

AgDevCo<sup>o</sup>

# FACEBOOK FARMERS

Understanding young, tech-savvy farmers as an emerging customer base for African agribusinesses



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# Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) is the world's fastest growing mobile telecommunications market, with millions of new subscribers enjoying regular internet access for the first time via smartphones.

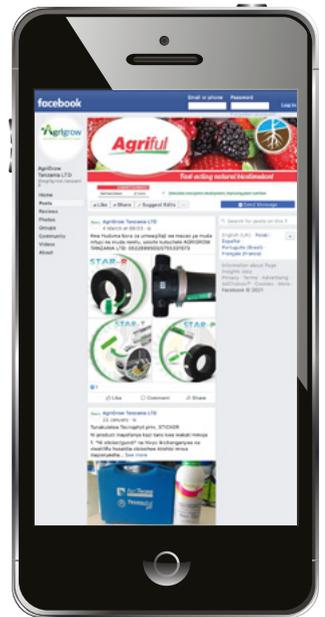
In 2021, the number of subscribers will reach half a billion, doubling to one billion by 2024. At least half of all connections will be via smartphones, driven by the increasing availability of affordable handsets.

Despite the financial impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, regional mobile operators remain committed to investing USD 52 billion in infrastructure between 2019 and 2025.

Half of all mobile money services in the world are in SSA, and online retail is expected to grow significantly as e-commerce infrastructure develops.

Facebook is the social media site of choice in SSA, with more than 200 million regional users and a market share of 67.5% - far higher than the second most popular site, YouTube, which controls 16.5% market share.

**This case study profiles Agrigrow, an agribusiness in Tanzania that received support from AgDevCo's Smallholder Development Unit (SDU). Over several months, SDU consultant Nickson Muturi advised Agrigrow on how to leverage Facebook to reach new customers and launch new business lines – for the mutual benefit of the business and small-scale farmers.**



 @agriflow.tanzania

## Online shopping in Africa

↑ 18%

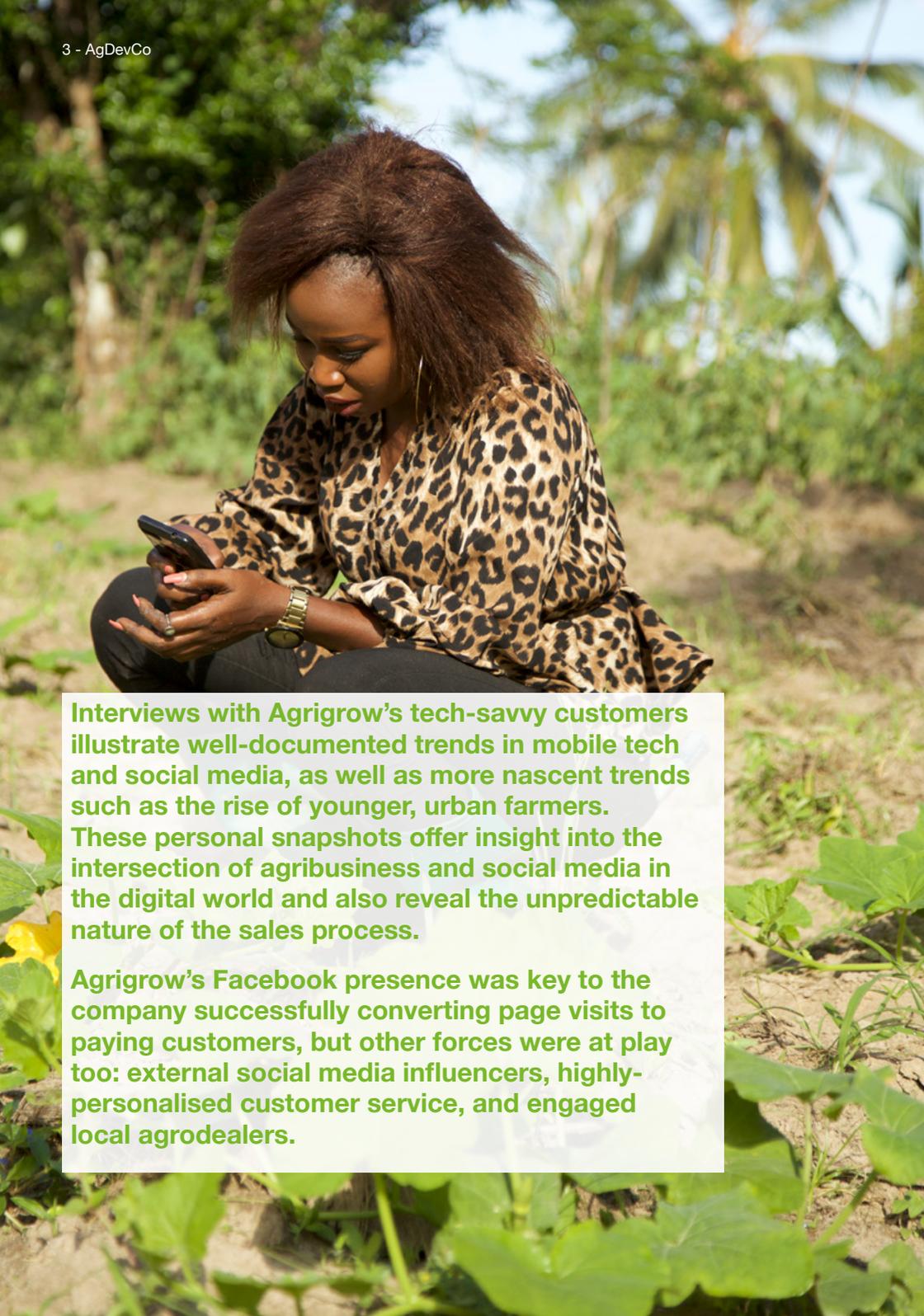
Number of online shoppers in Africa is up 18% annually since 2014

