ISF Advisors Platforms Webinar Audience Questions

Session 1

Question:	Asked by:	Authors' response:
The report had a helpful distinction between 'platforms' and 'solutions', with the latter directly providing digitally enabled solutions, e.g. iProcure. Is there any follow on research planned to look at these digital solutions?	Ryan Bourque	A lot of research has already been done on digital solutions, for instance the 2019 CTA report on the Digitalisation of African Agriculture and more recently GSMA's 2020 State of the Sector report as part of its Digital Agriculture Maps series. Our research was focused on Digital Platforms rather than Digital Solutions as there is significantly less research that has been done on Digital Platforms in the context of smallholder agriculture. Although we don't currently have planned additional follow-on research, we think the distinction between Digital Platform and Digital Solutions, and the areas of overlap between them (e.g., the usage of solutions within platforms, or the evolution of solutions into platforms) is a topic we would like to dive into more deeply.
In Indonesia the agriculture investment platform is growing rapidly. I am wondering why this is not happening in other countries? Is the regulation much stricter or the people are more careful on the type of investment?	Indah Nuryanti	In our report we make note that Digital Platforms are being seen in every region of the world with Kenya and India being particular hotspots. Check out the landscape mapping and deep dives into Kenya and India in the report for more information.
Are pipeline businesses at risk of losing their competitive advantage with the rise of 3rd party platforms? They already provide a lot of "pipeline-like" services (advances, input loans, etc.) and invest a lot in the farmers they work with. I guess they will be forced to become "platforms" themselves or join dominant ones..."platform-like"*	Alex Ponton	What the emergence of Platforms will mean for pipeline businesses is likely to be quite nuanced and complex. In tight value chains with dominant, highly consolidated and often vertically integrated pipeline businesses (involved in activities such as aggregation, processing, trading), the emergence of Platforms could indeed pose a threat to the current market configuration, or at least drastically change the way businesses interact with farmers. At the same time, these pipeline businesses may be well-placed to set up their own Platforms. In our report we reflect on the likely patterns in such value chains (page

		32). In looser value chains and for smaller businesses, the rise of Platforms may likely bring benefits in terms of easier access to customers and suppliers, more and higher quality interactions, etc. In all cases, there are risks related to excessive dominance of Platforms, which we explore in section 5 of our report (specifically pages 51-54). For instance, large and powerful Platforms may compete with their own (business) users and/or extract excessively high rents for access to markets.
Is there any insight on onboarding vs. activation rate (onboarded users who continue to use the platform after 6 months or a year) on different categories of platforms?	Ankur Seth	The question of onboarding (registered users) versus activation (active users) rates is a very important one. In our report, on page 24 we provide a reflection on the difficulties of gathering comparable data on Platform scale. In most cases, Platforms communicate on the number of registered users; not only are active user numbers likely to be much lower, there is no easy way of calculating active users in an easily comparable way, as we would need a consistent way of defining activity (certain number of interactions? Certain frequency of interactions?) and account for very different kinds of interactions facilitated by different Platforms (offtake-focused Platforms may only interact with certain farmers only once or twice a year, depending on the crops grown and the harvest seasons). Further research into this topic would be valuable and will be a part of the Platform case studies that IDH Farmfit will be conducting based on the conceptual work laid out in our research.
Do we consider commodities exchanges as a form of platform for fulfilling some of these needs? Given the slight twist we have seen in the offerings provided by some of these exchanges in Africa.	Yusuf Ogunbiyi	Yes, commodity exchanges that have a digital backbone and online trading would be considered a Digital Platform. Some, such as AFEX in Nigeria, also offer enabling services and credit to participating smallholder farmers. In our Product and Service Marketplace taxonomy these would be considered Trading Marketplaces with more wholesale buyers.
1) To what extent have platforms been weak on basic	Tom Cadogan	First part of this question was answered at 49:50 in the webinar.

