don’t know about the model and its benefits	Facilitate training run by national media associations which showcases each model and its benefits to media outlets
Lack of skills to produce quality agricultural media content	Facilitate agri-journalism training run by media associations with international agri-journalism expert, then work to integrate agri-journalism into university journalism degrees through module development
Few information sources, no contacts etc.	Facilitate wider and deeper connections with information sources, to build on previous strategy (see Box 2)
Little understanding of consumer demands, poor audience research etc.	Include in training (as above)
Poor or no equipment and facilities	Facilitate Journalist Resource Centre to produce <i>Agri News</i> (an agricultural programme distributed to regional media)

The best players in the system to scale innovation to newspapers and TV stations in rural areas of Georgia were associations. The Georgian Association of Regional Broadcasters (GARB)’s members included 24 regional television broadcasters and 4 radio broadcasters and the Georgian Regional Media Association (GRMA) brought together 24 regional newspapers. In 2017 GARB split into two associations, GARB and the Alliance of Broadcasters (AB) which allied with its closely connected organisation, the Journalism Resource Centre (JRC). The associations had an incentive to provide good services to their members and an explicit objective to improve programme content through capacity building, so the ALCP suggested working together to deliver multi-day training courses on agricultural journalism for editors, producers and journalists.<sup>36</sup>

These training courses and subsequent association meetings addressed multiple constraints. Firstly, they provided an opportunity to showcase successful models and to explain how their success was achieved, highlighting key tools like a consumer research survey which media outlets could use to get to know their audience better and generate ideas for content. The intention was to inspire other media entities to invest in the growing field of agri-journalism, and to open journalists’ minds to more positive, sophisticated and audience-driven ways of reported on rural topics and regions.<sup>37</sup> These presentations alone were enough to stimulate independent copying by three newspapers, and donor-funded copying by a further 14 newspapers.

Secondly, specific skill constraints that had been identified could be addressed head on in training. Thirdly, the training provided an opportunity to give journalists ideas about how to tackle agricultural topics, specifically. Attendees were provided with a booklet of “agricultural themes” that briefly introduced topics relevant to a rural audience. Many journalists still refer to it frequently.

Finally, although an international agricultural journalism expert was brought in to help develop and deliver the training, the first day was delivered by local trainers who were sector experts from the ALCP’s other interventions. These were the same information sources the intervention team had long been putting their partners in touch with. The face-to-face training allowed the forty-five

<sup>36</sup> Facilitation began in 2013 when the ALCP had enough momentum and evidence (linkages, content, impact) to convince the associations of the potential of agri-journalism.

<sup>37</sup> See Bradbury, H. and Samkharadze, N. (2015) *Information in Alliances* for further details and context on this.

journalists who attended the courses to build their own relationships with these experts, who have since become indispensable information sources in the media market more widely. As the ALCP's satisfied media intervention lead put it, "Now, they never call me." The associations also encouraged journalists to support one another and exchange information, since they do not compete for ratings, being from different regions.

### Addressing skills constraints in media markets sustainably

To address skills constraints sustainably, the ALCP then partnered with the JRC (whose activities are intertwined closely with one of the associations, but who also offer commercial production services) to develop an agri-journalism module to be included in journalism degrees in Georgian universities.

Getting universities to 'adopt' this module was not difficult – they were keen, not least, as the Head of the Programme of Journalism at Caucasus International University stated, because of a sense that journalist training is becoming more specialist and it is important to stay ahead of the trends. As of December 2018, six Georgian universities have included the module in their curriculum, and so far 369 students have studied agricultural journalism as a result.<sup>38</sup> A further eight universities have plans to incorporate the module in the coming year. There are also signs of the universities "adapting" this intervention. Having tried out the materials, several of the universities have attempted to improve them, for example by using visual case studies taken from *Me Var Fermeri* and *Perma* and by bringing in guest lecturers to complement the written curriculum.

