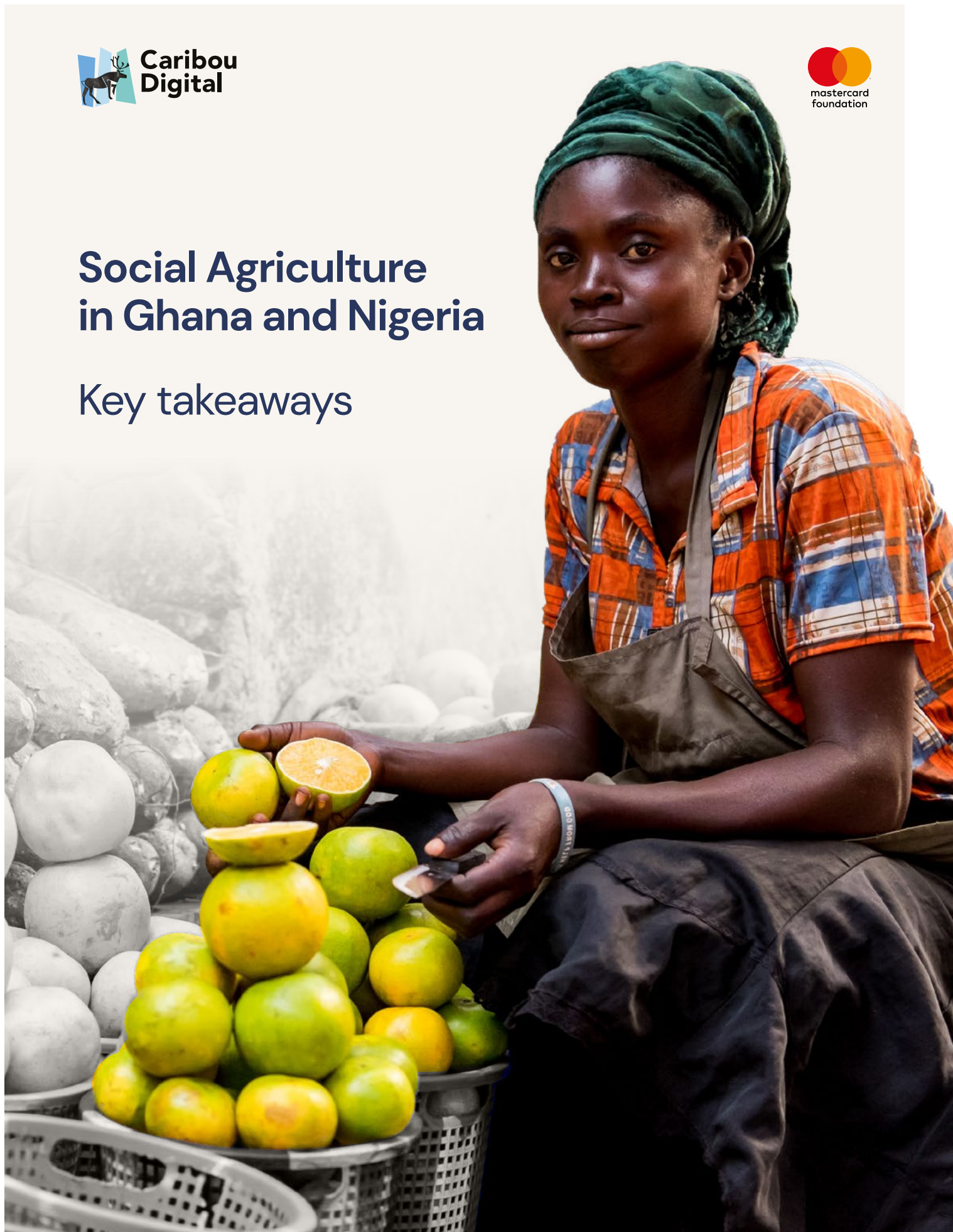


# Social Agriculture in Ghana and Nigeria

## Key takeaways



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It is also part of the larger Platform Livelihoods Project, exploring working, trading, renting, and creating in a digital age. [www.platformlivelihoods.com](http://www.platformlivelihoods.com)

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# Executive summary

The way people earn livelihoods from agriculture is changing. Around the world social platforms like WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, X (formerly Twitter), and TikTok are transforming the production of food from farm to fork.

In Ghana and Nigeria, agriculturalists' practices are changing as through posts, shares, photos, and videos, they build and exchange knowledge, offer mutual support, and invent new markets and marketing channels. This study builds on previous research on social agriculture in Kenya and Senegal to describe the way people use social media platforms and their role in the agricultural value chain.<sup>1</sup> It's not just farmers. The roles of suppliers of inputs (e.g., fertilizers), aggregators and marketers of produce, and producers and consumers are also being transformed, introducing new opportunities as well as new challenges.

This research provides eleven key insights from extensive multi-method research in Ghana and Nigeria conducted in 2022 and 2023. It also includes specific and actionable recommendations for policymakers, development actors, and technology companies to support young people practicing social agriculture to achieve more inclusive, sustainable livelihoods.

**The first set of recommendations is based on supporting social agricultural “influencers” to share what works**, for example, success pathways and specific opportunities along a product's value chain, information about value chain types and structures, and the potential of video and audio to overcome barriers to participating in social agriculture.

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<sup>1</sup> Caribou Digital, “Social Agriculture in Kenya” [project page]; Caribou Digital, *Cultivating Connections: How Social Media Powers Post-Production in Senegal*.

But these recommendations come with a caution: misinformation proliferates on platforms without any editorial or content verification mechanisms, so influencers must be supported to mitigate the risk of sharing potentially harmful content, for example, through expert support and partnerships with established agricultural extension services.

**The second set of recommendations focuses on overcoming barriers to social agriculture**, barriers that are common to many forms of social commerce. These recommendations focus on efforts to strengthen and scale trust, such as investing to scale informal identification verification and escrow services and managing the addictive nature of social platforms. Key to this is encouraging investors and financial institutions such as savings and loan cooperatives to adopt higher risk tolerance and support innovative ideas.

**The third set of recommendations emphasizes strengthening social institutions and physical infrastructure.** These include efforts to mitigate the precarious nature of social agriculture through strengthening cooperation and establishing cooperatives. Strengthening social agriculture also requires addressing its dependencies on physical infrastructure such as roads and logistics, as well as acknowledging the importance of private digital platforms for social agriculture and small-scale commerce in efforts to develop public digital infrastructure.

This research adopts Caribou Digital’s approach to platform livelihoods, as “more social, fractional, sales-oriented, and informal than what the digital development community has come to understand as ‘gig work.’”<sup>2</sup> It is intended to contribute to broader efforts to ensure that the digital transformation of livelihoods and agriculture leads to a better quality of work and more sustainable livelihoods.

This report and the recommendations it makes reflect a holistic, ecosystemic approach to social agriculture as a part of wider digital transformation. Acting on these recommendations, therefore, requires the collective efforts of a diverse coalition of stakeholders, from industry, government, development, policymakers, and civil society—and, of course, agripreneurs themselves. Strengthening social agriculture can help realize the promise of platforms for inclusive, meaningful livelihoods, and serve as a template for strengthening all forms of social commerce and platform livelihoods. This report calls for a collective approach to investment and support to realize the promise of an inclusive, meaningful digital transformation.

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2 Donner, “Investing in Inclusive Platform Livelihoods,” in *The Platform Livelihoods Project*.