\$29bn

E-commerce will reach \$29bn by 2022

< 5%

Fewer than 5% of internet users in Africa make purchases online, compared to more than 70% in the EU

A woman with long, dark, curly hair is sitting in a field, looking down at her smartphone. She is wearing a leopard print top and a watch. The background is a lush green field with trees and a clear sky.

**Interviews with Agrigrow's tech-savvy customers illustrate well-documented trends in mobile tech and social media, as well as more nascent trends such as the rise of younger, urban farmers. These personal snapshots offer insight into the intersection of agribusiness and social media in the digital world and also reveal the unpredictable nature of the sales process.**

**AgriGrow's Facebook presence was key to the company successfully converting page visits to paying customers, but other forces were at play too: external social media influencers, highly-personalised customer service, and engaged local agrodealers.**

# Introducing Agrigrow

## Agricultural inputs distributor in Tanzania, East Africa.

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4 dealerships

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39 stockists

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4 field officers

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**Specialising in bio-stimulants and organic pesticides**

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Fred Myinga,  
Co-founder and Managing Director of Agrigrow

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In April 2020, Agrigrow launched a four-month Facebook campaign, supported by AgDevCo's SDU, to promote their products. As part of the campaign, Agrigrow also linked its Facebook presence to a WhatsApp Business account, allowing Fred Myinga to receive inquiries from potential customers direct to his mobile phone.

**The campaign attracted 27,000 new active subscribers and an average daily reach of 35,000 users. There were zero negative reactions to the social media campaign.**

The impact on Agrigrow's business was immediate: sales doubled, predominantly from small- to medium-sized farmers, but also from larger agribusinesses. They also successfully launched a new irrigation business in response to requests from Facebook followers. Social media is now Agrigrow's primary marketing channel.

Managing Director, Fred Myinga, reports that most of Agrigrow's new customers represent an underserved sector of the African farming market: in their 20s to 40s, tech-savvy, open to innovation and currently neglected by big agribusinesses.

The Facebook campaign prompted customers to inquire about products at their local agrodealer, helping Agrigrow expand its network of stockists around Tanzania. Sales in Dar es Salaam increased by 60%, with three new stockists, fuelled by a new class of 'investor farmers': individuals working in the city who are beginning to invest in farming.

More remote sales locations came online too, including Kilosa District in Morogoro Region, 280km west of Dar es Salaam, where 23-year-old Ezekiel Mwaitenda has set up an agrodealer called Big Agrochemical. 'I found Agrigrow products on Facebook, read the testimonials and then visited their office in Morogoro,' says Mwaitenda. 'At first the response from customers was low because they had never seen the products before. So I started to educate them on the usage and benefits. I post photos of the products on Facebook and WhatsApp – groups and agricultural forums – then people 'like' them and ask questions, which I respond to, finally converting them to customers. I never sell a product to a customer without educating him or her on the usage and benefits first.

'Customers I sell to become ambassadors – there is not a single customer that I sold these products to who does not give positive feedback.