The JRC and the ALCP are now working together to "expand" the agri-journalism initiative to universities in Azerbaijan and Armenia (two universities in Armenia and one in Azerbaijan have already adopted the module), and although it is still early days, there are signs of organic expansion within Georgia too. This is largely occurring as staff interact and move between universities, spreading news of the module to other universities who wish to adopt it for themselves. This training is likely to have a significant impact on LHPs access to agricultural media in the future.

In the meantime, many regional media stations continue to struggle with limited financial resources to buy equipment, hire staff and pay for training. As the JRC is a production company as well as working alongside AB to support regional media broadcasters, it offered to address this constraint by producing a programme called *Agri News* and distributing it to the regional media stations to air on their stations alongside local news. The ALCP partnered with the JRC to set up a studio for producing this, and the JRC distributes it to its members for free, subsidising its production with other production service contracts. Although *Agri News* is not locally produced, investigative journalism and hence does not offer representation to most LHPs, it does offer good quality, up-to-date agricultural information. In an information-poor environment, such content is popular and provides regional media with an entry point to develop more relevant content themselves. Since then, the JRC have independently developed a web portal of information about agriculture for journalists (<http://agro.jrc.ge/>) and a code of ethics that they encourage agricultural journalists to sign up to.

The JRC is led by a highly motivated individual who is passionate about changing the media landscape in Georgia from being politically polarised and potentially corrupt, to being independent and ethical. Whilst the JRC occupies an unusual position in the market, sometimes acting as a production agency, sometimes selling advertising space on its own productions, sometimes collaborating with universities, and sometimes inseparable from the AB association, their leader is influential and the JRC is without a doubt an important market player. In many ways the JRC has replaced the ALCP as the innovator and catalyst of change in agricultural journalism. This is an encouraging sign that, whilst dysfunctions in mass media as a whole (such as poor audience ratings

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<sup>38</sup> A detailed description of the status of the module in each of these universities is given in Annex 6 of *Alliances Caucasus Programme (2018) A National Review of Information Impact in Alliances, 2008-2018*. The publication also provides further details about the ALCP's interventions in agri-journalism training.

monitoring and distortion from pay-to-play models) remains a risk to the stability of those media outlets that broadcast agricultural content, agricultural journalism is becoming a permanent part of the system. Furthermore, as the JRC and other supporting institutions are strengthened, they are in a better position to address the root causes of wider media dysfunction for themselves.<sup>39</sup>

## 4. IMPACT

Following the ALCP's facilitation with media partners, coverage of agricultural programming now covers the whole of Georgia. The table in Annex 2 shows all the media products that farmers use to access agricultural information, other than those that were funded by donors on a short-term, pay-to-play basis. These products have positively impacted both media entities and their audiences.

### Impact on media organisations

Overall, the media entities that partnered with the ALCP to include agricultural content in their programming and publishing experienced a notable increase in popularity, which for private stations and papers translated into greater opportunities for generating stable income streams. For *Me Var Fermeri* and *Perma*, both of which are aired on a public broadcaster channel, increased audience translated to broader support and more sustainable financing from their management.

For example, prior to intervention *Me Var Fermeri* was a largely studio-based programme with a male host that focused on planting, citrus and gardening. It has transitioned to a field-oriented programme with a female host which covers a more diverse and relevant set of topics, tying into agricultural calendars. The programme interacts with its audience online more than it used to and it has noticed a peak in popularity as measured through TV ratings and Facebook interaction. *Me Var Fermeri* is the only programme on Ajara TV to be rated among the top ten national talk shows.<sup>40</sup>

The changes in the way media entities report on agricultural topics has had an impact on the perceptions of journalists, rural viewers (including LHPs and those providing services to them in rural areas) and urban viewers. Journalists view their rural audience as a rich source of interesting stories as well as an important segment of their audience who need to be catered to. Rural viewers are more willing to grow their operations as the rural regions of Georgia are presented in mainstream media as stable, growing sectors, and urban viewers are increasingly interested in investing in rural sectors which are presented as having exciting potential.