# Eleven key takeaways about social agriculture

- 1 The social agriculture opportunity is biggest for established agriculturalists.
- 2 Some agriculture sectors are easier to “break into” than others.
- 3 Understanding power is always key to success.
- 4 Social platforms enable the digital transformation of entire agricultural value chains, from farm to fork.
- 5 WhatsApp is ubiquitous, but not sufficient by itself.
- 6 Trust deficits drive innovation, like peer-based identity verification and escrow services.
- 7 Social agriculture is an entrepreneurial yet precarious “hustle” livelihood.
- 8 Social platforms can enable cooperation such as building cooperatives and strengthening resilience.
- 9 Finance and financial transactions are a major source of friction that limit the potential of social agriculture.
- 10 Social agriculture is also material: physical goods depend on logistics infrastructure.
- 11 Social agriculture is dependent on private digital infrastructure and vulnerable to private interests and state control.



# 1 The social agriculture opportunity is biggest for established agriculturalists.

The opportunity that social platforms enable in agriculture is biggest for people already active in agriculture with existing knowledge of or roles within agricultural value chains. Social agriculture amplifies existing livelihood patterns but introduces an opportunity to extend and grow livelihoods.

We know from research in Kenya and Senegal how digital platforms enable opportunity.<sup>3</sup> Our research in Ghana and Nigeria confirms that these opportunities spread across entire agricultural value chains, from people working on inputs and production through to marketing and sales. Our research on Nigerian cassava, broccoli, and snail production found social agriculturalists report a 45% to 90% increase in income, with some reporting that 90% of their income come from social media-based livelihoods. This increase is due to expanding existing markets and finding new efficiencies.

Social media platforms enable agriculturalists to grow the scale of their markets, affording the upgrade to new, previously inaccessible markets, including pan-African and international ones.

*“The kind of products that we are producing ... you have to play on volume to be able to maximize profit, and the way to do this is for you to reach more audience, reach more consumers ... more value chain actors, especially the distributors ... social media can really, really help me with this ... in fact there are a lot we have sold ... [through] Instagram, people that we have not even met before.”*

 **Pelumi, cassava processor, producer, and consultant**  
(Nigeria, male, 35–40 years old)

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3 Caribou Digital, “Social Agriculture in Kenya” [project page]; Caribou Digital, *Cultivating Connections: How Social Media Powers Post-Production in Senegal*.

Social media platforms also provide transformative entry points for people new to agriculture, as well as the tools to practice social agriculture as a livelihood. Seeing others share success stories provides inspiration to many who might not have firsthand experience of agriculture. Many go on to seek livelihoods in produce ranging from cassava to snails.

*“I just started researching, searching for other people that were into it and then checking out what they’ve done so far, and I did some.”*

 **Dare, snail producer (Nigeria, female, 30–35 years old)**

Social media also enables agripreneurs to increase the efficiency of their livelihoods, for example, through reducing the need to travel:

*“Initially, without social media, we have to leave our location, travel hours, 5 hours, 6 hours, 10 hours ... from one state to another state, just to create awareness. And you know moving from one location to another is costing money ... but with social media, everything is just smooth.”*

 **Samuel, broccoli producer and input supplier (Nigeria, male, 30–35 years old)**

The benefits of social agriculture extend particularly to women and marginalized groups—indeed, as we found in our earlier research, social agriculture has particular value for women. For example, in Ghana female traders have been able to expand businesses and increase their income.

In Ghana, Naomi Kokuro, popularly known as Maame Kaya, posted a TikTok video about bulk foodstuff and vegetables she chanced upon in the market; she invited interested persons to join her to buy them in bulk and share. The post gained over 30,000 views overnight. This post has grown into the grocery app KayaApp, now available across various regions in Ghana. Maame Kaya’s TikTok account now has more than 4,400 followers with 15,900 likes, and her Facebook page has more than 5,300 followers and 5,100 likes.

## Recommendations

Development actors and agricultural departments should promote social agriculture practices and behaviors, and strengthen social agricultural influencers to increase their reach. Development actors and agricultural departments, especially extension services, should support influencers to share success pathways and insight into how social platforms can create new opportunities along a product’s value chain.



## 2 Some agriculture sectors are easier to “break into” than others.

Social platforms are transforming entire value chains and attracting people from outside the agricultural sector. But some agricultural value chains are easier for people new to the sector to enter than others.

Some kinds of agricultural produce are more open to people from non-agricultural backgrounds. For example, we found that the cassava value chain had more people in it with agricultural backgrounds than broccoli or snail, suggesting that highly structured and institutionalized value chains like cassava and cocoa are harder to enter, while more open value chains are easier for people new to agriculture to enter. Indeed, none of those we spoke to who were involved in broccoli had studied agriculture at all. Paradoxically, the low barrier to entry in some sectors means that in free market value chains there is also a higher level of failure.

*“We see a lot of new Instagram pages selling strawberries, and you’re like ‘oh, interesting, welcome.’ After some time, they disappear, because ... they don’t know the methods we use to mitigate risks ... because they haven’t learnt, over time, these things ... We won’t make those mistakes and we don’t make these losses, because we’ve made it in the past already ... and we have moved on.”*

 **Ryakeng, broccoli aggregator and retailer (Nigeria, female, 30–35 years old)**

Regardless of whether a value chain is open or closed, mature or emergent, people within them need specific skills. For those new to agriculture, existing non-agricultural expertise can help level the social agricultural playing field—like the woman using her photo-journalism experience to make her broccoli so “Instagrammable” that hordes of followers on social media buy it. Others draw on experience from past livelihoods to make agriculture a profitable livelihood—like the ex-pilot who uses her aviation experience to charter flights to transport only the freshest broccoli down from the heights of Plateau State, the only place in Nigeria where broccoli reliably grows outdoors, to her select customers in the lowlands, in prime condition ready to be sauteed and served to guests at the chef’s table.

*“A lot of young people are on social media and they see what we do, so people that are not even key players then are coming in; there are a lot of people coming in.”*

 Ngozi, broccoli producer (Nigeria, female, 32 years old)

## Recommendations

Development actors seeking to promote agriculture as a livelihood opportunity should be clear about the difference between agricultural sectors, and target communications and outreach appropriately. In practice, this means that efforts to promote agriculture as a new livelihood opportunity should focus on promoting opportunities in open and less formal value chains, as these are easier to enter for people new to the sector. Efforts to support people with existing agricultural livelihoods to upgrade their role and income should focus on participants in closed, structured value chains.



### 3 Understanding power is always key to success.

The way social agriculture is practiced is hugely determined by context. This research expanded the focus of previous research in Kenya and Senegal to deepen an understanding of the entire product ecosystem or “value chain.”<sup>4</sup>

The nature of relationships and role power are some of the most important aspects of context that define value chains and determine the role that social media can play in the function of those value chains.<sup>5</sup> The power in value chains is structured and shaped by how they are configured, whether they are highly controlled or open and entrepreneurial;<sup>6</sup> their “length” (the number of actors or activities that facilitate bringing produce to market); and the maturity of the value chain. For example, the scale, length, and complexity of the cassava value chain produce aspects of all four governance types. Yet, because of the value chain’s maturity, each position or role in the value chain is occupied by well-established actors, limiting the possibility for existing actors in the value chain to “upgrade” their position (and thus livelihood), or for actors new to the sector to successfully compete against established actors.

The shape of the value chain requires social agriculturalists to use social media platforms in different ways. For people seeking to use social media in long value chains with multiple steps between production and sale, social media platforms can help to establish vertical linkages—that is, to build relationships to the key points in a value chain that can help an individual move or increase value to produce.

