From insights to infrastructure: How the Enabling Market Intelligence and Building Engagement (EMBE) project is fixing last mile distribution

5 Countries | 20+ Agribusinesses | 3 Core Solutions

Masterclass

Building capacity of agribusinesses across Kenya, Senegal, Nigeria, Malawi, and Zambia to strengthen agent networks and last-mile delivery systems.

AgentBI Platform

A data-driven platform in development to help agribusinesses manage agent networks, track performance and generate real-time market insights.

Agent Network Playbook

A practical guide (in development) to support structured agent recruitment, training, performance management, and retention.

Across EMBE's work with agribusinesses in Kenya, Senegal, Nigeria, Malawi, and Zambia, a consistent pattern is emerging: improving last-mile delivery is not simply about products or logistics. It is about systems.

This learning series brings together key insights from EMBE's engagements, alongside the program's core milestones:

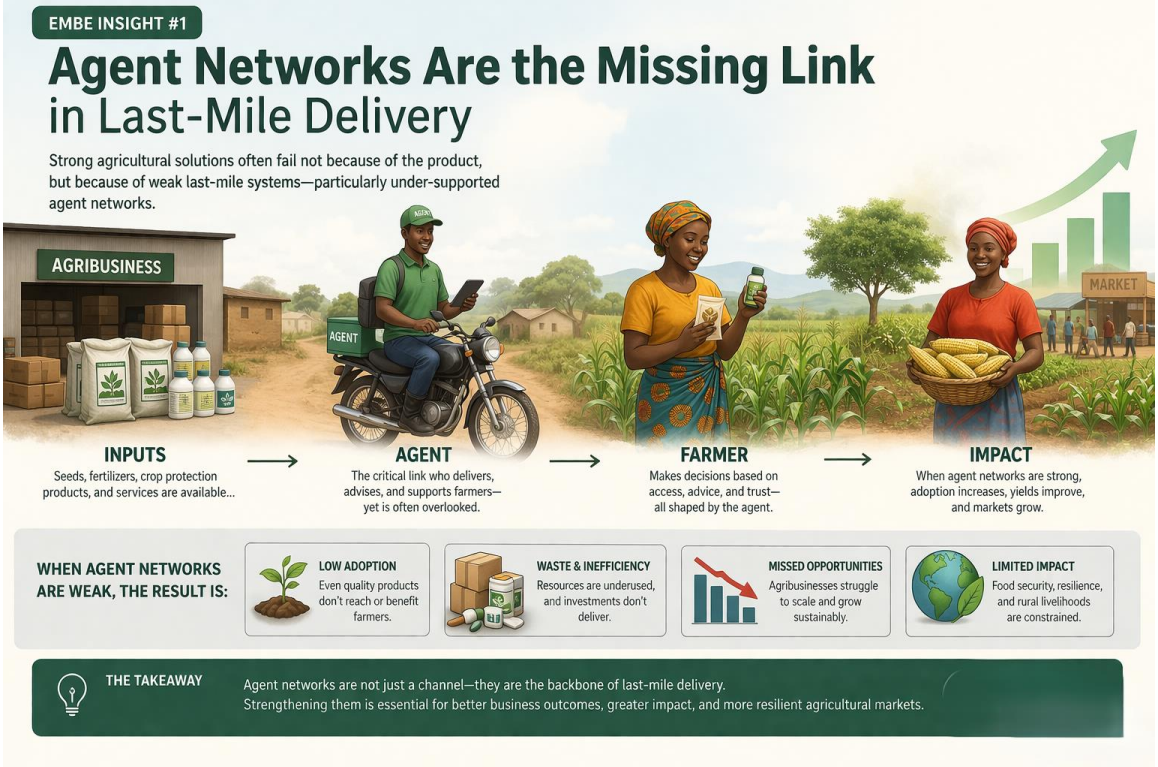
- The AgentBI platform (in development)

- The EMBE Masterclass (delivered across five countries)

- The Agent Network Optimization Playbook (in development)

Together, these interventions aim to strengthen how agribusinesses design, manage, and scale last-mile systems.