The changes in media have also provided a platform for agricultural input supply companies and producers to gain wider visibility. Although the advertising market remains weak, input supply companies and small-scale producers who are willing to be interviewed on air gain publicity and increase sales. The information sources that the ALCP have linked with media outlets – many of whom are female leaders and experts, including specialists in agricultural journalism (such as the leader of the JRC), experts in supporting sectors of agriculture (such as consultants in FS&H and veterinary inputs) and lead agriculturalists (such as a leading female beekeeper) – have been able to grow their organisations as a result of being profiled in media stories.

### Impact on intended beneficiaries

The ALCP recently conducted a national survey about their information interventions' impact on LHPs. They found that 52% of the farmers and beekeepers interviewed are regularly receiving agricultural information through media outlets, of which 82% mentioned at least one of the media products the programme facilitated. 68% of these are women, who particularly appreciate the more frequent female-oriented agricultural reporting. The survey found that two of the top three most

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<sup>39</sup> An early and encouraging sign of this is a project the JRC has taken on to begin developing an audience rating system for rural broadcast media.

<sup>40</sup> Alliances Caucasus Programme (2018) *A National Review of Information Impact in Alliances, 2008-2018*. Ajara TV is popular throughout Georgia, not just in Ajara region.

watched agricultural programmes are ALCP-facilitated media products - *Perma* and *Me Var Fermeri* – both of which include content that targets female viewers. One third of *Perma* stories feature rural female agriculturalists, and *Me Var Fermeri* now has a female host and covers topics specifically relevant to women.

*Box 4: Gender and information in the dairy sector*

In Georgia, care of livestock, milking and dairy production are women's roles but prior to ALCP interventions, only men had access to information about milk quality standards, so the information did not result in changed milking practices.

Thanks to gender-sensitised information interventions, women are now able to access reliable information about FS&H and dairy markets directly.<sup>41</sup> The synergy between this and interventions to improve cheese processing facilities has enabled women to sell clean milk directly to local collectors who supply cheese processors, giving women access to information through buyers, agency over the sale of milk, and thus greater control over income from dairy markets.<sup>42</sup>

One woman living in Kvemo Kartli region explained that she had first invested in cattle when she moved to the region as an internally displaced person. Unable to sell the milk, she began to collect milk from local women instead and make it into cheese by hand, using baths in her home. Even with the help of two local women she hired, they were unable to process all the milk they could collect, and their cheese did not meet FS&H standards.

Thanks to the ALCP's interventions in information and cheese processing facilities, this producer now runs a cheese enterprise (*Tsintskaro + Ltd*), employs seven people, has increased milk processing capacity from about 1.5 to about 4.5 tonnes a day, and estimates that she and her husband have tripled their monthly income. She watches *Perma*, *Me Var Feremi* and *Agri News* and accesses <http://agroface.ge> online to stay up to date with news in the dairy sector. She also says that media stories which have highlighted how powdered milk processors threaten Georgian natural milk cheese processors have protected her market, making consumers more aware of the need to check labels and putting pressure on government to implement labelling standards.

The ALCP's goal of providing better agricultural information through media was ultimately to stimulate behaviour change that would lead to income generation for LHPs. 61% of the respondents who use media to access agricultural information claimed to have adopted new practices because of what they saw on TV or read in the newspapers, with several directly attributing behaviour changes to specific media content.<sup>43</sup> Reported behaviour changes included using new medicines for livestock, using different pesticides or chemicals, investing in combined feed for cattle, following FS&H rules and investing in more beehives. Farmers frequently mentioned investing in new practices and technology, suggesting that media was effective in changing attitudes to risk.

