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## **Moringa Connect: Best Practices in Field Agent Management**

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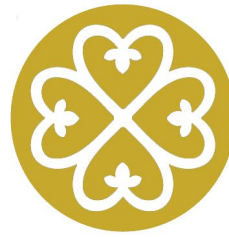
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**MORINGACONNECT**

# Best Practices in Field Officer Management



Jean Baptiste Tooley, Erin Ronald, and Kimmie Meunier

# Executive Summary

## Overview

MoringaConnect connects over 2,500 smallholder Ghanaian farmers to global markets using the moringa tree. Currently, MoringaConnect needs to expand its field officer network in order to increase its supply of moringa.

## Results

We conducted interviews with 69 farmers, 42 field officers, and 13 partner organizations in Ghana. Findings from these interviews can be summarized into four main points:

1. Field officers are often inefficient.
2. Young field officers have a lot of energy and passion for growth, while old field officers have more community engagement and leadership experience.
3. Field officer and farmer trainings are infrequent and cover a narrow range of topics.
4. The current compensation structure does not effectively incentivize field officers to improve their performances.

## Recommendations

We synthesized our findings into an implementation plan comprised of four actionable initiatives. In order to scale its field agent network and drive impact, MoringaConnect needs to:

1. Clearly define the role of field officers
2. Strategically recruit field officers
3. Expand the scope of field officer and farmer trainings
4. Add incremental bonuses to spur productivity

In order to continue to improve the livelihoods of Ghanaian smallholder farmers, MoringaConnect should integrate these recommendations into a strategic extension services network plan.

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# Introduction

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MoringaConnect improves lives through the moringa tree by connecting farmers to global markets. In 2018, we investigated the question: How can MoringaConnect increase the efficiency and effectiveness of agricultural extension officers to increase the supply of moringa? To scale its impact, MoringaConnect must both improve management of existing field officers and expand its network reach. This would allow greater aggregation of moringa, while continuing to create personal relationships with smallholder farmers and their communities. In this report we will propose potential solutions towards improving the overall efficiency of recruiting, training and compensating extension officers. These suggestions are the result of analysis of MoringaConnect's field operations and interviews with successful partner organizations.



**Photo 1:** Mr. Narty uses his experience to teach new farmers how to plant moringa in Ghana's Eastern Region.



**Photo 2:** An Osonson farmer uses a machete to plant a moringa farm outside his village.

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# Practical Initiatives to Foster Field Officer Efficiency

Challenge	Practical Initiative	Justification
Create: Network Scaling Strategy	Define roles	Defining roles of extension services team will allow each member to be sure of their duties and ensure efficiency as the network expands.
	Define geographic boundaries for extension officers	Defining geographic boundaries help field officers be more efficient with travel time and customer acquisition.
Recruit: Determine Intentional Recruiting Strategy	Recruit young extension officers and older Regional Managers	Younger agents have increased energy, while older agents have advanced community relationships and expertise. Intentionally recruiting for these positions will increase efficiency.
	Recruit more women	Women are reliable, and efficient employees, who can make rapid social connections, and invest incomes in their children's future.
Train: Engage Field Officers by Expanding Training Scope	Increase frequency of trainings	Interviews showed that field officers and farmers improve productivity when they feel valued. This occurs with increased contact with management at trainings or related activities.
	Explore other training opportunities	Training officers on customer relations and sales training will decrease time of customer acquisition. Field days can improve field knowledge and team bonds.
Compensate: Provide bonuses that incentivize field officers to improve productivity	Provide tools that enhance the quality work	Farmers and extension officers are motivated by tools that help them improve their work.
	Create bonus structure based on performance	Achievable goals help motivate agents and can provide a benchmark measurement for the network.