*“... the way we get the farmers is we go through their association ... that’s for the traditional small holder farmers. Then we also ... do ‘farmers field day’ where, through their association, we are able to invite these smallholder farmers to events ... we have a lot of them who will show interest.”*

 **Pelumi, cassava processor, producer, and consultant**  
(Nigeria, male, 35–40 years old)

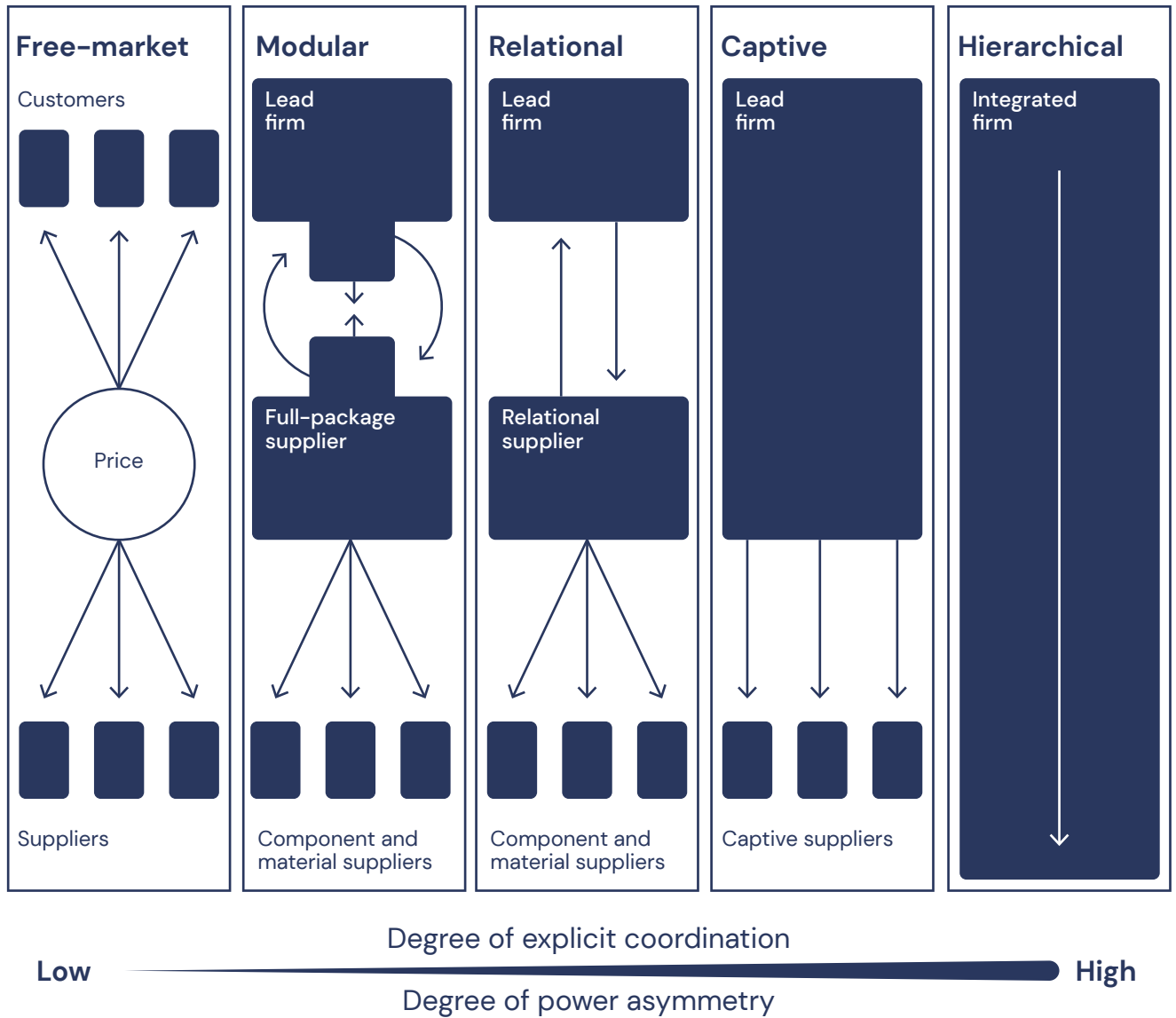
4 Caribou Digital, “Social Agriculture in Kenya” [project page]; Caribou Digital, *Cultivating Connections: How Social Media Powers Post-Production in Senegal*.

5 Caribou Digital and Qhala, “Platform Livelihoods Knowledge Map: Hidden Hierarchies”; Qhala and Caribou Digital, *Platform Livelihoods: The Quality of Kenyan Youth’s Digital Experiences across Eight Different Sectors*.

6 See USAID, “Value Chain Development Wiki.”

Figure 1 ▼

Value chain governance  
 Source: USAID, "Value Chain Development Wiki"



In value chains such as broccoli or snail, where there are fewer nodes or steps between production and sale, social media is often used to support horizontal linkages, building connections between peers to establish cooperation and transfer knowledge to improve efficiencies. This is particularly significant as it requires actors to see others in their value chain as collaborators rather than competitors—a practice particularly common among participants in the snail value chain.

*“I sent him a message like ‘I really like what you’re doing, I don’t know if you’ll put me through in one way or the other because you’re more like a senior to me in this business.’ He accepted and he put me through ... and I can say it was really of great help.”*

 **Chukwudumebi, snail consumer and restaurant owner**  
(Nigeria, female, 25–30 years old)

The maturity of the value chain, scale of production and consumption, cultural embeddedness, level of institutional backing and associated networking opportunities, and complexity and diversity of possible end products may all contribute to these observed differences between value chains.

## Recommendations

Development actors and agricultural departments should strengthen social agriculturalists’ understanding of the value chain(s) in which they are already active, or those they seek to enter, through helping influencers share knowledge of the way social media platforms can provide an opportunity to maximize value creation.



## 4 Social platforms enable the digital transformation of entire agricultural value chains, from farm to fork.

Social media platforms are transforming every role within the production of food—from input suppliers to farmers to logistics and marketers. Every role that people play in the agricultural sector is transformed through the use of digital platforms.

In past research we focused on the way farmers' roles are transformed through the use of social media platforms.<sup>7</sup> In contrast, this study found that the use of social media platforms within and across the value chain introduces transformations that go beyond changing the way farmers grow produce. For example, as the case of the market trader Maame Kaya illustrates, some agriculturalists utilize social platforms to introduce efficiencies and predictability in their business:

*“Now with the new feature on WhatsApp called the polls, I use it weekly to determine whether people are going to shop or not. There is a certain number that I will not shop for because it will not be cost-effective like we want it. So, every week on Tuesday, I will post it on all platforms. So, when I get a certain number of potential buyers, I know that week will be good.”*

**Maame Kaya, creator of grocery app KayaApp**

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<sup>7</sup> Caribou Digital, “Social Agriculture in Kenya” [project page].