LHPs say that they pass on the information they receive from media sources<sup>44</sup> and respondents to the ALCP's national information survey claimed that neighbours and friends changed the medicines,

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<sup>41</sup> The ALCP intervened to improve women's access to dairy-oriented FS&H information through multiple information distribution channels, including consultancy, training, leaflets, embedded information, access to community level meetings and media.

<sup>42</sup> Market Share Associates (2016) *Testing Tools for Assessing Systemic Change: Outcome Harvesting*

<sup>43</sup> The 2016 and 2017 impact assessments found that 19% of the programme's target beneficiaries in Samtskhe-Javakheti, 15% in Kvemo Kartli and 21% in Ajara region have adopted new practices as a result of watching or reading agricultural information.

<sup>44</sup> The 2016 and 2017 impact assessments estimated that on average each viewer shares new information obtained through media with 1.5 people outside the family in Kvemo Kartli and 1 person outside the family in Ajara region. The 2018 national ALCP information survey found that each farmer shared information with an average of 8 additional farmers.

pesticides or feed they used as a result of this shared information.<sup>45</sup> The theory that media impacts informal peer networks is well evidenced by the available data.

Respondents in the ALCP's information survey also reported tangible outcomes from these behaviour changes. Reported benefits that respondents associated with having better access to agricultural information included getting a better harvest from cultivated nuts or vegetables, preventing livestock disease, saving women's time and effort spent on milking cows, increasing the milk yield and being able to produce a clean dairy product (see Box 4). One respondent told the interviewer, "I measured the temperature of the cattle, which I saw on TV. I didn't know that cattle could have temperatures. It revealed that the cattle had high temperature and I gave them relevant medicines. Therefore, they haven't got diseases." Another simply said that "The cows are treated in a timely manner and are not getting sick. Before they were dying."<sup>46</sup>

Overall, most of the information survey respondents who accessed agricultural information through media perceived it to have tangibly benefited them, ultimately leading to increased incomes. The impact assessments backed up this up, reporting that more than half of the people who changed their behaviour in all programme areas (and as much as 81% in Ajara region) reported monetary benefits from implementing the newly accessible agricultural information, though the impact assessors themselves argued that access to other programme-facilitated services was an important (and in Ajara region, probably a necessary) aspect of translating agricultural information into increased income.

## Impact on development donors

One of the biggest challenges the ALCP has faced in its information-related interventions is dealing with other donors, because once media outlets have been successful in growing a rural audience by publishing or broadcasting agricultural content, donors and development projects are eager to leverage these successes to achieve their own goals. This represents a risk to sustainability; after all, why should media entities expend effort to pursue advertising revenue and generate content independently when they can generate higher yields for less effort by accepting donor funding?<sup>47</sup> Arguably, donors are partly to blame for the existing dysfunctions in private media markets.

The ALCP have tried to mitigate these risks by persuading their partners to manage donors more carefully and to think about the long-term risks of accepting funding. The ALCP's media partners are now more aware of the options available to them and the risks that donor funding can represent, having experienced generating content and ratings independently. Consequently, some of the ALCP's partners are warier of development grants than they once were and are more inclined to engage with donors through service contracts than pay-to-play agreements. Nonetheless, it is hard for a resource-constrained organisation to turn down large sums of money.

In some cases, other donors have directly funded media products (such as agricultural newspaper supplements) that the ALCP and their media partners have developed together, instead of encouraging the media outlets producing them to build sustainable commercial revenue streams. The ALCP's perspective is that in a donor-saturated market, it is better that donor dollars are invested in these products, which at least require media players to generate content themselves, and which have the potential to attract sustainable revenue in the future, than they are spent on pay-to-play content dissemination. Nonetheless, it is unfortunate that one of the greatest risks to impact the ALCP has had to face comes from the development industry itself.

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<sup>45</sup> Alliances Caucasus Programme (2018) *A National Review of Information Impact in Alliances, 2008-2018*, p. 8. On average 3.4 farmers copy behaviour as a result of information shared this way, according to the claims of interviewed farmers.

