AFRICAN RURAL RADIO PROGRAM ANALYSIS (ARRPA)
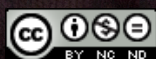
UNDERSTANDING THE STATE OF FARMER RADIO PROGRAMMING IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

FARM RADIO
INTERNATIONAL

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PHOTO: FREDERIC COURBET,
BILL & MELINDA GATES FOUNDATION

This document is a summary of our full findings. Read the full report at:
http://bit.ly/FRIFullARRPA

INTRODUCTION

In 2011, Farm Radio International (FRI) launched the African Rural Radio Program Analysis (ARRPA) project. ARRPA is the first study of its kind. For donors, radio practitioners and organizations who wish to partner with radio stations in sub-Saharan Africa, ARRPA's detailed findings and analysis provide a comprehensive picture of the often challenging conditions in which farmer radio programs are produced. The picture that ARRPA paints about the circumstances in which farmer radio programming operates, the strengths of radio stations and the challenges they face in producing farmer programs, and the desires and preferences of farmer-listeners provides an indispensable foundation that will inform future partnerships between rural broadcasters in sub-Saharan Africa and organizations who wish to collaborate with them.

Radio is widely acknowledged as the best medium for delivering farming information to small-scale farmers in sub-Saharan Africa, even as newer technologies are increasingly adopted. In fact, rural radio has experienced a renaissance of late, both with respect to the widespread acknowledgement of its unrivaled potential for disseminating information and supporting positive change, and also in terms of the growing interest in radio on the part of donors and international NGOs.

GOALS

The goals of the ARRPA project were to deepen understanding of the state of farmer radio programming in sub-Saharan Africa, and gain insights to make FRI's services more responsive and effective.

Prior to this study, little was known about the circumstances in which African farm broadcasters operate. There was little documentation or analysis of the production practices used in farmer radio programs, and whether farmer programs broadcast by radio stations in sub-Saharan Africa effectively serve listeners' needs.

ARRPA helped fill these knowledge gaps. The study documented a host of details, including: how farmer programs are put together, the resource challenges that stations face, listener preferences, and to what degree these programs inform farmers, are respectful of farmers, engage and entertain farmers, and include farmers' own voices.

METHODOLOGY

ARRPA involved an in-depth investigation of the farmer radio programs of 22 radio stations in five sub-Saharan African countries (Cameroon, Ghana, Kenya, Malawi and Tanzania). The stations comprise a mix of typologies – community, public, religious and private stations – and represent a continuum from well-resourced stations to those on a shoestring budget.

Between April and June 2011, trained project researchers (one per country) conducted multi-day visits to these stations and amassed detailed information on a wide variety of station activities and capacities by interviewing radio station management and staff in the workplace.

During the same time period, researchers also visited listening communities to gather listeners' perspectives on their local station's farmer programming. Finally, development communication experts analyzed one episode from each station's main farmer program with reference to FRI's VOICE standards for farmer radio programs (see below) – standards that emphasize valuing, including, informing, respecting and entertaining farmers.

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KEY FINDINGS

Stations offer a variety of services for farmers …

All ARRPA stations indicate that farmers are their primary audience, that they use local languages in their broadcast, and employ a magazine format in their main farmer program. Most broadcast at a time that is convenient for farmers.

Beyond their main farmer program, there is wide variation among stations on some practices. Most offer a daily local news service, some provide a daily weather service, and some report on farm markets. Roughly half feature regular programming on rural livelihoods and on women's rights, parenting and livelihoods.

In most stations, a single individual produces and hosts the farmer program. Most hosts and producers are men. Half of stations pre-record their whole program, while most others pre-record most or all interviews. Some stations also pre-record content such as community discussions, dramas and poems.

Some stations feature farmers' voices in discussion formats or incorporate listeners' comments via phone-in and text-in. Others adopt "lecture" formats in which a single host or guest "talks at" the audience. Government extension workers are the most common sources of information cited in farmer programs, and are often interviewed on-air.

Some programs include both men and women farmers in their programs, feature guest experts, offer repeat broadcasts on alternative days and time slots, focus on only one complex topic per episode, include dramatic elements and/or music, and feature good quality audio. Others do not include farmers, do not feature guests (or have invited guests who perform long monologues), do not do a good job of engaging and entertaining listeners, and have poor quality audio.