market analysis of the different AG supply chains (e.g. food value chains v more structured export supply chains? 2) Has this meant platforms to date have been stronger on input markets (i.e. e-extension) but have had challenges on the output markets? Namely connecting SHFs to stabilized market prices, aggregation points & offtaking?		On the second part of the question, we have actually seen quite a large number of Platforms focused on connecting farmers to offtake markets; 60 out of the 76 marketplaces that we analyzed connect farmers to offtake markets, and for 33 of these this is the only or primary type of Platform function provided (Produce Marketplaces and Trading Marketplaces). On the other hand, we found only 6 Platforms that exclusively focus on connecting farmers to input markets (i.e., interactions *to* rather than *from* the farm) - in addition to a quite large number of Platforms combining both access to and from the farm. To us this suggests that it is generally easier to create a commercially viable Digital Platform facilitating farm produce transactions (which are transactions that already take place and where Platforms can improve the efficiency and quality of transactions) rather than input and supplies transactions (which in many contexts are economically challenging or even non-existent, making it much more difficult for a Platform to facilitate and create enough value to sustain itself).
Do you see a role for platforms in helping farmer collectives addressing their organisational/operational challenges. While there have been some standalone pilots on these lines by some agri-businesses here in India, did you come across any platforms that have been successfully integrated by collectives?	Shalini Rajan	Yes, absolutely. Some Cooperative and Collectives could start to use different marketplaces to more efficiently sell the aggregated produce of members to more wholesale and retail buyers. On the other side of that equation they could also use different services platforms as a way of increasing access to credit and technical assistance to their members. This wasn't a key part of our research but well worth looking into in the future.
One question regarding smallholder farmers, are they willing to pay for digital services? Or do they rely more on their current method of doing things?	Syed Rafi Sifath Palal	Our research did not focus on the extent to which farmers are willing (or able) to pay for Digital Solutions. In other work that we have done and in work by our peers, we have found quite some examples of Digital Solution providers successfully building

		B2C models in which they charge farmers for their services. In the case of Platforms, charging farmers is only one of a large number of observed revenue streams (incl. transaction fees, membership fees, business intelligence revenues, indirect revenues/cross-subsidization from core business, grant funding, etc.). We have seen virtually no examples in which farmers are directly charged for using a Platform (as opposed to indirectly charged through transaction fees).
Could we use these platforms to document and store package of practices developed by various communities across the countries? It may be of help to someone!	Prerak Shah	Some platforms such as WeFarm were originally designed to be a digital marketplace for technical assistance and communication. At this point it is difficult to make that model commercially viable if that is the only service provided but other Communication-based Digital Platforms such as Facebook and Whatsapp are being informally used to trade a lot of this information informally in many communities.
Will the report be available in Spanish as well?	Elisa Criscione	We don't currently have a plan to translate the report to other languages.
Great to see the focus on farmers/users in the 'Who' section of slide 16, which emphasizes to me that we can't take the utility of these platforms for granted. Did you pick up any info on which profiles of users are engaged in which kinds of platforms? And how platforms can make onboarding and active use easier, esp given limited digital reach and fluency of some potential users?	Jamie Anderson (CGAP)	**Answered at 31:40**
Farming across the world is heavily subsidised? How do we see this impacting the effectiveness of growing and scaling platform businesses.	Sneha ML	**Answered at 35:46**
Are agriculture platforms conversely too focused on	John Mundy	**Answered at 43:00**

agriculture services only? Should they not provide various off-farm services combined with off farm offerings to become more scalable/sustainable? Amazon started with books, but now sells everything, for example.		
Have you seen cases where platforms share the farmers' register? Our experience in AGRA of funding Tulaa, e-Granary and Mobigrow is that most funds are spent on signing on farmers. Is there a role for Governments to implement one digital ID for farmers like in India to at least reduce numbers of platforms that farmers need to sign on to and save costs of registration and 'boots on the ground'?	Hedwig Siewertsen	**Answered at 47:50**
To what extent have platforms been weak on basic market analysis of the different AG supply chains (e.g. food value chains v more structured export supply chains?	Tom Cadogan	**Answered at 49:50**

Session 2

Question:	Asked By:	Authors' response:
What is disintermediation?	Moffatt Ngugi	**Answered at 32:00**
Who are the main promoters of platforms and what is their main business motive for setting up a platform?	Juan Buchenau	**Answered at 33:31**
I work at Viamo, where we have been piloting a voice and SMS-based market linking service to connect buyers and sellers of agricultural outputs. I am curious how many of the platforms you researched are web or smartphone-based vs accessible on basic mobile phones? Did you find any interesting examples of platforms that are	Nikki Brand	**Answered at 35:56**

available to farmers via basic phones?		
What’s the right role for a development agency like USAID in the scaling up of these Platforms? How would the role be different from a traditional foundation?	Hans Muzoora	**Answered at 37:30**
Platform examples like Facebook are commercially viable but not inclusive. How do we make sure ag platforms are both?	Songbae Lee	**Answered at 40:56**
You mention in the report the need for storage and that platforms have to sometimes build the enabling infrastructure themselves. Have you come across any platforms building storage?	Hans Muzoora	**Answered at 43:14**
Have you seen the rise of satellite imagery innovations play notable roles in the rise of agricultural platforms?	Manuel Camacho	**Answered at 46:20**
For a lot of these platforms there is a big difference between total number of users, and active users. From the data, were you able to capture average activity rate, and what would be classified as "successful"?	Melissa Tickle	**Answered at 47:13**
Could you please share some examples of platforms supporting Climate Change Adaptation efforts? And what would be your advise for USAID to leverage on those platforms experience working with smallholder farmers?	Fernando Marquez	**Answered at 48:49**