<sup>46</sup> Quotes given to and translated by the ALCP programme staff and edited for grammatical clarity by the author.

<sup>47</sup> See Market Alliances Against Poverty (2011) *Southern Gates Newspaper: Product Diversification and Commercialization in a Non-Commercial World*, p. 6



## 5. LESSONS TO LEARN FROM THE ALCP'S APPROACH

The ALCP did not start their work in media with the goal of changing the way Georgian mass media systems work; they were focused on developing agricultural content in media explicitly because of its potential to address information constraints in agricultural markets. Consequently, in the early stages they intervened with media *players* in the provision of agricultural information but chose not to immediately develop wider media *systems*. Instead, their focus was on developing agricultural systems, and media partners were treated as players in the “provision of information” supporting function of these systems. This was effective in addressing agricultural information constraints in the programme areas. It also served to prove that a market for agricultural content existed and that a local Georgian media outlet could successfully generate content to meet that demand.

The challenge came when the ALCP sought to expand their interventions to new media players. Systemic constraints in the mass media market systems prevented new players from broadcasting agricultural information without the same kind of mentoring and technical assistance programme partners had received. To address this, the ALCP began intervening in the supporting functions of media systems. By addressing systemic constraints, they were able to expand the number of media players who published agricultural content and increase the interventions’ sustainability.

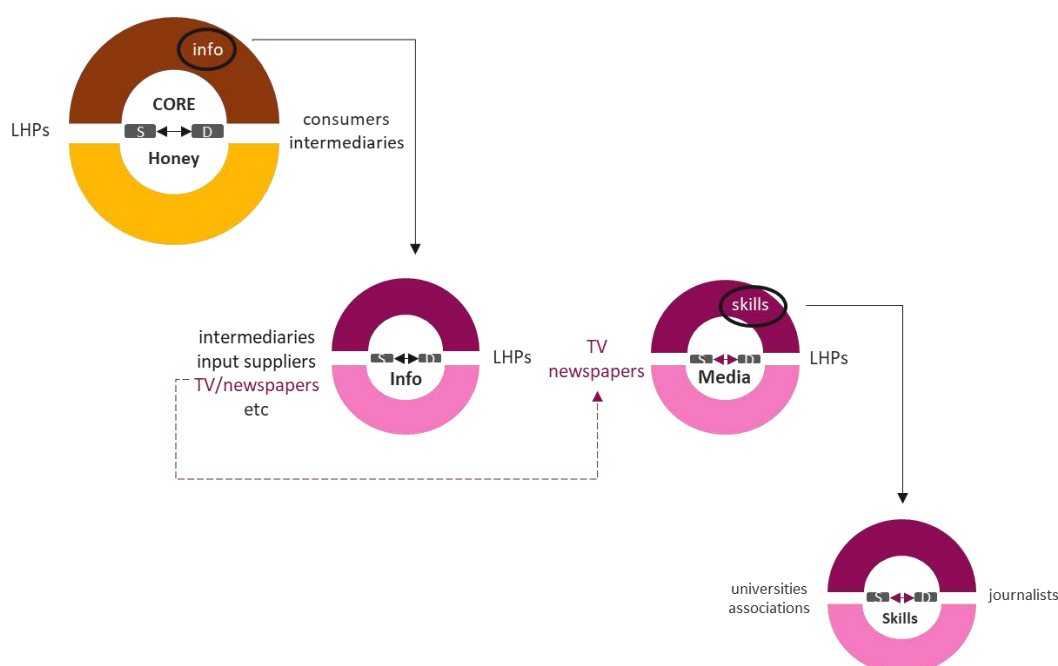
Arguably, digging even deeper into mass media systems to address root causes of systemic constraints (such as audience ratings monitoring and the wider media advertising market) could increase the interventions’ depth of scale and sustainability further still, though doing so would also demand additional investment of programme resources. This may not be justifiable given the success in addressing information constraints the programme has already had and given the changing information landscape (for instance, digital content, which has different constraints, is growing in importance as a source of agricultural information in rural areas).