'Facebook makes a huge difference to my business and it's helping attract new people, mostly young, to farming. They get motivated when they see how agriculture is being done successfully.'

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**During COVID, social media influencers have come to the fore as a marketing channel to push out products and connect to customers. We've always believed we need boots on the ground but our success with Facebook, during lockdown, proves otherwise.**

**The industry is behind in exploring what this social media boom means for agribusiness: less than 5% of the industry is leveraging social media in their activities. Only a few, small organisations like Agrigrow have succeeded in reaching and winning the hearts of rural farmers through social media.**

**They need to get over the barrier that you can't measure the volume of sales going through any one platform – the sales process is determined by a combination of factors.”**

AgDevCo SDU consultant Nickson Muturi, who led Agrigrow's Facebook campaign.



Ezekiel Mwaitenda, 23, agrodealer.

# Meet Agrigrow's new customers

## Francisca Matiniamo

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**Age:** 32

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**Job:** women's clothing and accessories shop owner, part-time farmer

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**Home:** Dar es Salaam

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**Farm location:** Mkuranga District, Pwani Region (55km south of Dar es Salaam)

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**Crops:** butternut squash, tomatoes, okra

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**Device:** smartphone

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**Data:** 14GB monthly package

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Francisca says:

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In 2012 I graduated with a Bachelor's Degree in Business Administration based in finance and then spent 5 years working in customer services for different companies. But my goal was to be self-employed, so I quit and set up a ladies clothing and accessories business.

I have a shop in Dar es Salaam, where I live, but I also sell products online. I started farming in 2020. My inspiration was a friend who made a big profit farming butternut squash.

I started looking for agricultural products and advice on Instagram, that's how I found Agrigrow. I'm also on their WhatsApp group. As soon as I face a problem I take a picture and post on Insta or send it to Mr Fred and the group. He responds very quickly and I'm very grateful for his pro-activeness. For example, when I was farming squash during the heavy rainy season there was so much water the plant faced stress leading to drying of the leaves and stunting. Mr. Fred told me to use 'min Max' and then 'min Brex' at fruit season to help with ripening. In the end I lost a few crops but most were super. I like the products because of their effectiveness and affordability.”

## Saidi Mohamed Mashine

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**Age:** 38

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**Job:** part-time vendor, part-time farmer

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**Home and farm location:** Dumila District, Morogoro Region (250km west of Dar es Salaam)

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**Crops:** eggplant, tomatoes, onions

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**Device:** smartphone

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**Data:** 1 GB weekly data bundle

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Saidi says:



2021 is my third year of farming. I also sell second hand clothes and shoes, so when I am not busy at the farm, I go into the streets to hawk. Social media helped inspire me to go into agriculture – I read a lot of blogs and saw that Mrisho Mpoto was growing tomatoes in Mkuranga.

A lot of young people don't use social media wisely, they need educating about what is out there. I also use YouTube for life-coaching advice. I have learned a lot about entrepreneurship and agriculture that way – how to persevere, and how to sell.

I found Agrigrow on Facebook last year, when I was looking for tomato products. The most important thing on a social media page is that the company explains the product clearly. If they explain themselves well, and you understand, then you will go ahead and try. That's what happened with Agrigrow.

I have never bought something online. I see that it could save time because I can order something online and it is delivered to where I am, instead of going to Morogoro, which take two hours there and back. The world has changed now, but for those of us coming from rural areas, we want to see for ourselves, to see something physically, to meet you face to face.”

Mrisho Mpoto is a famous Tanzanian poet and performer, with 637,000 followers on Facebook.

## Nasra Shaibu Sozi

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**Age:** 22

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**Job:** full-time farmer

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**Home:** Dar es Salaam

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**Farm location:** Kingolwira District, Morogoro region (175km west of Dar es Salaam)

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**Crops:** tomatoes

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**Device:** smartphone

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**Data:** 22GB bundle every two weeks

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Nasra says:



I come from Dar es Salaam and graduated last year, with a degree in Agriculture and Business. I decided to employ myself in tomato farming because I love agribusiness. I love that if I manage it well, it will ensure me economic success and I have been motivated by the farmers I follow on social media. Like Mrisho Mpoti – at first he was not successful but he did not give up; he’s among the people who have inspired me so much.

I started connecting with Agrigrow in April last year, when I was a student. I did my field study with them during the Nane Nane fair, where we sold a lot of their products. The farmers who visited the stand commended their products highly.