Insight 1: Agent Networks Are the Missing Link in Last-Mile Delivery



Agribusinesses across Africa continue to invest in better inputs and climate-smart solutions. Yet adoption remains inconsistent. Through EMBE masterclasses delivered across multiple countries, one pattern is clear: the challenge is not the product, rather, it is the last mile.

More specifically, it is the systems that support the last mile. Distribution channels are often fragmented, reactive and poorly aligned with farmer demand. At the center of these systems are field agents, responsible for generating demand, delivering products and building trust.

Yet agents frequently operate with limited support, weak incentives and little performance visibility. This creates a contradiction: the most critical actors in last-mile delivery are also the least supported.

This insight has shaped the EMBE Masterclass, which focuses on helping agribusinesses rethink agent networks as core infrastructure, not just distribution channels.

Insight 2: The Hidden Cost of Poor Agent Management

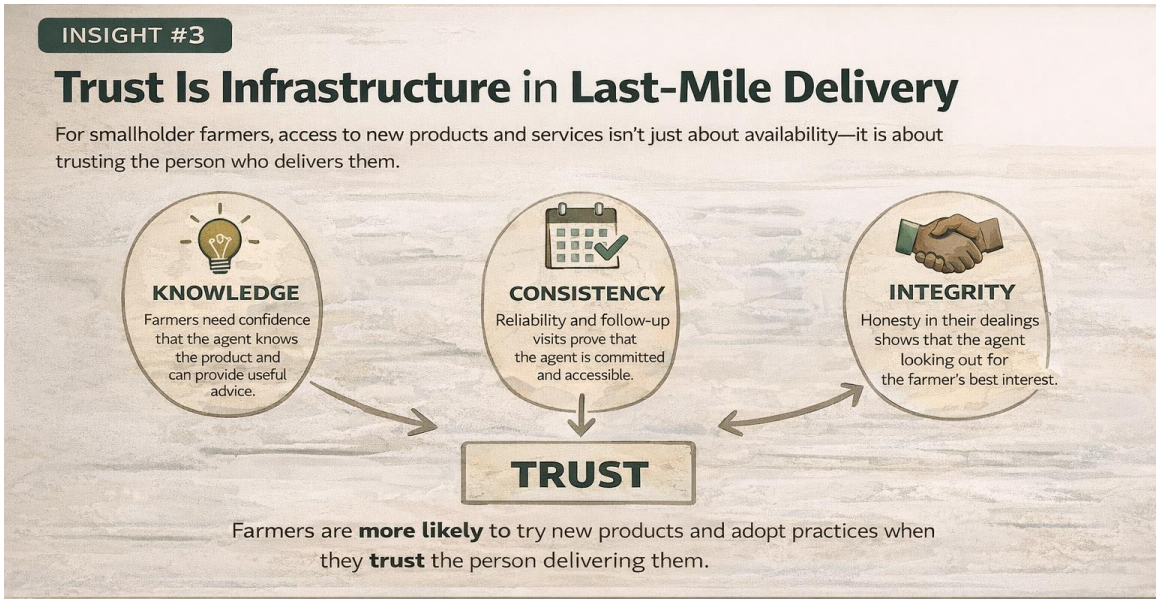
If agent networks are central, then how they are managed determines performance. Across EMBE engagements, many agribusinesses have agent networks but struggle to make them effective.

Agents often operate within systems where incentives are unclear, accountability is weak, and performance tracking is limited. This leads to inconsistent delivery, unreliable data and high turnover.

These challenges carry hidden costs: repeated recruitment, lost revenue, poor demand forecasting, and increased operational burden. Over time, these inefficiencies constrain growth.

This is why EMBE is developing the Agent Network Optimization Playbook to provide structured guidance on agent selection, training, performance managementnand retention.