Any MSD programme faces a tension in strategically choosing which system to begin intervening in, and at which point. There are several lessons to be learned from the ALCP’s experience.

### The key to scale and sustainability often lies in supporting systems

Intervening in a system that is several market systems away from the core market can be very effective, particularly for achieving scale.

Figure 9: The ALCP’s progression from core systems to supporting systems



As Figure 9 shows, the ALCP's work with associations and universities was three market systems away from the core agricultural markets they began intervening in. This increased the programme's impact: training in agricultural journalism inspires journalists across numerous media outlets to include agricultural content in their media products, thereby providing relevant and up-to-date agricultural information to a large rural audience and so addressing key constraints in agricultural markets for countless LHPs.

## The road to successful intervention in supporting markets is paved with pilots

Although it can often be effective to intervene several market systems away from a core market system, the theory of change should be tested through pilots before large scale interventions are invested in. For example, the ALCP did not begin their work in information with universities that train journalists. They piloted interventions with media partners to see if media really could be an effective player in addressing agricultural information constraints, and then they piloted training with journalists to see if it would change their reporting on agriculture, before working with universities. Using pilots is important because it gives programmes the chance to test assumptions and develop robust, context-appropriate intervention strategies. It also builds an evidence base for the value-for-money of intervening in markets that might seem, intuitively, to be disconnected from a programme's mandate.

## Systemic constraints need to be addressed in supporting markets

Having decided to work in a supporting market and having demonstrated through pilots that changes in that supporting market have the desired impact on constraints in the core market, it is important to intervene to address systemic constraints in the supporting market itself. For example, the ALCP decided to work in media, demonstrated through pilots with media partners that agricultural media content could address information constraints in core markets, and then had to address systemic constraints in the mass media markets themselves in order to achieve scale and sustainability (this work led them into a supporting market of media systems – training).

It can be challenging to address systemic constraints in a sustainable way, as the links are not always explicit between the constraints and the intended impact. Nonetheless, systemic change cannot be achieved without addressing systemic constraints. The ALCP's stepped approach had the advantage of building confidence and credibility with both market players and other stakeholders such as the programme donor, allowing them to gradually demonstrate the effectiveness of their strategy.

Whenever work in a new supporting market system commences, programmes should diagnose that system and use their research to determine which entry point to leverage first. It is often effective to work with partners to pilot an intervention and gain credibility first. Eventually, though, systemic constraints in the supporting market will need to be addressed in order to sustainably embed a change within the wider system.

## Research should drive programme strategy

The ALCP is highly research-driven, which has enabled the programme to be unusually creative, adaptive and context-specific in their intervention strategies. It was thorough diagnostic research that led to the ALCP working with media in the first place. The ALCP's research showed:

- a high level of demand for agricultural content in media;
- strong indicators that quality agricultural media content would contribute to changed agricultural behaviour by small-scale LHPs;
- adequate incentives for media players to provide agricultural content; and

- a clear link between changes in media and the root causes of dysfunction in agricultural markets.

In other words, the evidence suggested that a media strategy would work to address agricultural information constraints in the Georgian context, so the ALCP tested it, and found that it did.

## Programming for gender and ethnicity amplifies success

The ALCP have kept gender and ethnicity visible in every stage of their interventions in media. By disaggregating data according to gender and ethnicity in diagnosis activities they were able to identify the unique information needs of women and men in different ethnic and linguistic communities, and the different strategies needed to address constraints for these demographics. Highlighting these distinct needs to media partners enabled them to produce content aimed at different segments of viewers or readers, which both increased media outlets' reach and led to increased economic empowerment for women and ethnic minorities as well as for men.