I visit the Facebook pages of agricultural companies regularly and I download agricultural apps that teach you about topics of your interest. For example, when these tomatoes got black spot, I went straight to the Agrigrow Facebook page and today I’m here to spray the correct pesticide. I look for testimonials from other people who had similar problems and then call Fred or one of my friends from university who has been farming for two years.

Social media is helping us be better farmers, but a lot of young people are still scared to go into agriculture because it’s so risky. Once I have been able to properly manage my one acre, I plan to register a consultancy company to assist those who have capital but are risk averse. I will take full management of their agricultural projects and share the profits at a 70%/30% ratio between the investor and the management. I’ve set up a Facebook page where I post all my costs so people can see I have experience. I plan to launch the business later this year.”

## George Ng'atigwa

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**Age:** 48

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**Job:** full-time farmer

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**Home and farm location:** Mikese District, Morogoro Region (160km west of Dar es Salaam)

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**Crops:** tomatoes and bell peppers

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**Device:** smartphone

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**Data:** 3GB monthly bundle

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George says:



I found Agrigrow through Google last season when there was a problem with my tomato plants. It seemed they had a calcium deficiency. Agrigrow had a product to remedy the problem and the results were fast because it is in liquid form. When I take products from them, they follow up on my progress. If you face a problem, you inform them, and they come. Now they are my main advisors and I visit their Facebook page regularly for the latest information and to hear what experts are saying. You can see my farm is green because of proper use of their fertilisers.

I only visit the social media pages of institutions I trust. So, when I was researching irrigation I went to Agrigrow's page and got the phone number of their director. This is a vivid example of online shopping – the whole irrigation system was accomplished through Facebook. I even get to compare prices without going to Dar es Salaam, or Arusha. You just sit under the mango tree like I do and compare prices. Lucky enough the Agrigrow team has very affordable prices and they really do care about us farmers. Their contribution to our development is substantial.”

## Where next?

# The next step for Agrigrow is to move beyond online marketing, to online sales.

As Agrigrow's customers grow more comfortable in the online space, and become ready to move from exploring products to purchasing them, an online sales system will be essential - at present it is not possible to connect their social media pages with a buying platform through which farmers could pay for products and have them delivered to the farmgate. At the start of 2021, they sent their first overseas delivery to a customer in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, who found them on Facebook. A cross-border payment system would allow them to reach more new customers in neighbouring markets. This may not be too far away - the remittance industry is booming across SSA and other elements of e-commerce infrastructure are developing fast too:

### Last-mile delivery

Poor roads make last-mile delivery a critical e-commerce bottleneck. Could electric motorbikes be part of the solution? In 2019, SafeBoda Uganda launched its food delivery service, SafeBoda Food. In April 2020, it partnered with the U.N. Capital Development Fund to provide an e-commerce platform for market vendors to sell fresh produce and household goods. The company provides market vendors with smartphones so that cashless payments can be made through its mobile wallet. The majority of SSA households do not have an address, complicating the work of delivery services.

However, apps like Addressya and What3Words are solving this by providing precise locations with a unique address or word combination so that delivery bikes can find their way. In 2017, NIPOST (Nigerian Post) became the seventh postal service in the world to adopt What3Words (third in Africa, after Côte d'Ivoire and Djibouti). The app makes last mile deliveries 42% faster. This may not be too far away - the remittance industry is booming across SSA and other elements of e-commerce infrastructure are developing fast too.

