



Summary of the online discussion

<http://www.fao.org/fsnforum/west-africa/rural-radio>

Rural radio and community media: empowering rural youth for resilient livelihoods and improved food security and nutrition

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Background

In order to contribute to the celebrations of World Radio Day (13 February) the Food Security and Nutrition (FSN) and the Communication for Development (ComDev) team in FAO, in collaboration with UNESCO, have organized between 2 to 23 February 2015 an online discussion on “Rural radio and community media: empowering rural youth for resilient livelihoods and improved food security and nutrition”.

The aim of this initiative was to reflect on the contribution of rural radio and community media with regards to increasing the resilience of livelihoods to threats and crises, with particular focus on the role of youth and FSN in West Africa.

The discussions can be viewed on FAO’s Global Forum on Food Security and Nutrition in West Africa ([FSN Forum in West Africa](#)).

All contributions received are available at: http://www.fao.org/fsnforum/west-africa/sites/west-africa/files/files/ResourcesWA/PROCEEDINGS_Radio.docx

The role of radio in rural communities

From the contributions received, all of the respondents, in their own words, stated the fact that radio is a powerful tool: it reaches remote, marginal areas, thanks to low-cost and accessible infrastructure and brings to the attention of farmers a wide range of issues that affect agriculture and their livelihoods.

“Radio is a catalyst for development in rural areas. It is common to hear people say - I heard on radio that... ” (John K. Cheburet, TOF Radio Manager, Kenya).

“Rural radio has the advantage of reaching people in their own language at the times they prefer and because of this the level of trust given to these radio stations often goes far beyond any other source of information” (Mark Leclair, Farm Radio International, Canada)

“The contribution of the community radio is immeasurable. It plays a major role in the communities because local issues are dealt with directly and are accessible to all. Everyone can give their opinion regarding the way local matters are going” (Babacar Mbaye Balde, Radio Cayar, Senegal)

The topics on which radio provides fundamental information and generally raises awareness among rural communities, helping them improve their opportunities and livelihoods are:

- Market production: *“With rural radio, small farmers are able to come together and group their small productions”* (Emile Houngbo, Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Sciences et Techniques Agronomiques de Kétou, Benin)
- Ecological and sustainable farming practices: *“Since radio has a wider coverage than magazine, it is used to create awareness, reinforce messages, raise and attend to queries and link farmers to farmers, promoting farmer-to-farmer learning”* (John K. Cheburet, TOF Radio Manager, Kenya).
- Awareness on new opportunities, such as aquaculture development: *“Initially I took help from the community radio to build the awareness about fish culture. In the Gambia most of the villages have no electricity, no television facility, no satellite TV channel and other recreation. They only depend on the Community Radio (CR) to get information”*. (Tofazuddin Ahamed, Senior Fisheries sub-district officer, Bangladesh)
- Improving nutrition practices (John Nicholson, John Snow Inc., USA; Manuel Moya, Real Academia de Medicina, Spain)
- Bridging the gap between policy makers and farmers (Alu Azege, FRCN, Nigeria)

In general radio plays a public good role by responding to information and education needs: an example is radio being used in Ebola affected communities for education of rural children, to temporarily replace school attendance. (Daniela Verona, FAO, Italy).

Besides radio, ICTS and mobile phones in particular, are complementing radios and can be used to improve interactivity and outreach.

“Radio practitioners must realize that radio is not the only medium at work in rural areas. Mobile telephony is one such technology that can help radio play a more meaningful role. Radio could be instrumental in creating awareness among youth on the opportunities in agriculture information and knowledge management; software development, organization websites, online content management, new and social media interaction, and other related ICT support”. (John K. Cheburet, TOF Radio Manager, Kenya).

However there can still be socio-cultural issues that hinder a greater involvement of some target groups in radio: this is the case of women, as gender gaps can still limit their active involvement in radio in the African landscape: *“African women seem to fear their husbands rather than respect them, so it is not easy to conduct interviews in presences of their husbands”* (David Wakhata, AT NONE, Uganda).

Engaging rural youth

When it comes to youth, radio can be instrumental to motivate, engage and empower young generations in rural communities. Radio programmes can portray successful stories and good practices of young entrepreneurs in agriculture and inspire youth to improve their livelihoods.

“Through radio, the stories of positive change by youths succeeding in agriculture enterprises and entrepreneurship can reach and inspire rural youth”. (Raymond Erick Zvavanyange, Ministry of Agriculture, Zimbabwe).

Direct experience shows that radio programmes can have an influence on youth behaviors and that radio can be used as a *“platform for self-expression. The freedom of expression on matters of relevance to country’s development can foster and speed up change among individuals and communities”* (Raymond Erick Zvavanyange, Ministry of Agriculture, Mechanization and Irrigation Development, Zimbabwe).

Participants shared their experience on what makes a programme successful in engaging rural youth and helping attract this target audience.

- Entertainment

To be successful in addressing youth needs and grabbing youth attention it is also important to recognize that there are many other programmes competing for the attention of youth and that a strong entertainment focus is needed.

“Carefully planned radio programmes can have a major impact on youth attitudes towards farming and rural issues. The trick is creating radio programming that is entertaining and appeals to youth!” (Mark Leclair, Farm Radio International, Canada).