Stations largely accord *information* the highest priority in their farmer radio program. When asked what they did best to serve farmers, the majority of stations said they provided farmers with agricultural information. This is consistent with farmers' preferences. When asked why they listened to farmer radio programs, the majority of farmers said they wanted information and knowledge from experts and other farmers.

A few stations believe they best serve farmers by allowing them to voice their needs and giving them the opportunity to discuss issues that are important to them. This also coincides with some farmers' stated preferences. Some farmers say they listen to radio programs mainly to hear the voices of other farmers. They believe the most effective way to learn is to listen to fellow farmers.

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Overall, it appears that FRI services – Resource Packs, Farm Radio Weekly, and Voices newsletter (see http://www.farmradio.org/) – are well-used and useful to those who receive them. These materials were judged by stations as easy to understand, often relevant to local situations, attractively packaged, and written in clear language. Most stations used them to get program ideas or as background research materials for their own programs, while some stations broadcast FRI's materials after adapting them to local circumstances or more or less as is.

… under sometimes challenging conditions …

The ARRPA findings reflect the challenges of making good farmer radio in sub-Saharan Africa. About two-thirds of stations have Internet access, though

connectivity is sometimes slow and/or unreliable. Most have some form of access to transportation for field work, though this access is often less than ideal, for example relying on staff vehicles or rented motorcycles. Almost all stations say that access to equipment is inadequate: there are, for example, too few computers; no funds for cell phone airtime or transport to the field; a lack of office space; and inadequate recording studios.

Stations identified a significant number of key challenges to creating more effective farmer programming. These include: the need for broadcaster training; inadequate equipment; financial constraints which block innovative programming; a lack of professional skills development to help retain staff; stations devoting a large portion of their income to facility rental; and challenges with transportation to the field.

… But are these services effective?

There are two lines of evidence to consider in this inquiry:

1) how each station's main farmer program stacks up against FRI's VOICE standards; and

2) farmers' stated preferences in community focus groups.

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FRI's VOICE standards establish benchmarks for farmer programming related to:

V - The programs value small-scale farmers, both women and men. They respect farmers for their hard work producing food for their families and the markets, often in the face of major challenges. They reach out to farmers to understand their situation, and are dedicated to supporting them in their farming work and in their efforts to improve rural life.

O - The programs provide farmers with the opportunity to speak and be heard on all matters. They are centred on encouraging small-scale farmers to name their concerns, discuss them, and organize to act on them.

I - The programs provide farmers with the information they need, when they need it.

C - The programs are broadcast consistently and conveniently, on a reliable, regular basis, at least weekly, at a time when farmers can listen.

E - The programs are entertaining and attract large numbers of farmers. There is no excuse for boring farm radio programs!

For the ARRPA project, FRI developed a scorecard to rate farmer programs against the VOICE Standards. Generally speaking, stations found it easier to meet VOICE standards on Valuing farmers, providing relevant, credible and timely Information, and offering Convenient programming. It was more difficult for stations to meet standards on providing Opportunities for farmers' voices to be heard, and broadcasting programs that farmers find Entertaining.

> One of ARRPA's key findings is the apparent mismatch between stations' sense that they have strategies in place to include farmers in programming and many listeners' feelings that they are not sufficiently included.

FRI's broadcaster support and training programs are founded on the presumption that effective farmer programming must go beyond providing good information at convenient times in a way that values and respects the audience. In order to fulfill radio's potential to help listeners fully participate in issues that affect them, programming must also provide opportunities for farmers' voices to be heard. And without sufficient attention to engaging and entertaining the audience, listeners will simply tune out.

On some measures, stations did well. As mentioned above, all stations broadcast in local languages and

most broadcast at times that are convenient for farmers to listen. As also indicated above, some stations use guest experts appropriately, have good quality audio, offer repeat broadcasts, include dramatic elements or music, and feature women and men farmers.

But few stations use formats that encourage farmer discussion. Only two included a phone-in or text-in segment in their broadcast. Stations often did not use local music (a stated farmer preference) or provide farmers with opportunities to discuss important matters. Few stations provide engaging introductions to their farmer programs or offer previews of upcoming programs.