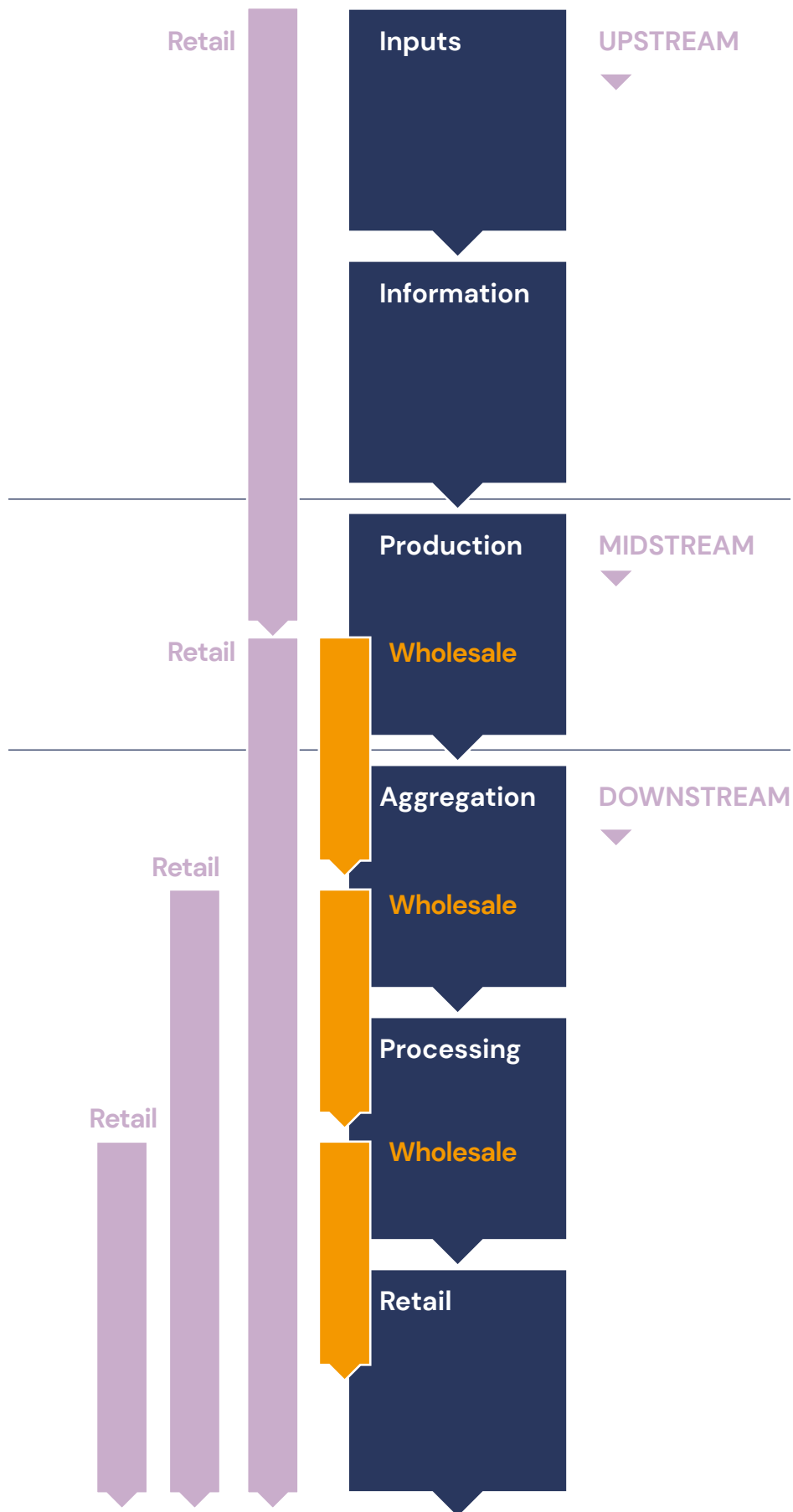





Figure 2 ▾  
Archetypal agricultural value chain nodes

Figure 3 ▾  
Sources of income among study participants (Nigeria)

	 <b>Cassava</b>	 <b>Broccoli</b>	 <b>Snail</b>
Primary — Secondary			
<b>Inputs</b>	Sanusi Oluwadara	Ladi Samuel	Oko Ezekiel Kester
<b>Information</b>	Timothy Omotoshi Tunde Mohammed Kehinde Pelumi	Samson Samuel Ladi	Ezekiel Kester Victor Oko Temisan Bello
<b>Production</b>	Sanusi Omotoshi Tunde Folarin Pelumi	Samuel Samson Gyang Ladi	Ezekiel Oko Temisan Miriam Bello Dare Kester
<b>Aggregation</b>	Tunde Mohammed Kehinde Favour Sanusi Folarin Oluwadara Pelumi	Ryakeng Ngozi Samson Grace	Chukwudumebi
<b>Processing</b>	Kehinde Folarin Oluwadara Pelumi Favour	Grace	Dare Kester Miriam Bello
<b>Retail</b>	Favour Omotoshi Oluwadara	Ryakeng Ngozi Grace Adetokunbo Samuel Samson Gyang	Chukwudumebi Dare Miriam Bello

Social agriculturalists occupy lots of places to engage in these value chains—from inputs to farms and all the way to the table—with differences between established and emergent, free market value chains. Participants in well-established, structured value chains such as cassava and cocoa tend to have more structured roles, and their side hustles are either within the same value chain or in different fields entirely. For example, one producer of added-value cassava and guinea corn products also has a job as ad-hoc staff for a radio station. The livelihoods of participants in more “open, free market” value chains tend to be dominated by agriculture—though often across multiple nodes and activities across the value chain. For example, one participant in the broccoli value chain is primarily an input supplier offering agronomic advice along with her products, but she also runs a productive demo farm from which she sells her produce. Most of those active in the snail value chain not only farm snails but also offer training and consultancy on snail farming, in person or via social media.

## Recommendations

Development actors as well as education and agricultural departments should increase the understanding of those interested in agriculture of entire value chains. This would increase general awareness of the opportunities that social platforms create across entire value chains and lead to more people being aware and able to pursue the livelihood opportunities of social agriculture.

## 5 WhatsApp is ubiquitous, but not sufficient by itself.

We know from research in Kenya and Senegal that Meta’s platforms (Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram) are central to social agriculture, particularly WhatsApp.<sup>8</sup> In addition to a surprisingly high use of X (formerly Twitter), social agriculturalists are also using LinkedIn—the latter particularly for high-value transactions—but very few are using TikTok.

The design features of platforms play a significant role in shaping *how* social agriculture is practiced. Video-based social media platforms are primarily used for consultation and training, and for proving or validating the authenticity of actors and their products or services. But the *kind* of video matters. For example, YouTube is primarily used for long-form video, and this is commonly used for training, particularly in the snail value chain.

*“... most of my videos are large, they are long ... as I take time to explain whatever I’m doing ... definitely I can’t put that on Instagram.”*

 Kester, snail producer and consultant (Nigeria, male, 30–35 years old)

In contrast, short-form video such as Facebook “Stories” and Instagram “Reels” are most commonly used for marketing to end consumers of inputs (i.e., farmers) and for proving authenticity, particularly in the snail and broccoli value chains.

*“I think more people engage more with Insta-stories and then the Reels as well. So those allow you to be able to market like that ... I think Instagram just works better.”*

 Ryakeng, broccoli aggregator and retailer (Nigeria, female, 30–35 years old)

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<sup>8</sup> Interestingly, some participants don’t think of regular WhatsApp as a “social media platform” as defined in this study, considering it more like a phone feature akin to SMS and standard phone calls. Notwithstanding this distinction, the use of personal WhatsApp is universal among study participants; not a single one goes without it.