### Payment

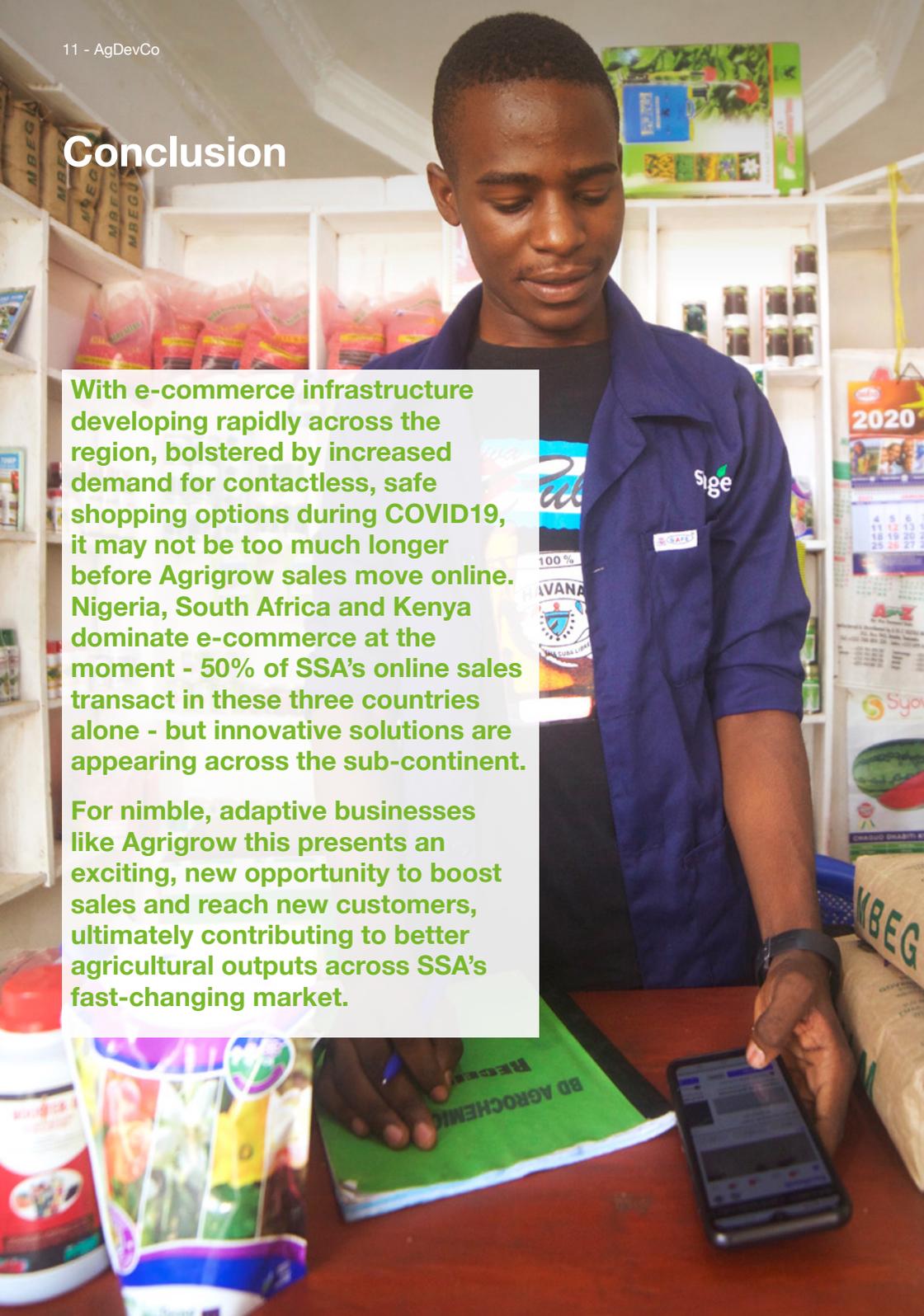
Global payment giant Mastercard and telecom provider MTN have partnered to enable millions of customers in 16 African countries to pay on global online platforms. The payments are made with a Mastercard virtual payment solution linked to MTN MoMo wallet.



# Conclusion

With e-commerce infrastructure developing rapidly across the region, bolstered by increased demand for contactless, safe shopping options during COVID19, it may not be too much longer before Agrigrow sales move online. Nigeria, South Africa and Kenya dominate e-commerce at the moment - 50% of SSA's online sales transact in these three countries alone - but innovative solutions are appearing across the sub-continent.

For nimble, adaptive businesses like Agrigrow this presents an exciting, new opportunity to boost sales and reach new customers, ultimately contributing to better agricultural outputs across SSA's fast-changing market.



# AgDevCo's Smallholder Development Unit (SDU)

AgDevCo's SDU, with the support of the Mastercard Foundation and UK Aid, supports key systems and processes that enable catalytic relationships between agribusinesses and hundreds of thousands of smallholder farmers across SSA.

As of 2021, the SDU has partnered with businesses across Senegal, Sierra Leone, Ghana, Uganda, Tanzania, Zambia, Malawi, and Mozambique. The SDU has produced various guides with information on how to design successful smallholder schemes.



Taylor Winch: A co-operative future case study.



Gender lens investing: the case for empowering women. Practical findings for the investment community.



Engaging with Smallholder Farmers: the business case.



A guide to technology implementation in agribusinesses. Part 1: Developing requirements.



A guide to technology implementation in agribusinesses. Part 2: Working with technology providers.



A guide to technology implementation in agribusinesses. Part 3: Innovation through pilots.



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