One of ARRPA's key findings is the apparent mismatch between stations' sense that they have strategies in place to include farmers in programming and many listeners' feelings that they are not sufficiently included. Almost all stations indicated that they offer program formats and other mechanisms to include farmers in programming – phone-ins and text-ins, field interviews, and in-studio interviews. Twelve stations said they offer regular or special phone-in programming that provides farmers with an opportunity to raise and discuss issues. Yet when evaluators listened to single episodes of each station's main farmer program, they found that only two stations used SMS in programs, and two used phone-ins. While it is possible that more extensive listening might reveal further opportunities for farmer involvement, the finding of lack of opportunity for listener involvement was backed up by farmers in focus groups, who indicated that opportunities for voicing their concerns on the radio were limited. Many listeners wish that farmers could participate more frequently in farmer programs, with several suggesting that their station produce on-location broadcasts. Listeners also want more local market information, improved sound quality, more repeat broadcasts, more local music, and want broadcasters to use language that is easier for farmers to understand.

We found some correlation between a station's level of resources (office/broadcasting equipment, production capacity in the studio and in the field), and the degree to which the station meets VOICE standards. While there was no difference between stations with the highest and stations with a moderate level of resources, stations with the lowest level of resources had somewhat more difficulty meeting the VOICE standards. Thus, there may be a certain minimum level of resources required to air effective farmer programming, as defined by the VOICE standards. However, stations with all levels of resources – low, moderate and high – produced both effective and ineffective programs.

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RECOMMENDATIONS

To create more effective farmer programs, ARRPA suggests a number of ways forward – for radio stations, and for FRI, donors, and other organizations that wish to collaborate with radio stations in sub-Saharan Africa.

FOR RADIO STATIONS:

After ARRPA's research phase was completed, stakeholder meetings were held in each of the five ARRPA countries. The reports from these meetings listed a number of recommendations for improving farmer programs. In addition, farmers in focus groups made suggestions for improving programming on their local stations. The recommendations include:

- purchasing more modern equipment;

- broadcasting local music;

- providing the Internet as a research tool free for station staff to use;

- taking steps to facilitate travel for the field collection of information;

- involving farmers, experts and civil society organizations in production and broadcasts;

- ensuring teamwork in production rather than relying on a single producer/host;

- dramatizing information received from resource experts to engage and sustain farmers' interest;

- using clear, non-technical language;

- enacting policies to encourage more women producers of farmer programs and female hosts (there was clear male domination of the airwaves);

- broadcasting more market information;

- organizing events to encourage listener groups which are incorporated within existing self-help groups (so that farmers do not view listener groups as externally motivated); and

- ensuring that broadcasters possess the right skills and knowledge to address farmers' needs.

In addition, FRI produced a document entitled *75 ways to fix your farmer program,* based on evaluations of the 22 ARRPA station farmer programs. The document addresses many of the shortcomings that were identified in individual farmer programs. It can be found at

75 Ways to fix your farmer program

http://bit.ly/FRI75Ways

Here are two examples of strategies from the document:

- **6.** Help farmers speak with confidence and clarity Most farmers have little experience with media. In an interview, make them feel comfortable and help them get their information and opinions across clearly. This will encourage more women and men farmers to agree to be interviewed.

- **16.** Use the right word. Modern farming is full of modern words. But do those words translate clearly into your farmers' language? If not, farmers won't fully understand the modern word and the meaning of your radio item might be lost.

FOR FARM RADIO INTERNATIONAL

Based on ARRPA findings, a number of recommendations were crafted to improve FRI's services to African radio stations. In addition to these

recommendations, FRI will continue to monitor and improve FRI's services for broadcasters, and to mine the rich vein of ARRPA data for further lessons.