Insight 3: Trust Is Infrastructure in Last-Mile Delivery



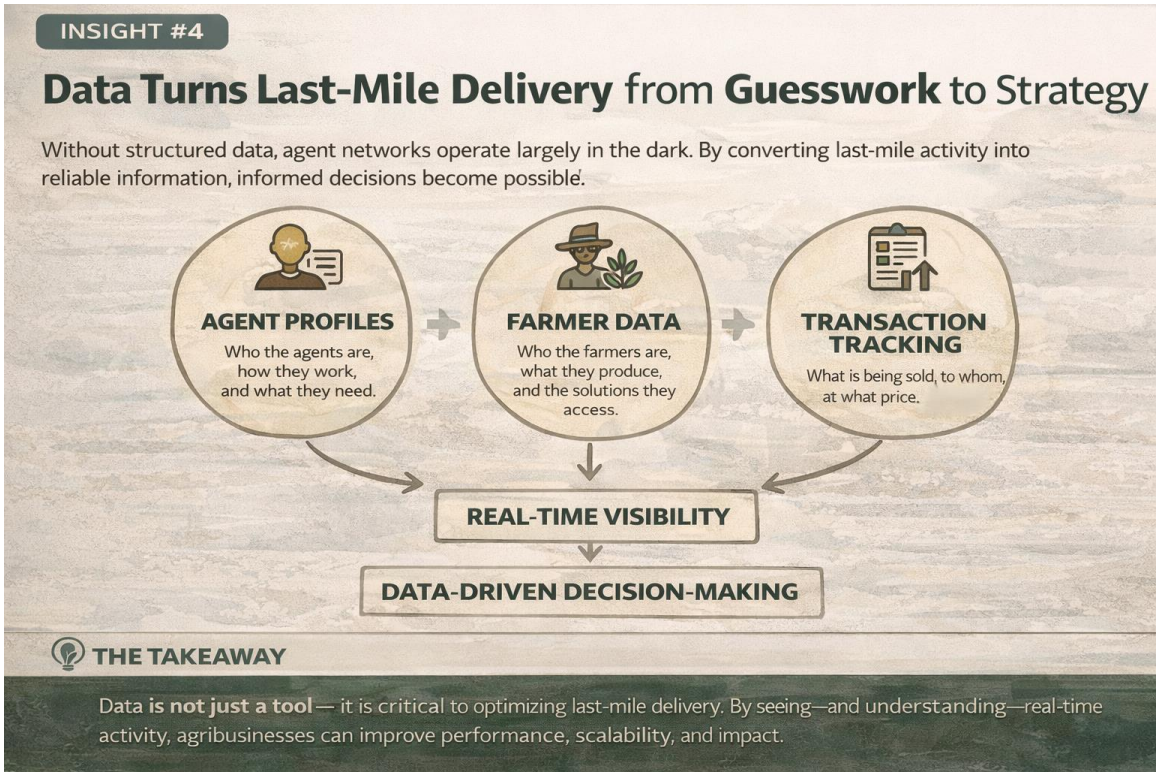
Beyond physical and digital infrastructure, trust is a critical enabler of last-mile systems. Farmers make decisions based on relationships, not just availability.

Agents are central to building this trust. Their interactions influence adoption, perception and repeat engagement. However, trust is fragile. Inconsistent information or unmet expectations can reset relationships and slow adoption.

Designing for trust requires systems that effectively support agents through proper training, aligned incentives, and ongoing engagement

The EMBE Masterclass incorporates these behavioral insights, emphasizing that trust is not incidental, it is something that can be designed and strengthened.

Insight 4: Data Turns Last-Mile Delivery from Guesswork to Strategy



A major constraint across agribusinesses is limited visibility into what is happening at the last mile. Decisions are often made without reliable data on demand, performance, or adoption.