- Young broadcasters

The role of young broadcasters is also key: community radio personalities may well influence other young listeners and youth wants to be able to relate to the voices in the air (John Nicholson, John Snow Inc., USA; Mark Leclair, Farm Radio International, Canada). Young radio broadcasters should *“produce good radio programmes targeting their fellow youth in all corners of the issues above and facilitating formation of Agricultural radio listening clubs for the youth”* (Monica Mandala, Agriculture Communication Branch, Malawi)

Young broadcasters can also help harness the potential of ICTs to improve the service radio provides to communities, improving the way radio messages are delivered to listeners. (John K. Cheburet, TOF Radio Manager, Kenya).

- Interactivity

Radio can stimulate dialogue and collaboration among youth and their communities especially when a participatory and interactive approach is promoted.

An example is the FAO Dimitra community listeners’ clubs, which is currently addressing the specific needs of young people. Dimitra is a participatory information and communication project which builds the capacities of rural populations through information dissemination and the exchange of experiences using radio.

“Dimitra clubs are groups of women, men and young people – mixed or not – who decide to organize themselves so as to work together to bring about changes in their communities. They meet regularly to discuss the challenges they face in their daily lives, make decisions and take action to resolve their problems” (Alice Van der Elstraen, FAO, Belgium).

*“In Niger, the Dimitra listening clubs are an answer to this kind of partnership between radio stations and communities brought about by an agreement. Furthermore the implementation of an early warning system at the center of these clubs is a strategy to promote resilient means of existence among the communities. Indeed, in West Africa the radio stations’ programming should be more participative by letting the communities in general, and especially the youth, **share** in the development of their programs. In our view, this approach will favor the involvement of the youth in the matters that concern them”.* (Ibrahim Farmo, ONG VIE Kande Ni Bayra, Niger)

- Topics of interest

With regards to the kind of issues that have to be raised through rural radio and community media when it comes to youth challenges in West Africa, participants mentioned: youth employment and careers, HIV/Aids, agriculture youth clubs, nutrition and nutrition education. But also investment priorities for youth development, investment priorities for education, train/retrain and recruit teachers (in order to ensure that the quality of education provided is up to acceptable standards), review educational curriculum, research, science and technology, invest in girls’ education, train skilled vocational and career guidance counselors, etc. (Santosh Kumar Mishra, Population Education Resource Centre (PERC), India)

Improving and scaling up rural radio

Many radio experiences and initiatives actively involving rural communities and youth in particular are still relying on donor funds; if funds come to an end the risk is that these programmes are replaced by more commercially viable options.

“With good training radio stations can produce more engaging programming but also explore models of sustainability that are not entirely reliant on the donor community” (Mark Leclair, Farm Radio International, Canada)

Other areas to address to improve sustainability include: partnerships on content development with research institutions, content sharing between radio broadcasters, airtime subsidies or discounts when using public owned broadcasters (John K. Cheburet, TOF Radio Manager, Kenya).

Besides funding, it is also useful to learn from past experiences, in order to better target the radio beneficiaries. It is also fundamental to understand the farmers and rural communities’ needs and to further raise their voices.

Since agriculture is currently one of the main topics showcased both on radio and TV in Africa, journalists in private and commercial media should also receive constant training, in order to cover agriculture stories.

There is also a need to make linkages between farming and other sectors / issues and to offer variety in the programming.

Finally, to maintain programme consistency, partnerships on content development particularly with research institutions would help a farming radio program to fulfill its role of being the bridge between researchers and farmers, and it would cut down on costs. (John K. Cheburet, TOF Radio Manager, Kenya).

Examples of resources shared by participants

- **FarmQuest:** a reality radio series run in Mali and targeted at young people, following six young entrepreneurs as they created, developed and managed a farming business https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VolxAzFKbEg&list=PL8WMEQOs0bi_FkrXKKKtGLv1wFh7g_sWd&index=1
- **Dimitra Listeners clubs:** www.fao.org/dimitra
- **The African Farm Radio Initiative**
- **The Organic Farmer Magazine:** www.theorganicfarmer.org
- **Young People and Farming in Zimbabwe**, broadcasted on ZiFM in May 2014: <https://soundcloud.com/raymond-erick-zvavanyange/young-farmerswav>>
- Rennie, Waverly, Peggy Koniz-Booher, Bridget Rogers, and Marjolein Moreaux. 2014. **SBCC in the Sahel: A Landscape Assessment of Nutrition and Hygiene Social and Behavior Change Communication in Niger and Burkina Faso**. Arlington, VA: USAID/Strengthening Partnerships, Results, and Innovations in Nutrition Globally (SPRING) Project www.spring-nutrition.org/sites/default/files/publications/reports/spring_sbcc_in_the_sahel_0.pdf
- **Report on Selected Radios and Communities in Mali** [www.fao.org/fsnforum/west-africa/sites/west-africa/files/resources/Draft_Radios_Communities_Select_Mali_17_07_2011_01%20\(2\).pdf](http://www.fao.org/fsnforum/west-africa/sites/west-africa/files/resources/Draft_Radios_Communities_Select_Mali_17_07_2011_01%20(2).pdf)
- **Interview by Yannick De Mol, FAO**, in which he explains how radio engages young audiences in rural communities and promotes agricultural development. <http://www.fao.org/news/audio-video/detail-audio/en/?uid=11029>
- **Now This Is An Example Of Truly Educational Radio** www.npr.org/blogs/goatsandsoda/2015/02/18/387027766/now-this-is-an-example-of-truly-educational-radio
- **ICT-a major breakthrough in agriculture:** article on potentialities and challenges of ICTs and agriculture in Nepal www.fao.org/fsnforum/west-africa/sites/west-africa/files/resources/Nepal.docx