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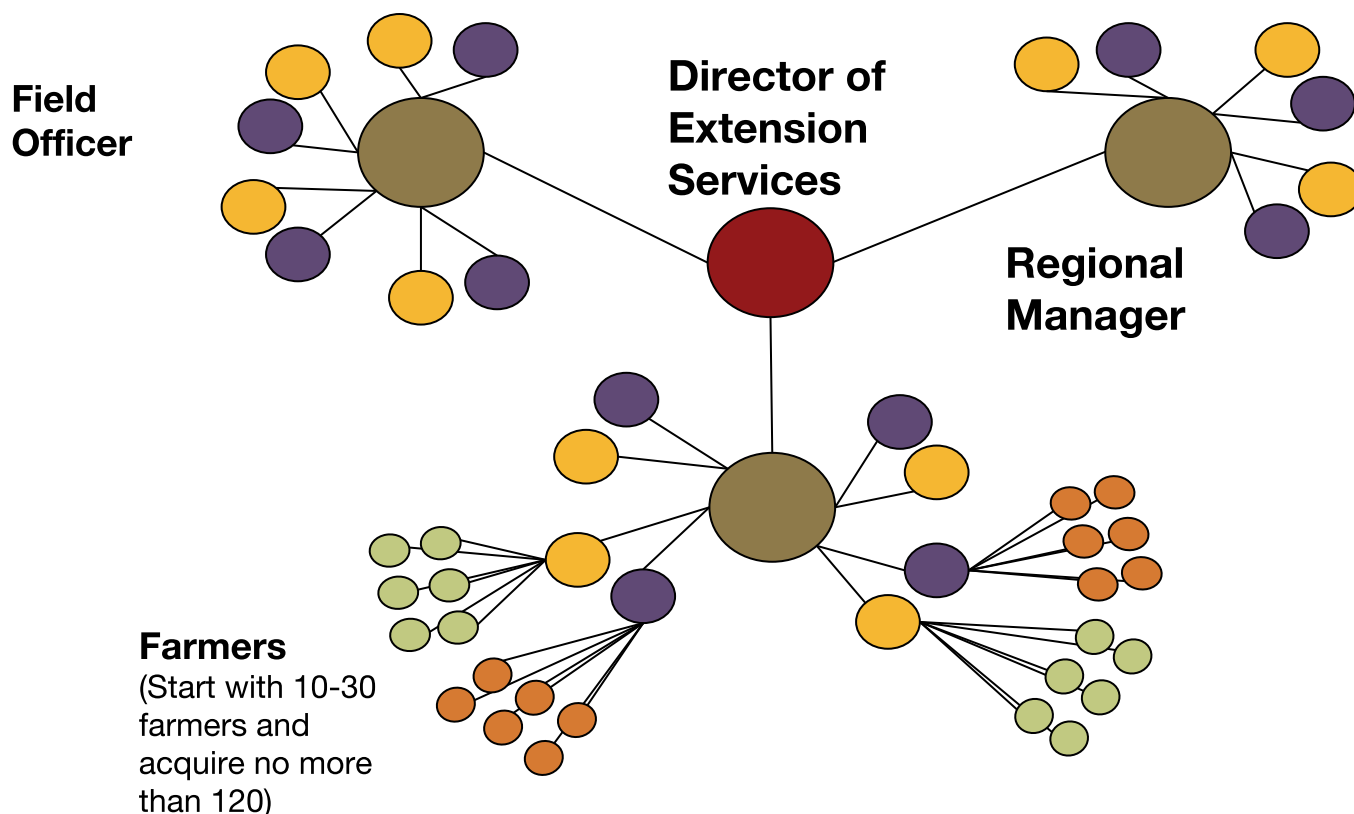
# Vision to Scale Field Officer Network

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MoringaConnect currently hires highly qualified individuals, placing them within the field officer network without a strategy to maximize their efficiency or a proper structure to support them. A disproportionate amount of responsibility is placed on regional managers. As MoringaConnect scales its network, it is necessary to intentionally recruit field officers that will increase the productivity of their team. To ensure the sustainability of the field officer network, we suggest defining a recruiting strategy that places individuals into set roles.

## Visual Representation of Recommended Extension Services

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# Practical Initiatives to Foster Field Officer Efficiency

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Role	Definition
Extension Services Manager	Works as a mediator between MoringaConnect management and the extension services network. Their role is to work with regional managers to execute growth plans defined by management.
Regional Manager	Manages field officers within a set region. This role should be filled by an experienced, community leader who is knowledgeable of agricultural practices in the region, and deeply cares about the wellbeing of the community. Ideally, this individual should have stakes in the prosperity of his or her region, outside of their work for MoringaConnect. This individual should primarily work with field officers, with occasional interactions with farmers.
Field Officer	Work to both expand number of farmers growing moringa while providing support for farmers who currently supply moringa to MoringaConnect. These individuals will learn from their expert regional manager and work directly with farmers in a set geographic region. MoringaConnect should take a gender inclusive approach to recruiting women field officers. While some partner organizations have found success in women serving other women, piloting the value of women field officers should be explored over varied gender dynamics. An agricultural social enterprises suggested that field officers should work with no more than 120 farmers to ensure personal relationships are kept throughout the growth of the network.
Farmer	When MoringaConnect identifies a community it wish to expand into, a regional manager will work with farmers to identify potential field officers for the area. These candidates, voted on by the farmers will be submitted to the regional manager and extension services manager who will work together to select the next field officer.