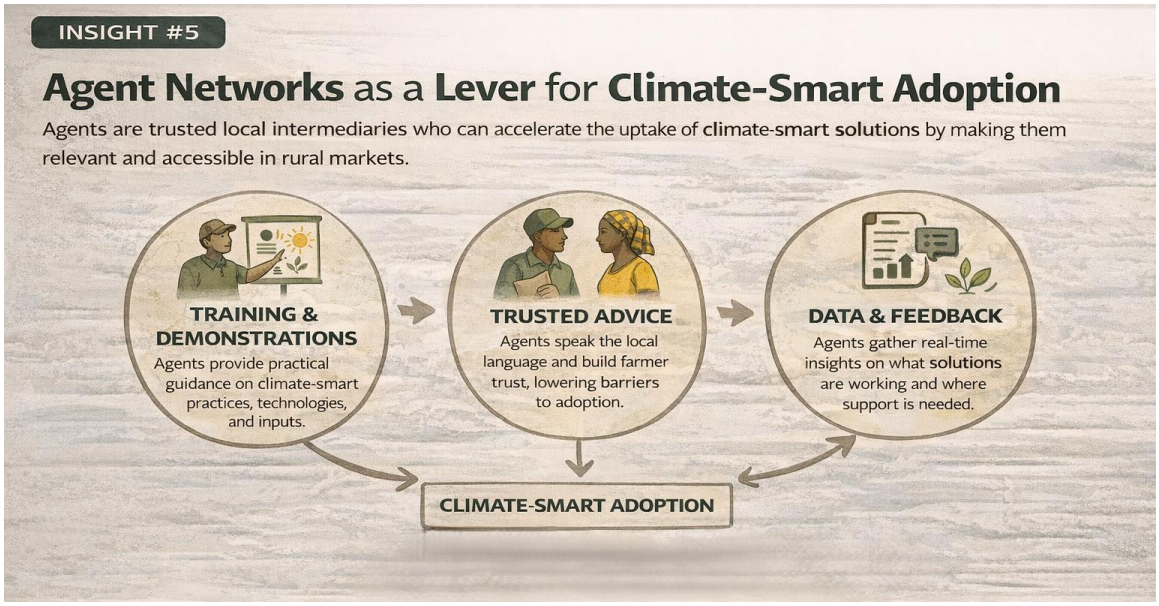
Agent networks frequently generate fragmented or inconsistent data. This leads to reactive decision making and inefficiencies.

The shift is from tracking activity to generating insight. Structured systems can connect agents, farmers and transactions into a coherent view.

To address this, EMBE is developing AgentBI which is a platform designed to transform fragmented agent networks into structured, data-rich systems. By integrating agent profiles, farmer data, transaction tracking and performance analytics, AgentBI enables real-time visibility and more strategic decision making.

The goal is not simply digitization but creating actionable insight that improves both performance and scalability.

Insight 5: Agent Networks as a Lever for Climate-Smart Adoption



Climate-smart solutions are increasingly available, but adoption remains uneven. These solutions require behavior change, trust, and sustained engagement.

Agent networks play a critical role in enabling adoption. They translate technical information, provide demonstrations, and support farmers over time.

Adoption is behavioral. Farmers adopt when they trust the source, understand the benefits, and receive consistent support.

Weak systems undermine adoption. Strengthening agent networks shifts their role from distribution to enablement.

Through its combined interventions—the Masterclass, AgentBI, and the Playbook—EMBE is supporting agribusinesses to move beyond access and toward sustained adoption of climate-smart solutions.

Conclusion

Across these insights, a clear pattern emerges. Last-mile delivery challenges are systemic. Agent networks sit at the center; trust determines their effectiveness, data enables scale, and adoption drives impact.

EMBE's approach brings these elements together through:

- Capacity building (Masterclass)

- System tools (AgentBI)

- Practical guidance (Playbook)

Together, these milestones represent a shift toward more structured, data-driven, and resilient last-mile systems.