## Conclusion

The ALCP's analysis of dairy, meat, wool and honey markets in Georgia showed that a lack of access to relevant and trustworthy information was constraining small-scale, rural LHPs' participation and profit in these markets. Further analysis showed that media played an important role in provision of information to LHPs and that agricultural media content could give farmers and beekeepers the confidence to risk investing in new practices and technology (which were also being facilitated by the ALCP), as well as the information they needed to participate on a more equal footing. The ALCP therefore decided to intervene to introduce rural-relevant agricultural content to Georgian media.

The programme applied MSD principles to their work with media, focusing on media's incentives for reaching a rural audience and addressing the constraints that had previously prevented them from doing so. Having proved the model could work with a number of partners in different regions as well as on national television, and having demonstrated that these partners continued to air agricultural content without programme funding, the ALCP then addressed supporting functions that could enable new media players to overcome systemic constraints in the media systems and begin including agricultural content in their media products without programme support. By focusing on sustainability and scale, the ALCP has been able to introduce the discipline of agricultural journalism to Georgian media, improving LHPs' access to information and achieving a remarkable scale of impact that can claim to have changed the media landscape in Georgia and is set to outlast the programme itself.

## ANNEX 1: THE MULTI-PLAYER STRATEGY IN THE HONEY SECTOR

The ALCP's work in the honey sector provides an example of how different intervention strategies addressed information constraints that affected:

- the **supply** of honey by small-scale producers – this was mostly information about production practices and technology and about input services and goods
- the **exchange** of honey – this was mostly information about market prices and regulations that affected the actual transaction of selling honey
- the **demand** for honey – this was mostly information that producers needed about consumers' priorities and how best to meet them

As this table shows, information constraints were addressed by multiple players in different markets, and each intervention had multiple benefits, generating an overall synergistic effect.

The ALCP intervened in these market systems...		...to address constraints in these supporting functions of the honey market.			
<i>Information distribution channel (players)</i>	<i>Market system</i>	Info about <b>supply</b>	Info about <b>exchange</b>	Info about <b>demand</b>	Also affects these <b>other supporting functions</b>
TV programmes Radio programmes  Newspapers	Broadcast media (private and public)  Print media (private)	✓	✓	✓	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Input supply</li> <li>• Testing</li> <li>• Export regulations</li> <li>• Export norms</li> <li>• Registration</li> <li>• Standards</li> <li>• FS&amp;H regulations</li> <li>• Consumer perceptions</li> </ul>
Website and social media	Online media – embedded within various other market systems	✓	✓	✓	
Embedded - input suppliers	Beekeeping input supply	✓	✗	✗	
Training and consultancies	Business development  Education/training	✓	✗	✗	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Testing</li> <li>• Export norms</li> <li>• Registration</li> </ul>
Embedded - intermediaries/ buyers	Honey (core)	✗	✓	✓	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Aggregation</li> <li>• Packaging</li> <li>• Export norms</li> <li>• Consumer perceptions</li> </ul>
Formal peer networks e.g. associations, cooperatives etc.	Honey (core)	✓	✓	✓	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Registration</li> <li>• Export norms</li> <li>• Consumer perceptions</li> </ul>

## ANNEX 2: MEDIA PRODUCTS WITH AGRICULTURAL INFORMATION

Dark purple refers to products facilitated by the ALCP, light purple refers to expansions that can be attributed to the ALCP and grey refers to products for which the ALCP has no direct attribution.

