

Silage Baithak

Engagement and Influencing Events to Scale-up MDF Pakistan's Work in Silage

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Executive Summary

Pakistan has one of the significantly large agricultural livestock industries in the world. Over the last few decades, farm animal populations grew so quickly that local fodder producers could not keep up with demand. Due to insufficient silage supplies, smallholder farmers must use crop residue as animal feed, which limits potential milk production. MDF identified the insufficient supply of nutritious fodder as a market growth opportunity. It is for this reason that over the last six years, MDF Pakistan developed a market system for small-baled silage - a cost effective and nutritious, maize-based fodder. By establishing local partnerships, MDF successfully introduced innovative machinery, designed and rolled-out new loan products, developed and popularised appropriate seed usage and helped mitigate risk to support local farmers to produce and sell their own small-bale silage. To reach this goal, MDF Pakistan established partnerships with rural silage entrepreneurs, a commercial bank, a farm equipment supplier and a seeds company.

Through field assessments, MDF Pakistan learned that if good quality fodder is available, milk yields can increase by up to two litres per animal per day. In January 2018, to scale-up extensive work in silage, MDF decided to bring all its strategic partners on a single platform to promote the successful, small-baled silage business model to potential entrepreneurs. The team did this through Engagement and Influencing (EI) events, branded as "Silage Baithaks," as part of the scale-up strategy in MDF's silage journey.

This policy brief describes why MDF Pakistan chose to use EI events in conjunction with other forms of outreach and how MDF engaged its partners to identify and connect with the right audience.

Purpose

This brief will explain the benefits of EI events. These programs deepen a project's impact within a market system and help strengthen growing business models.

Event Design

Most Silage Baithaks were led and hosted by either MDF Pakistan or the farm machine company, Cattlekit, a local partner. The program design aimed to connect mid-sized, farmer entrepreneurs with a panel of experts to guide them through the process of silage making, starting with growing a suitable quality maize crop for production to acquiring the appropriate harvest machinery and finally, to establish tried and true packaging techniques.

To begin each session, panel members gave a 10-minute presentation on their respective area of expertise. The panellists included representatives from MDF partners Cattlekit, Corteva Agriscience (also known as Pioneer Seeds), Bank Alfalah, as well as local government officials and successful

silage entrepreneurs. Once the audience had an opportunity to listen to the various aspects of establishing and operating a silage business, they had a chance to talk to the experts about any issues they had during a structured question and answer portion of the program. Each event concluded with a lunch to give participants, presenters and organisers the space to network and make personal connections.

Benefits

After years of work in the silage market, MDF Pakistan decided the time was right to spread awareness about this innovative business model. To this end, the team considered a variety of ways, including television, print media and social media marketing campaigns. However, the team wanted to start with an approach which allowed engagement with potential entrepreneurs more directly. To do this, the team turned to Engagement and Influencing events.

These sessions provided a level of personal interaction that was lacking in other forms of outreach. Attendees heard silage entrepreneur's journeys firsthand. Not only did EI events provide further, targeted information for people interested in the silage sector, they were also an important source of market feedback for MDF and its partners. MDF and Cattlekit learned from their experiences at each EI meeting and revised their approach at subsequent gatherings.

Unlike traditional mass media advertisement campaigns, EI information sessions offered the flexibility to target content to localised audiences. For example, in an event held in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, panellists gave presentations and answered questions in the local language. At a session held in the Sindh Province, a local government official joined the panel so he could share information about the provincial government's subsidy scheme for farm machinery, thereby using the platform to educate audience members about relevant local government policies that they could utilise to grow their own silage businesses. In each EI event, panellists informed themselves of specific, localised constraints, such as weather patterns and land holding size, and adapted their presentations accordingly.

Finally, MDF's partner Cattlekit displayed farm machinery at each event so participants could take a look at available harvest equipment and talk with the present staff members to find what might be right for them.

Selecting the Right Audience

Engagement and Influencing events require a higher spend-per-person investment compared to mass media outreach. However, EI audience engagement is much more meaningful - that is, if the right people attend. To guarantee the investment was fruitful and the attendees were progressive maize growing farmers interested in silage making, MDF employed the help of their local business partners.

Considering MDF does not collaborate with beneficiaries directly, the Pakistan team mobilised two key business partners, Cattlekit and Corteva Agriscience, to send invitations and confirm the participation of key community members. Thanks to this assistance, each event had between 150 and 200 carefully selected participants. In addition to securing the right audience, collaborating with local business partners to determine the invitees increased their involvement and sense of project ownership.

What Happens After an Event?

An EI event on its own was not enough to establish robust silage entrepreneurial change. To effectively change behaviour, the sessions were supplemented by two-way communication between farmers and MDF partners with a potential for repeat engagement between local sales teams and interested entrepreneurs. MDF organised a communication network so that after walking away from the event, the attendees could reach out to panellists and business partners for more information. Additionally, event coordinators registered all attendees into a comprehensive data base and partners' field staff followed up with participants after events.

Conclusion and Results

MDF partners and EI participants gave Silage Baithaks positive feedback. Local partners expressed an interest in holding more of these sessions and Cattlekit made an active effort to increase the panel size for each subsequent event. MDF Pakistan plans to continue using EI gatherings as a medium to educate potential farmer-entrepreneurs about silage making business practices and ensure that experiences in this promising market are shared as widely as possible.

There is a positive correlation between people who attend Silage Baithaks and increased online interaction between farmers who use social media platforms and Cattlekit. MDF conducted the first round of EI events between January and May 2018. By June 2018, the total number of followers for Cattlekit's Facebook page increased by more than 500 per cent. This change in online engagement and awareness amongst farmers translated into a nearly 60 per cent increase in sales. MDF's productive experience with Engagement and Influencing events gives evidence that these programs can be an effective tool to establish successful business models in new regions.



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