The recommendations below are categorized as *training, other kinds of support,* and *overarching.* For a complete list of recommendations, see the full ARRPA report available at **http://bit.ly/FRIFullARRPA**

TRAINING RECOMMENDATIONS

1.   Provide training for all African broadcasters who want to improve their farmer programs. The ARRPA data generally suggest that FRI services are effective, well-targeted, and being used. They also show that many farm broadcasters do not use the most effective available broadcasting techniques. This is not just a problem of resources. In fact, some of the best farmer programs were created by stations with scarce resources. The problem is that most

farm broadcasters have not received the training required to become proficient in the skills needed to produce effective farmer programs. Also, most farm broadcasters do not receive the ongoing support and reinforcement they need to keep those skills current. FRI has developed the training and support methods that can help these broadcasters. With training and ongoing support through FRI's other services, FRI can help deal with this fundamental problem in African farm broadcasting. (In providing such support to broadcasters, FRI will consider, among other things, the category of radio station (public, community, private, religious), and the degree to which women are full participants in programming.)

2.   *Establish a system to capture and share practices that serve (and do not serve) farmers well.* The ARRPA data provided a treasure trove of best practices that have been captured and shared through documents like *75 ways to fix your farmer program.* As a learning organization, FRI should ensure that in all of our projects, and in all of our contacts with radio stations, we gather best practices – and bad practices – and share them broadly and systematically.

3.   *Design a way to support public/state broadcasters to provide effective farmer programs.* Most Africans listening to farmer programming are tuned into shows produced by state or public broadcasters, and broadcast over transmitters that reach tens or hundreds of thousands – even millions – of farmers. While these state/public stations typically have more resources than other stations, the ARRPA data

shows that they face many of the same problems in creating effective farmer programs. Given the strategic importance of these stations, FRI should design a way to help state/public stations meet their mandate to small-scale farmers, and then work with these broadcasters to secure funding to provide training and ongoing support to them.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR OTHER KINDS OF SUPPORT

1.   *Partner with one or more organizations to provide useful agricultural weather forecasting services to radio stations.* The ARRPA data show that six stations offer a daily weather service and 11 others hope to include weather services in the future. In addition, ARRPA focus groups show that weather forecasts are one of the most important additional services that farmers would like from their radio stations.

2.   *Revise resource packs.* Since most ARRPA programs use FRI scripts to get ideas or as background research materials, FRI should revise its Resource Packs to include, in point form, the most important and pertinent research on topics of importance to rural farmers, in order to help broadcasters create their own items on these issues. In addition, FRI should write broadcast "how-to guides" on the most critical best practices identified through the ARRPA inquiry. One will be a guide outlining how broadcasters can best use FRI materials (scripts, research, Farm Radio Weekly stories, etc.) to produce items that meet farmer needs. (It should be noted that FRI has recently hired staff who are tasked with coaching broadcasters in partner stations on how to best use items in Farm Radio Resource Packs.)

3.   *Create more region-specific material for Farm Radio Weekly and the Resource Packs.*

This request from ARRPA stations has been echoed by many stations over the years. Now that FRI has additional Africa-based staff, FRI should generate more of these tailored materials.

OVERARCHING RECOMMENDATION

Conduct ARRPA in Francophone Africa. The ARRPA data, gathered mainly from stations where the colonial language was English, have provided valuable evidence to help radio stations provide more effective programming for farmers, and to help FRI improve its support to radio stations. Given that almost half of FRI's broadcasting partners are in Francophone Africa, and that the culture of radio in Francophone Africa is different from that in Anglophone Africa, FRI should conduct an ARRPA in Francophone Africa.

CONCLUSION

ARRPA shows that farmer programming in sub-Saharan Africa faces some challenges, both in terms of its level of resources, but more fundamentally in terms of how it incorporates listeners into its programming and its ability to engage and entertain its audience. It also shows that some broadcasters have made major steps to connect with farmers, while others clearly need help to reach their potential. With the right support, all stations can provide farmers with entertaining, informative and effective programs.

FRI invites donors and other organizations interested in collaborating with rural radio stations in sub-Saharan Africa to engage with us in an effort to build on ARRPA, in order to fulfil rural radio's potential to improve the lives of smallholder farmers in Africa.

Above: The African Rural Radio Program Analysis (ARRPA) team during a training field visit near Arusha, Tanzania in 2011. From left: David Mowbray (Canada), Njuki Githethwa (Kenya), Pauline Kalumikiza (Malawi), Doug Ward (Canada), Lilian Manyuka (Tanzania), Kwabena Agyei (Ghana), Meli Evariste-Rostand (Cameroon), Lazarus Laiser (front, Tanzania).