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# Implementation Plan for Practical Initiatives

To actualize the provided network strategy, we have identified practical initiatives. By successfully carrying out the steps provided, MoringaConnect can sustainably grow their extension services network.

Practical Initiative	Implementation
<b>Define Boundaries</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify ideal locations for growing moringa</li> <li>Establish geographic boundaries for field officers based on a 30 minute travel time to farm</li> </ul>
<b>Define Roles</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify the parameters of regional manager and field officer roles</li> <li>Create HR policies for an improved salary and bonus structure</li> </ul>
<b>Recruit Women</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Pilot, evaluate, and determine strategy for gender conscious recruitment in network</li> <li>Identify communities with a significant population of women moringa farmers</li> <li>Help women within community nominate female field officers and hire these FOs</li> <li>Provide quotas for each region to recruit women FOs</li> <li>Consider varying gender dynamics across regions when hiring women</li> </ul>
<b>Recruit Experienced Regional Managers and Young Field Officers</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify agricultural leaders in the community and make them regional managers</li> <li>Allow regional managers to elect young candidates to be field officers</li> <li>Hire candidates from a pool of young field officers nominated by regional managers</li> <li>Encourage older regional managers to nurture younger FOs into becoming regional managers</li> <li>Hire older candidates if they have deep ties within the community, an agricultural background, and/or relevant work experience</li> </ul>
<b>Increase Frequency of Interactions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Allocate time for upper management to visiting at least one region/year on a rotating basis               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>This could take the form of a retreat for all Field Officers and Regional Supervisors once a year</li> </ul> </li> <li>Ensure Regional Managers sets regular meetings with Field agents and conducts quarterly regional training on relevant seasonal topics</li> <li>Help Regional Managers to pilot “Farmer Field Days” where every agent meets on a farm to diagnose problems and learn new skills</li> <li>Aid regional managers in creating a demo farm to experiment with local agricultural techniques and demonstrate best practices</li> </ul>
<b>Provide Other Training Opportunities</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Train field officers on sales techniques and customer relations</li> <li>Provide field officers and farmers with well defined expansion goals</li> </ul>
<b>Provide Tools</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Give farmers access to tools through a pre-financing or renting model</li> <li>Allow field officers to pay for motorbikes through their salary over two years</li> </ul>
<b>Bonus Structure</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify what MoringaConnect wants field officers to achieve each year               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Acres converted to moringa and yields from farmer fields</li> </ul> </li> <li>Provide field officers and regional managers standardized bonuses for hitting marks               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Compensate for each Kg of moringa seeds procured through their farmer network</li> <li>Bonus structure for farmers profiled on Mergedata</li> <li>Begin a company wide employee of the month program within each department</li> </ul> </li> <li>Create a structure that allows field officers and regional managers to track their progress and see where they compare to other field officers or regional managers</li> </ul>

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# Conclusion

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In order to increase its supply of moringa, MoringaConnect must scale its extension services network. In order to do so, the enterprise should innovate its current recruitment, training, and compensation tactics. Strategic recruitment of officers into more clearly defined roles will increase efficiency of the extension services network. Offering more frequent trainings on diversified topics will reinforce agent productivity and promote role clarity. To retain and grow the agent force, MoringaConnect should create a compensation structure that will reward both agents and farmers with tangible items that assist employees in their roles. If implemented, these recommendations will better position MoringaConnect to source more moringa and generate more impact in smallholder farming communities.