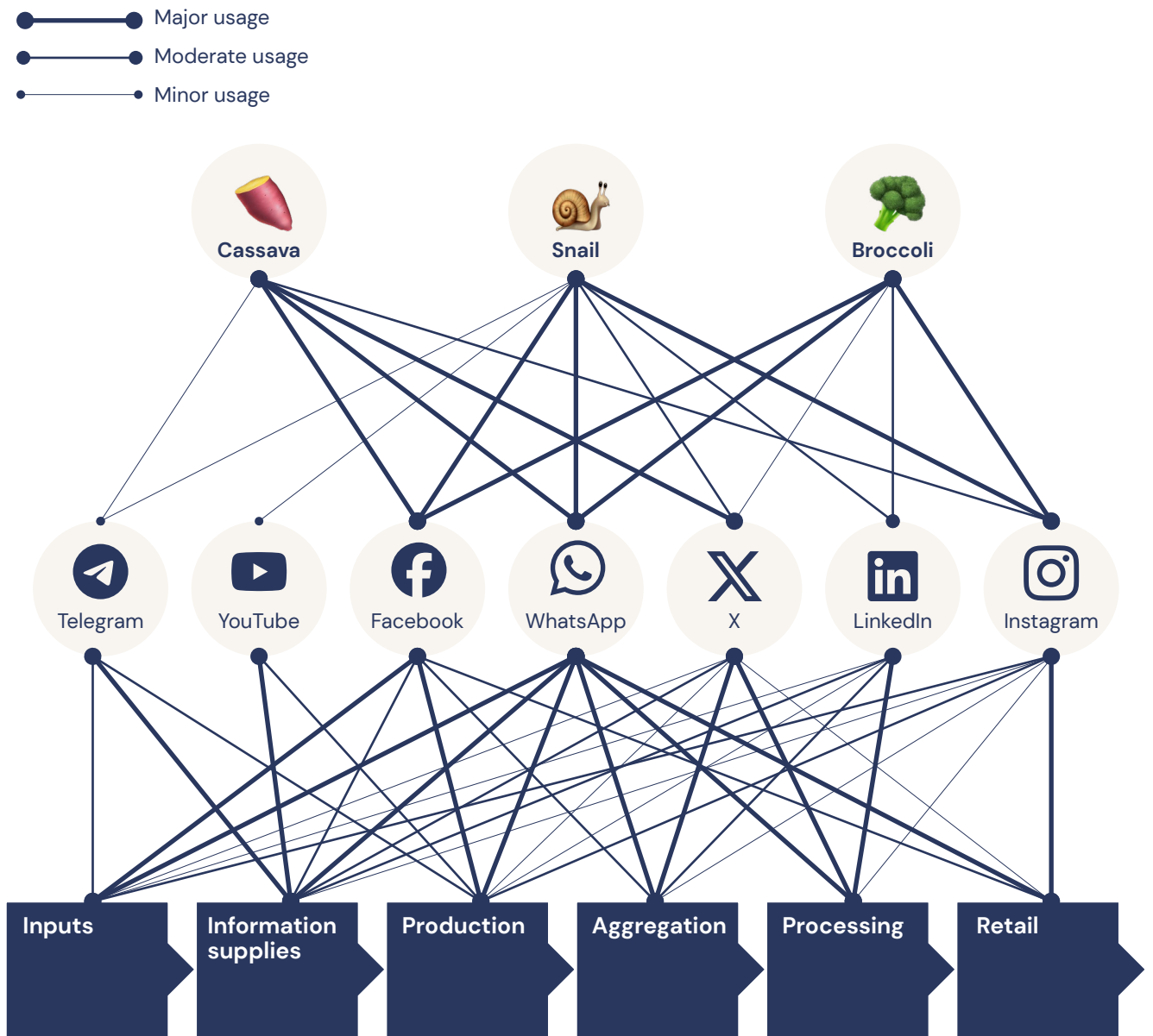


Figure 4 ▲  
Social media platform use  
by value chain and node (Nigeria)

Platforms that enable audio communication also shape how people practice social agriculture. Indeed, nearly all the platforms that social agriculturalists use enable audio communication. These include voice notes in direct messaging (DM) threads on X (formerly Twitter) and Meta products Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp; voice calls on all Meta products; audio-only discussion threads on X/Twitter Spaces and “Live Audio Rooms” on Facebook; and “voiceovers” to accompany image and video posts and status updates on Meta products. Voice notes is the most commonly used functionality, primarily on WhatsApp. They are widely used for a diverse range of purposes, including to overcome literacy and language barriers, to enhance trust and familiarity between actors, and simply for their ease of use in comparison to typing. Ladi, a broccoli input supplier dealing with farmers, has many clients who are not well educated and who struggle with written communication, so they use WhatsApp voice notes instead. Voice notes are also used to facilitate discussion in tribal languages, which are generally not supported by platforms and devices, and for which the standard keypad may not be suitable.

Platform design features have an important role in shaping how people practice social agriculture, with different design features affording different practices. This is not prescriptive—people adapt functionality for their own purposes, but design functionality interacts with user goals to shape outcomes.

## Recommendations

Development actors, agricultural organizations, and employment ministries should promote video and audio functionality as an opportunity to overcome barriers to participating in social agriculture. Development actors and those with links to technology firms should advocate for platform companies and designers to incorporate understanding of social agriculture so they can build platforms that meet social agriculturalists' needs.



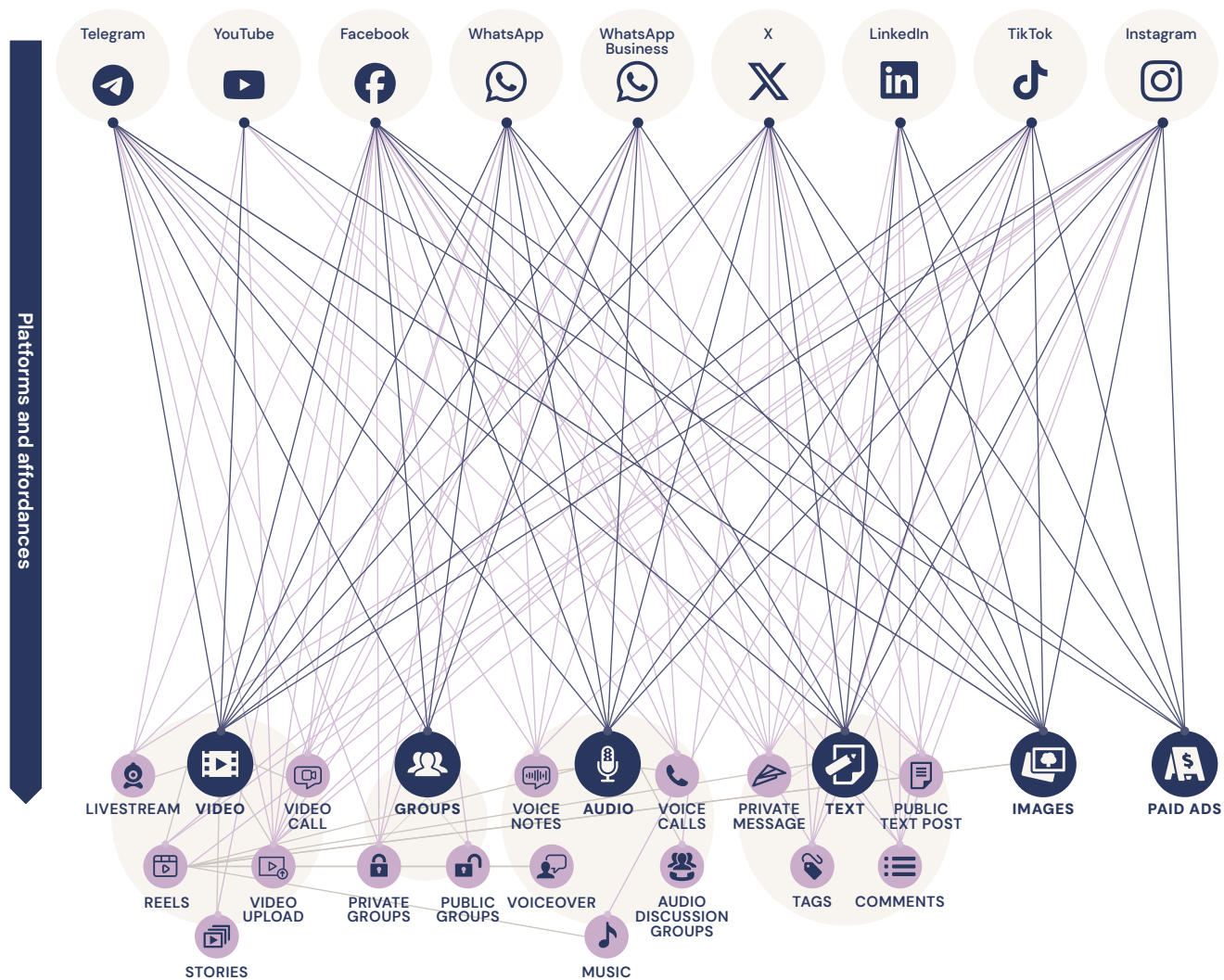


Figure 5 ▲

Platforms and their affordances used for social agriculture in Nigeria. Image captured from the social agriculture ecosystem map created as part of this research project, which shows how platforms and affordances are used to overcome contextual constraints in the case study value chains.