	Samtskhe-Javakheti	Kvemo Kartli	Ajara	Other regions	National
Television	<i>Farmer's Hour</i> (Akhaltsikhe TV)	<i>Tanamedrove Meurne</i> (Marneuli TV)	<i>Me var Fermeri</i> (Ajara TV)	<i>Agri News</i> – produced by the JRC, aired on 24 regional or municipality stations	<i>Perma</i> (GPB)
	<i>Pharma Advices</i> (Akhaltsikhe TV)			<i>Samkhretis Karibche</i> (Southern Gates online TV)	
			One Day in a Village (Ajara TV) - 'inspirational' rural content		Saperavi TV (online only, advertising-oriented); <i>Business Morning</i> (TV1)
Newspaper (some have moved online)	<i>Meurne</i> agricultural supplement (Southern Gates)	<i>Permeri</i> agricultural supplement (Trialetis Expresi)	<i>Farmer and Consumer</i> agricultural supplement (Ajara PS)		
		agricultural supplement (Didgorelebi, online only)		<i>Mamuli</i> agricultural supplement (Kharagauli); FS&H supplement (Svaneti; Guriis Moambe)	14 additional local newspapers produced agri-info (funded by Eurasia Partnership Foundation)
Websites and mobile apps	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mosavali - agricultural information available online and via mobile app (<a href="https://www.facebook.com/mosavali/">https://www.facebook.com/mosavali/</a>)</li> <li>• <a href="http://agroface.ge">http://agroface.ge</a> - portal of agricultural information hosted by Roki Ltd (veterinary inputs company)</li> </ul>				
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="http://agro.jrc.ge/">http://agro.jrc.ge/</a> - portal of agricultural information hosted by the Journalists Resource Centre, supplemented by <i>Agri News</i> Facebook page</li> <li>• <i>Meurne</i> (Southern Gates newspaper) – online agricultural information</li> <li>• <i>Agri News</i> online – agricultural information including 'how to' videos</li> <li>• Other broadcast media programmes' websites and social media channels</li> </ul>				
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Traktor</i> and <i>Kalo</i> – agricultural information available online (<a href="https://kalo.ge">https://kalo.ge</a>) and via mobile app, now merged under the <i>Kalo</i> brand</li> <li>• <i>Agronavti</i> mobile app for Georgian farmers (<a href="https://www.facebook.com/agronavti/">https://www.facebook.com/agronavti/</a>)</li> <li>• <i>AgroKavkasia</i> online only agricultural newspaper (<a href="http://agrokavkaz.ge/">http://agrokavkaz.ge/</a>)</li> <li>• <i>Agromedia</i> (<a href="http://www.agromedia.ge">www.agromedia.ge</a>) – multimedia agri news portal</li> <li>• Ojakh.ge LTD (<a href="https://www.facebook.com/ojakh.ge/">https://www.facebook.com/ojakh.ge/</a>) – Facebook page of a project focused on developing capacity, primarily walnut oriented</li> </ul>				
Radio	<i>Meurne</i> (Southern Gates) radio programme			<i>Agri News</i> radio product, produced by the JRC, aired locally by 11 members	<i>Farm</i> (GPB), <i>Farmer's Hour</i> (GPB), <i>Morning in the Country</i> (GPB)

## ANNEX 3: STAKEHOLDERS CONSULTED

In addition to members of the ALCP team, the following stakeholders were interviewed for this case study. Many thanks to all the individuals who contributed their time and expertise.

Organisation	Individuals Interviewed
The Journalism Resource Centre	Natia Kuprashvili (director) Nugzar Suaridze (assistant director) Giga Abuladze (anchor of <i>Agri News</i> )
Georgian Public Broadcaster, <i>Perma</i>	Tamar Bokvadze (editor) Demetre Ergemlidze (anchor of <i>Perma</i> )
Caucasus International University	Nino Chalaganidze (Head of Journalism Department, Head of Multimedia Centre)
Star Consulting	Ekaterine Burkadze (founder, director)
Bee Queen	Manana Bokvadze (founder, beekeeper)
Roki Ltd, <i>Farmer of Future</i>	Rusudan Gigashvili (director)
<i>Tsintskaro + Dairy Processor</i>	Zeinab Abuladze (founder and director)
Tetrtskaro Women's Room	Melita Kopadze (manager)

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