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## Appendix A: Methods

This summer, we interviewed 139 individuals from six different regions around Ghana. Of these 139 individuals interviewed, 59 were MoringaConnect farmers, 10 were MoringaConnect field officers, 28 worked for partner organizations, and the rest were Farmerline farmers and field agents. These interviews took roughly one hour per person, and were often followed by field visits that provided insight into the lives of Ghanaian smallholder farmers. Our interviews consisted of 20-35 questions that aimed at understanding the motives of smallholder moringa farmers in Ghana. The qualitative answers from these interviews were compiled together to create a list of overall findings. The solutions above are drawn from a combination of challenges and ideas provided by MoringaConnect farmers and extension officers as well as successful practices implemented by partner organizations.

### Interview Guides:

#### **Regional Manager Interview Guide**

##### **Profile:**

\*Record region, location, name, age, and gender

- How much did you earn this last year from MoringaConnect?
- What other activities do you do for money?
- How much did you earn this last year from other jobs?

##### Preliminary:

- What does your role entail?
- When did you get started with MoringaConnect?

##### Recruiting

- How did you hear about this position?
- How were you recruited for this position?
- What motivated you to take this position?
- How long have you been with MoringaConnect?
- Why have you stayed with MoringaConnect?
- Do you recruit field officers? How are they hired?

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## Training

- What is a typical training process for field officers?
- How prepared are the field officers when leaving the training sessions? What would you change in order to improve the training experience for field officers?
- What are you trying to accomplish when training field officers?
- In what ways did [MoringaConnect] prepare you for your position? What were your biggest takeaways from training with [MoringaConnect]?
- What are the main challenges you face when working with and training field officers?
- How often do you interact with field officers?
- What difficulties do you see field officers encountering when recruiting and providing information to farmers?
- What methods have you seen to be most successful in providing farmers with information?
- How do you provide information and interact with your field officers?
- How do you ensure that all field officers give the same information and represent MoringaConnect in the same way?

## Compensating:

- How are you currently compensated for your efforts? Are you compensated in relation to the success of your field officers?
- What are your largest costs in this position?
- What would make your job easier?
- Do you feel as though you are compensated fairly for your work?
- How much money would motivate you to bring in more field officers?
- How much money would you need for this to be your only job?
- Besides money, why do you enjoy working for MoringaConnect?

## **Field Agent/Officer Interview Guide**

### **Field Agent/Officer Profile (All)**

\*Record region, location, name, age, and gender

- How much did you earn this last year from MoringaConnect?
- What other activities do you do for money?
- How much did you earn this last year from other jobs?

### **Successful:**

## Recruiting

- How did you hear about this position?
- How would you go about finding a long-term, full-time job?
- How were you recruited for this position?
- What motivated you to take this position?
- How long have you been with MoringaConnect?

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- Why have you stayed with MoringaConnect?

### Training

- When providing information to farmers) what is your main goal?
- In what ways did MoringaConnect prepare you for your position? What were your biggest takeaways from training with MoringaConnect?
- How do you foster trusting relationships with your farmers?
- What are the main challenges you face when interacting with farmers and their communities?
- How often do you interact/visit with farmers?
- What difficulties in the field are not addressed in training sessions?
- What was the most valuable information in the training sessions? What information was not necessary?
- At the end of the training session did you feel prepared?
- How many sessions would you need to feel comfortable (per year)?
- What methods have you found to be most successful in providing farmers with information/convincing them to grow moringa?
- Do you share your knowledge/techniques with other field officers? Have other field officers passed their knowledge/techniques on to you?
  - Could you explain what methods have been most effective.

### Compensating:

- How are you currently compensated for your efforts?
- What are your largest costs in this position?
- What would make your job easier?
- Do you feel as though you are compensated fairly for your work?
- How much money would motivate you to reach more farming communities?
- How much money would you need for this to be your only job?
- Besides money, why do you enjoy working for MoringaConnect?

## **Farmer Interview Guide**

### **Farmer Profile:**

\*Record region, location, name, age, and gender

- How much did you earn this last season?
  - How much did you make before you started growing moringa?
- What activities do you do for money?
- What crops do you grow (apart from moringa)? What did you grow this last season?
- How much did you harvest this last season? (ask for all crops)
- How much money (per kilo) did you get for your harvest? (ask for each crop)
- What do you do for money in the off-season?
- What non-agricultural activities do you do for money?
  - (If they have non-ag. activities) How much did you get for those sales?

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### Recruiting:

- What do you like about the interactions you've had thus far with your field officers?
- What do you dislike about the interactions you've had thus far with your field officers?