Source: Kilimo Source and Caribou Digital, "Social Agriculture Ecosystems in Nigeria"

## 6 Trust deficits drive innovation, like peer-based identity verification and escrow services.

Social media platforms provide new opportunities but also new challenges; one of the biggest challenges is the lack of institutional mechanisms for establishing trust.

We identified trust as a major concern in previous research because of the amount of scams, fraud, and misinformation that take place on social media platforms.<sup>9</sup> This research reinforces the importance of trust and identifies it as a driver of innovation to address the lack of trust in relationships and the lack of trust in transactions.

Social agriculturalists build reputations and outward appearances of trustworthiness by proving their expertise and/or authenticity. Social agriculturalists assess others' trustworthiness, using social media platforms as tools for conducting due diligence. They will often investigate new and potential contacts online, scrutinizing their online presence, behaviors, and interactions to get a sense of whether they are legitimate and trustworthy, as well as utilizing offline strategies that can include in-person meetings or even hiring investigators.

*“I was defrauded by hundreds of thousands ... One of the major steps I took in order not to fall victim anymore is: once I meet a person online ... I contact security personnel to go and investigate ... I rather spend money and ... wait three months and investigate before supplying goods than just jump into it ... Once they investigate then I don't have much issue.”*

 **Mohammed, cassava aggregator and consultant**  
(Nigeria, male, 30–35 years old)

The trust deficit is a driver of innovation and created a market for extending trust—for example, in the provision of verification services. Methods include first verifying potential members' involvement in the value chain and verifying their businesses or projects via video calls or physical meetings. Social platform group administrators charge a small registration fee of 2,000 or 3,000 naira (approx. US\$2.50–\$4.00) to people who want to join the groups. They will then be given badges or certificates marking them as “verified” members.

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9 Caribou Digital, “Social Agriculture in Kenya” [project page].

*“I will check your business, I will check your business place, you’ll do a video call for me and I will see your farm, your full address. If I have someone in that location, I’ll send him there to check your address. You will meet in a public space, but I just want to be sure that you are in that state where you said you are .... Then I will verify the person, that this person is legit.”*

 **Miriam, snail producer, processor, consultant, and retailer**  
(Nigeria, female, 25–30 years old)

There is a trust deficit in platform-based transactions and relationships. Indeed, trust is central to the financial transactions at the heart of social agriculture as a livelihood, particularly because these transactions are conducted remotely via social media platforms. The social media platforms used in social agriculture are not designed with transaction or trust-based functionality—transactions are facilitated off-platform via bank transfers, digital card payments, mobile money services, and cash.

*“Right now, I have a way to do my things because there are a lot of scammers online so a lot of people don’t trust online vendors again. They want payment on delivery. So what I do is that I use my dispatch rider; when the dispatch rider gets to the person, the person does the transfer immediately and I give them their package, so there will be no room for problems.”*

 **Miriam, snail producer, processor, and retailer**  
(Nigeria, female, 25–30 years old)

Some social agriculturalists who own and manage large social media groups also provide “escrow” services to facilitate financial transactions, leveraging their position of established trust. Instead of making payments directly to the seller, customers instead pay the group admin, who is trusted by both parties to release the funds once the goods have been delivered or transaction has been completed satisfactorily.

## Recommendations

Development actors and investors should invest in strengthening and scaling efforts that build trust. Specifically, there are opportunities for social capital and entrepreneurs to develop innovative services around identity verification by building on existing informal services. This would strengthen both social agriculture and broader social commerce by making transactions easier through enabling people to be vouched for by trusted parties. The same actors should explore similar opportunities in strengthening informal escrow services.

## 7 Social agriculture is an entrepreneurial yet precarious “hustle” livelihood.

For all the value and opportunity that people find in social agriculture, for most it remains a competitive and precarious livelihood. While much of the narrative around digital livelihoods emphasizes the flexibility of hustling,<sup>10</sup> our research suggests many experience platform livelihoods as precarious and competitive—a characteristic of gig work, sales, and agriculture.<sup>11</sup>

Many participants described how in agriculture competition is fierce, especially as new entrants use social media to pursue the opportunities platforms afford. Making the most of the opportunity requires individuals to constantly hustle. Experience and knowledge make all the difference; many describe how experience in the industry sets some actors apart from those newly entering into the value chain.

*“I think competition is actually very high ... A lot of young people are on social media and they see what we do, so ... there are a lot of people coming in. But the only thing that will actually put that distinction between you and them is that you’ve had experience; you know how to operate better ... customers see ... the difference between you, that you’re here and the new person ... is trying to find his or her feet.”*

 **Ngozi, broccoli producer (Nigeria, female, 32 years old)**


For most social agriculturalists, social media is deeply embedded in their personal lives. Participants report being online between 3 and 18 hours per day—with jokes of being online 24/7. The requirement to be active on multiple social media platforms is a big driver for such intensive use—as different platforms fulfill different functions from sourcing information to creating content, engaging with followers or managing customers and orders and more. Many describe how a successful social media presence requires continuous maintenance and caution of the burden of responsibility that comes with having large and active social media networks and audiences.

<sup>10</sup> Caribou Digital and Qhala, “Platform Livelihoods Knowledge Map: Flexibility.”

<sup>11</sup> Caribou Digital and Jonathan Donner, eds. *The Platform Livelihoods Project*.


They flag how this requires constant attention and maintenance to mitigate the risk of losing one's reputation or harming one's business.

*“The downside is you have to keep doing it, I mean there is no off season. So times when I am out of town ... times that I go on holiday ... I hand over my social media page to a trusted partner to just keep doing it.”*

 **Oluwadara, cassava aggregator, processor, and input supplier**  
(Nigeria, female, 30–35 years old)

Although most say they are able to balance their personal lives and the time spent on social media for business, many also express concerns about the amount of time they spend online.

*“The downside is that it has taken a lot of family matters from us. Taking away a lot which we are not even recognizing now because the future will still tell whether we like it or not.”*

 **Omotoso, private extension service provider**  
(Nigeria, female, 35–40 years old)

## Recommendations

Development actors and government agencies should pair the promotion of social agriculture with support to help potential participants manage their digital livelihoods. At the very least, this should include strategies to mitigate the constant demand of “addictive” devices and platforms. However, precarity and the need to hustle drive the constant search for opportunity, and no amount of self-control or device management can compensate for financial need. Government ministries, with the support of development actors, should accompany the promotion of social agriculture with efforts to strengthen formal employment opportunities, to increase quality of work, and to promote national policies that strengthen employment protection and rights.

## **8** Social platforms can enable cooperation such as building cooperatives, strengthening resilience, and combating misinformation.

Competition among actors can drive market competitiveness and innovation and incentivize market participants to seek opportunity by, for example, upgrading their role in the value chain. This delivers short-term benefits to those who succeed, but decreases the overall competitiveness of the value chain as a whole.

By contrast, research shows that platform workers seek to build and find support,<sup>12</sup> from individual efforts to various forms of institution building.<sup>13</sup> This research shows that supportive and effective relationships between value chain actors can also deliver increased value via the transfer and co-creation of knowledge and skills and can enhance the overall competitiveness of the value chain—strengthening the livelihoods of all involved.

*“... in the market in our space, there’s competition. But the competition is good ... Nigeria is a large market, and since we sell food I do not foresee a time where I would say we have too many marketers and too few customers, right? We have had so many supposed competitors come and go ... One thing that I think that has kept me and some other ladies I know is resilience. I know so many people that have come into our space and they have run away because ... they don’t have the patience that we have and they did not take time to study the space as we did.”*

 **Ryakeng, broccoli aggregator and retailer (Nigeria, female, 30–35 years old)**

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<sup>12</sup> Caribou Digital and Qhala, “Platform Livelihoods Knowledge Map: Association, Organization and Support.”

<sup>13</sup> Caribou Digital and Qhala, “The Experience of Platform Livelihoods: A Literature Review for Digital Development.”



Dynamics of competition and collaboration differ between established and emergent value chains. In relatively new value chains, such as snail, people describe a collaborative atmosphere that enhances the competitiveness of the value chain as a whole through cooperative horizontal linkages facilitating the transfer and co-creation of knowledge and skills, and the building of social capital among those who might otherwise be deemed competitors.

*“The beautiful thing about heliciculture is there is a huge market ... I don’t look at it as competition, I look at it more as collaboration, because there is so much money to be made and there is not enough experience and expertise to make the money.”*

 **Oko, snail producer and consultant (Nigeria, male, 25–30 years old)**

Social media platforms can also enable collaboration and cooperation, enabling the formation of cooperatives and collective action key issues and goals, such as advocacy and the promotion of member businesses. One social agriculturalist in Nigeria uses a WhatsApp group to inform group members of government meetings, and to coordinate members’ preparation and participation in the meetings to most effectively influence meeting outcomes. Groups are also used for collective action around online promotion of group members’ businesses, sharing and encouraging engagement with online content such as business posts and promotions. This drives greater traction of the content and stimulates the platform algorithm to reward the content, enhancing its reach and impact.

This collective action can also lead to the formation of formal groups and institutions to advance member interests. For example, one social media group formed of agripreneurs who were part of a World Bank training program has registered with the government and established itself a cooperative. The value of cooperatives such as these is the power and influence they have over value chain activity and governance, which is greater than any individual member is likely to have on their own.

Partnerships with established sources of agricultural expertise, such as government extension services and agricultural research organizations, can mitigate the risk of sharing harmful content and delivering cutting-edge information to those who need, integrating often under-resourced extension services with entrepreneurialism and livelihood opportunities.

## Recommendations

Development and government actors should support social agriculturalists to strengthen cooperation and establish cooperatives by, for example, documenting and sharing the benefits of cooperation and cooperatives, and providing support and guidance for establishing cooperatives. Government extension services and agricultural research organizations should develop partnerships with social agricultural entrepreneurs to increase the reach of reliable, trustworthy information.

## 9 Finance and financial transactions are a major source of friction that limit the potential of social agriculture.

Access to finance is a major source of friction that limits the livelihood opportunities of social agriculture, as are the issues of trust that constrain efficient and effective financial transactions.

This is not unique to agriculture—financial transactions are a major constraint across platform livelihoods.<sup>14</sup> In the agricultural sector access to finance is limited, particularly in small and informal value chains, so social agriculturalists have to find novel ways to raise finance. While this constrains scale, it also means that finance is less of a barrier to entry because self-funded startups, particularly in emergent value chains, are more achievable.

Capital and financing for social agriculture businesses tend not to come from conventional finance or banking. Instead, they come from a wide range of sources that include personal finance, friends and family, government and NGO grants, and crowdfunding. Conventional sources of finance tend not to make capital available to social agriculture entrepreneurs, who often operate within informal economies.

*“Let’s even leave the banks alone. No bank will give money in this agriculture because they believe agriculture is high risk, you understand. It is only a few of them that really support agriculture and before they even give you funds, they will need to do their own due diligence ... [Only] if you can get LPO [Local Purchase Order] from a reputable firm and they are sure you can supply that firm, they can give you funding.”*


 Kehinde, cassava aggregator and processor (Nigeria, male, 35–40 years old)

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<sup>14</sup> Caribou Digital, “Advancing Financial Inclusion through Platform-Enabled Financial Services.”

Patterns of access to finance vary by agricultural produce. More established value chains like cassava, which includes a wider array of agribusinesses, make a more appealing investment, including from institutional sources of finance. By contrast, new and emergent value chains, such as snail and broccoli, tend to be self-funded and as a result less likely to attract the investment necessary to scale.

*“I have explored different means in raising funds for my business, and I’m going to be very straightforward and sincere. I’ve used bank loans, I’ve used friends and family funds in terms of investment ... and took the money as investment to pay returns on it with interest, and I’ve also used some of the profit made from business.”*

 **Tunde, cassava aggregator, producer, and consultant**  
(Nigeria, male, 40–45 years old)

*“One time like that I tried the bank, they could not help me ... They were not able to give the loan, so I don’t depend on people like banks ... because they failed me once, so I just removed my mind from them.”*

 **Gyang, broccoli producer (Nigeria, male, 30–35 years old)**

Social media–based strategies for accessing finance include networking with potential investors (both domestically and internationally); finding government and NGO grant-funding opportunities via social media; and crowdfunding (including among friend and family networks). The latter source of financing is, however, often informal and entirely dependent on trust, which is at risk of abuse. One exception to this is the Nserewa crowdfunding platform set up by Ghanaian agribusiness development company Wecomm Agri-Media and Consultancy Limited, which “enables people to sponsor food production activities and earn returns on investment.” Since its inception in 2021, Nserewa has raised funds to support about 700 farmers to produce 5,000 acres of maize, soya, and rice in selected towns in Ghana. The supported crops are sold to aggregators and marketed by Nserewa-developed brands, such as Evivi Rice.

## Recommendations

Development actors should invest in innovative finance services and adopt higher risk tolerance around investing in the agricultural sector. This could also include increasing awareness among banks and financial institutions (e.g., savings and loan cooperatives) to support agricultural investments, as well as support to formalize and extend crowdfunding platforms.

## 10 Social agriculture is also material: physical goods depend on logistics infrastructure.

Social agriculture is a digital-first livelihood, but it does produce physical goods that depend on physical infrastructure. Scaling social agricultural livelihoods depends on moving physical goods from producer to one place to another, adding value through changing goods' location and form.

As such, logistics infrastructure is a key dependency for a sustainable livelihood—particularly for agricultural products that seek to reach a market larger than the immediate local one. This dependency is especially significant for perishable goods, such as fresh fruits, vegetables, and other produce. For example, snails are primarily produced near their primary consumption markets; in Nigeria this tends to be in and around urban centers throughout the south and southwest. Combined with processing or live transportation, these factors pose less of a constraint to market distribution in the snail value chain. Broccoli, however, is primarily produced in Jos in the North-Central Region, the only place in the country with the right conditions to reliably grow it outdoors. But broccoli is primarily consumed in its unprocessed form by affluent health- and food-conscious end consumers in urban centers such as Lagos in the South West of Nigeria.