### Training:

- How often do you interact with your extension officer?
- How would you describe your interactions with your extension officer?
- What information does your field extension officer give you?
- Do you feel as though you have enough information to use the grow Moringa?
- What information would you like to know that you do not have?

### Compensating:

- Do you feel a part of the MoringaConnect community?
- Do you see a future in moringa production?

## **Partner Organizations Interview Guide**

### Recruiting:

- How do you recruit field agents/field officers?
  - What methods of recruiting (recruitment center, phone interview etc.) have you found to be most effective?
- Do you allow field agents/field officers to refer other potential field agents/field officers?
- What qualities do you look for in recruiting field agents/field officers?
- What are the biggest challenges for finding/recruiting field agents/field officers?

### Training:

- What is your training process for field agents?
- How do you prepare field agents/field officers to meet customers specific needs?
- How much agency do your field agents/extension officers have?
- How often do you train your field agents?
- Do you allow senior agents to train new agents?

### Compensation:

- How do you compensate your field agents/officers?
- Have you explored other compensation methods than the one(s) you currently use?
- Is compensating field agents one of your major cost drivers?
- What non-economic incentives do you offer sales agents?
- Beside financial reasons, why do field agents stay with your organization?
  - (For example, Socio-economic status, brand-recognition, etc.)
- How do you generate and retain loyalty among field agents/officers within your company?

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Research Locations:

Ejura--Ashanti  
Kumasi--Ashanti  
New Longoro --Brong-Ahafo  
Asesewa--Eastern Region  
Osonson community--Eastern Region  
Plets Community--Eastern Region  
Totibu--Eastern Region  
Accra--Greater Accra Region  
Lawra--Upper West  
Wa-- Upper West  
Gbankor--Upper West  
Atonatonkor Community--Volta Region  
Hoehoe--Volta Region

Partner Organizations:

Herbalife  
Max International  
Coca Cola  
Vodafone  
*Large Cocoa Buying Company\**  
*Large Telecom Company\**  
IPA Global Research Institute  
CIKOD  
AgNRM  
Vitalite Zambia (GSBI 2017)  
Farmerline (GSBI 2016)

\*Companies chose to remain anonymous

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## Appendix B: Creating a Gender Conscious Network Expansion Strategy

Marisa Rudolph, 2018 Fulbright recipient, conducted research on initiatives taken by different Ghanaian groups to promote women's agency. Marisa's work found that the Kuapa Kokoo Women's Program had the most successful implementation of fostering women's agency. KKWP requires that women are equal members of all agricultural communities, and that women are seen as equal members of the community. Furthermore, women must be provided the same opportunities to take part in leadership committees as a man. This initiative by KKWP is a growing movement that started in 1993, and took years to develop. It is important to consider a timescale of change while implementing a gender-conscious network expansion strategy.

The Miller Center has found several resources useful in creating such interventions:

1. [Women and Social Enterprises: How Gender Integration Can Boost Entrepreneurial Solutions to Poverty](#)
  - a. This text presents frameworks and helpful case studies to examine ways social enterprises can further integrate women into their business models and value chains.
2. [Understanding and Measuring Women's Economic Empowerment](#)
  - a. This document gives definitions, indicators and frameworks that provide conceptual examples of how to advance women's economic empowerment. It also provides valuable indicators on how to help achieve these goals.

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## **Appendix C. Piloting the Value of Women Field Officers**

MoringaConnect has the potential to increase women's agency through implementing initiatives to hire women for leadership positions within its extension services network. Though MoringaConnect has the opportunity to positively affect lives, we believe it will be challenging to implement an initiative that promotes women field officers, while maintaining the trust of the male dominated agricultural community in rural Ghana. When male and women farmers were asked their thoughts on the possibility of having a women extension officer, many voiced a preference for a male, stating a long list of reasons why women could not consistently meet the job requirements. From these responses and other ethnographic observations, we do not believe that most male farmers will not heed advice provided by a woman field officer. Changing the mindset of communities rural Ghana to accept women in leadership positions will take years to achieve. We believe that before a network wide approach is taken, several pilots projects be implemented to test the effectiveness of women field officers in Ghana. Possible pilots include the Kuapa Kokoo Women's Program, which is described above, and the MEDA Greater Opportunities for Rural Women Project, which separates men and women farmers and field officers. We recommend that these initiatives be piloted before large scale implementation of women field officers by MoringaConnect.

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