*“We’ve made so many customers, and we’ve lost so many because of the logistics.”*

 **Ryakeng, broccoli aggregator and retailer (Nigeria, female, 30–35 years old)**

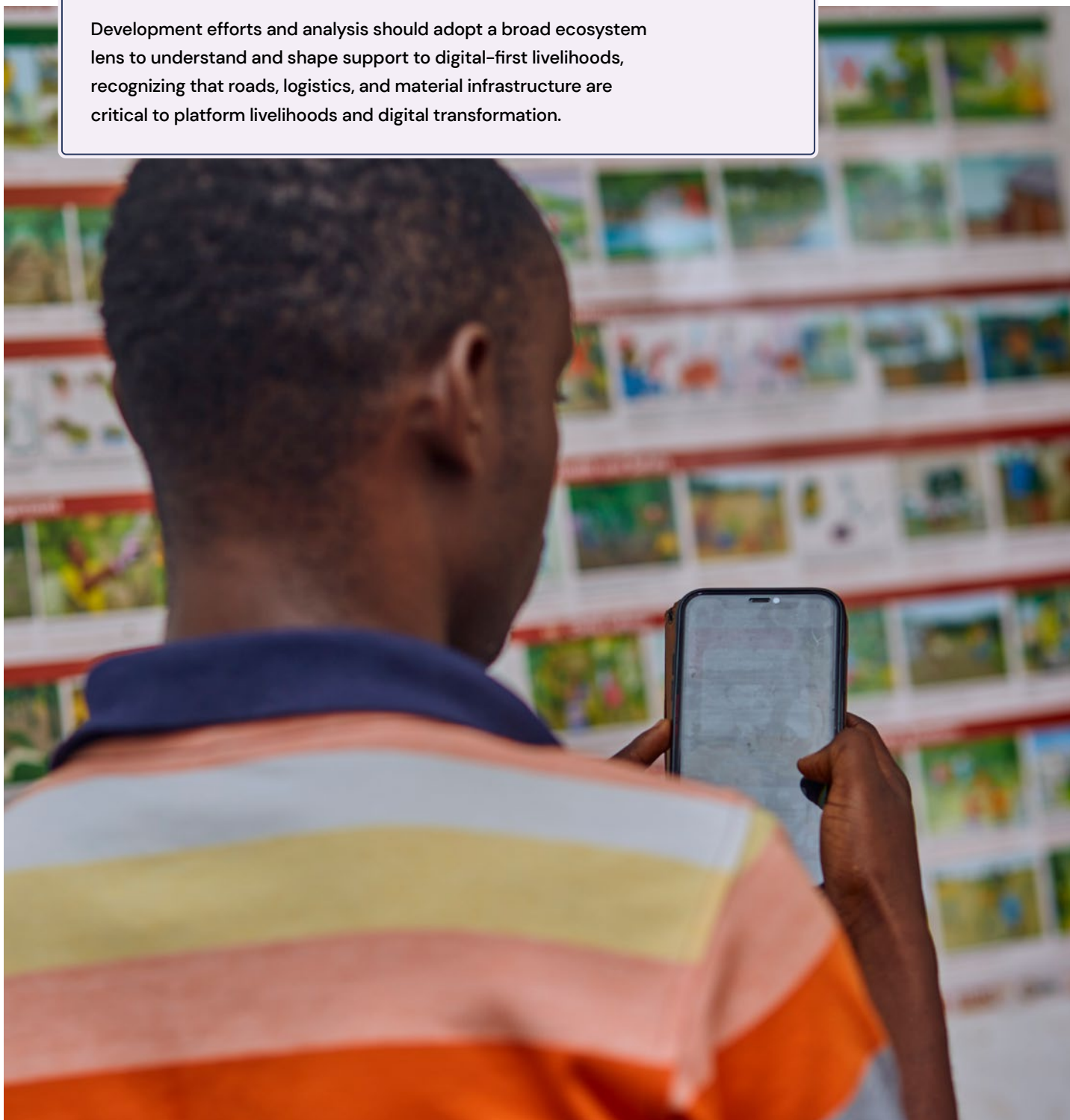
*“For local purchases, we go with the regular transport services. Like, we transport snails around the country via regular buses. But usually, the clients that order snail for export usually have their own logistics covered ... and we also have some contacts from the airport, so if we need to, we can—but most times when people want large quantities they usually have their [own] logistics.”*

 **Oko, snail producer and consultant (Nigeria, male, 25–30 years old)**

## Recommendations

Development and government actors should ensure that efforts to strengthen social agriculture are mindful of its dependencies on physical infrastructure. Promotion of social agriculture should include guidance on identifying relevant dependencies and establishing measures for their provision—for example, increasing awareness of and support to the development of logistics and infrastructure.

Development efforts and analysis should adopt a broad ecosystem lens to understand and shape support to digital-first livelihoods, recognizing that roads, logistics, and material infrastructure are critical to platform livelihoods and digital transformation.




## 11 Social agriculture is dependent on private digital infrastructure and vulnerable to private interests and state control.

Social agriculture is largely an opportunity for individual entrepreneurialism. But it depends on and is vulnerable to the interests of privately owned digital infrastructure. The digital platforms on which social agriculturalists depend are privately owned; thus, agripreneurs are vulnerable to any disruption of access to those services.

Earlier research by Caribou Digital documented the impact on social agricultural livelihoods of a Facebook shutdown.<sup>15</sup> This study revealed similar vulnerabilities. For example, a number of respondents in Nigeria described how a six-month government-enforced Twitter blackout in 2021 negatively affected their businesses.

*“People lost businesses ... You know, people that were using Twitter as a means ... of connecting to their customers, to their clients ... People lost money, people lost businesses a lot ... How can you even relate with your client on a regular basis? ... It will really have a drastic effect on businesses and it will reduce our GDP in Nigeria. It will reduce disposable income; it will reduce economic lives and social lives of Nigerians generally.”*

 **Kehinde, cassava aggregator, processor, and consultant  
(Nigeria, male, 35–40 years old)**

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<sup>15</sup> Learn.ink and Caribou Digital, *The Ecosystem of “Social Agriculture.”*



Social agriculturalists know that their businesses are vulnerable to their dependence on social platforms and have developed mitigation strategies. These include storing contact databases offline and maintaining offline business relationships and strategies such that their business could continue even in the face of social media blackouts or loss of access to social media accounts for other reasons.

*“I create invoices so I just know that one way or the other [I have] their contacts, their email addresses ... I didn’t used to do that but I just know that ... now it’s important you collect the extra details apart from social media handles of your customers.”*

 **Ngozi, broccoli aggregator and retailer (Nigeria, female, 32 years old)**

## Recommendations

Development donors and other actors supporting digital public infrastructure should acknowledge the importance of private digital platforms in small-scale commerce and broader digital transformation. Building out publicly owned platform and transaction functionality is key to ensuring that the opportunity of social commerce is resilient against both state and private sector shutdowns.

# Conclusion and call to action

This report has described how digital platforms are creating new opportunities for agricultural entrepreneurs across Ghana and Nigeria. We are confident that insights from this research, along with those from our research in Kenya and Senegal, have implications for wherever there are digital access, “open” agricultural sectors, and people seeking new livelihood opportunities. In other words, this report describes opportunities for new forms of social commerce around the world. But realizing these opportunities will require concerted effort and specific actions.

We recommend that agricultural influencers are supported to advocate for these new opportunities, leveraging their demonstrated expertise in sharing knowledge to effectively show others how to build successful digital livelihoods. But there must also be efforts to overcome barriers, especially around trust, to increase confidence in transactions. And there are opportunities for successful investment here, such as in identity verification and escrow services. There are also actions that can be taken to strengthen collective action and infrastructural constraints to increase the resilience of social agriculture and ensure that it is part of an inclusive and sustainable digital transformation.



Digital platforms hold the promise of meaningful livelihoods for millions. Achieving this will require the collective efforts of a diverse coalition, from industry, government, development, policymakers, and civil society—and, of course, social agripreneurs themselves. Strengthening social agriculture can help realize the promise of platforms for inclusive, meaningful livelihoods, and serve as a template for strengthening all forms of social commerce and platform livelihoods. This report calls for a collective approach to investment and support to realize the promise of an inclusive, meaningful digital transformation.



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