Journal of Development and Communication Studies
Vol. 2. Nos. 2/3, July-December, 2013. ISSN (Online): 2305-7432. http://www.devcomsjournalmw.org.

Impact of African Farm Radio Research Initiative Participatory Radio Campaigns: an Agriculture Extension Officer's Testimony

Andrew Kaipanyama
Agricultural Extension and Development Coordinator (AEDC), Mvera EPA, Dowa, Malawi

Introduction

The African Farm Radio Research Initiative (AFRRI) was a Farm Radio International project funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and implemented in five African countries of Ghana, Malawi, Tanzanian, Mali and Uganda in two phases or rounds. It aimed at discovering and documenting best practices in using radio to meet agricultural information needs of smallholder farmers in Africa (Farm Radio International, 2011) in order to have a real transformative impact on food insecure poor people. Using Participatory Radio Campaign (PRC) methodology, it was operationalised, in Malawi, through five partner radio stations, namely Nkhotakota, Dzimwe, and Mudziwathu community radio stations, Zodiak Broadcasting Station (ZBS), a private commercial radio, and the public service provider, the Malawi Broadcasting Corporation, from April 2007 to September 2010. One of the targets communities was Mvera in Dowa, where land and soil degradation had contributed to reduced agricultural production. The AFRRI participatory action research and radio communication/extension based project involved, per design, three Active Listening (ALC) communities of Labvu, Makombe and Lovimbi while Magodi and Chambakata acted as Passive Listening Communities (PLC) and Control Communities (CC). ALC participants were involved in identifying technologies or problems - soil rehabilitation through vetiver grass planting during the first phase, and composting, and increasing maize production through the one seed per station (1-1) planting method during the second round of the campaign - that required improvement, and deciding the content, times of broadcast, duration, and formats of the programme. They also regularly gave feedback on the programme through mobile short messages (SMS) and interviews. The Passive Listening Community (Magodi) heard the programmes, but was not involved in an other way while CC did not participate at all and was deemed not to have listened to and been aware of the PRCs at all as the locality (Chambakata) did not receive the ZBS signal.

During and after the project implementation, the influence of the PRCs was gauged through continuous monitoring and evaluation, summative evaluations and the final impact evaluation undertaken by AFRRI itself.

This case study presents the results of an impact evaluation conducted, independently of the AFRRI one, by the Mvera Extension Planning Area office for its own records in 2011.

Structure of the PRC

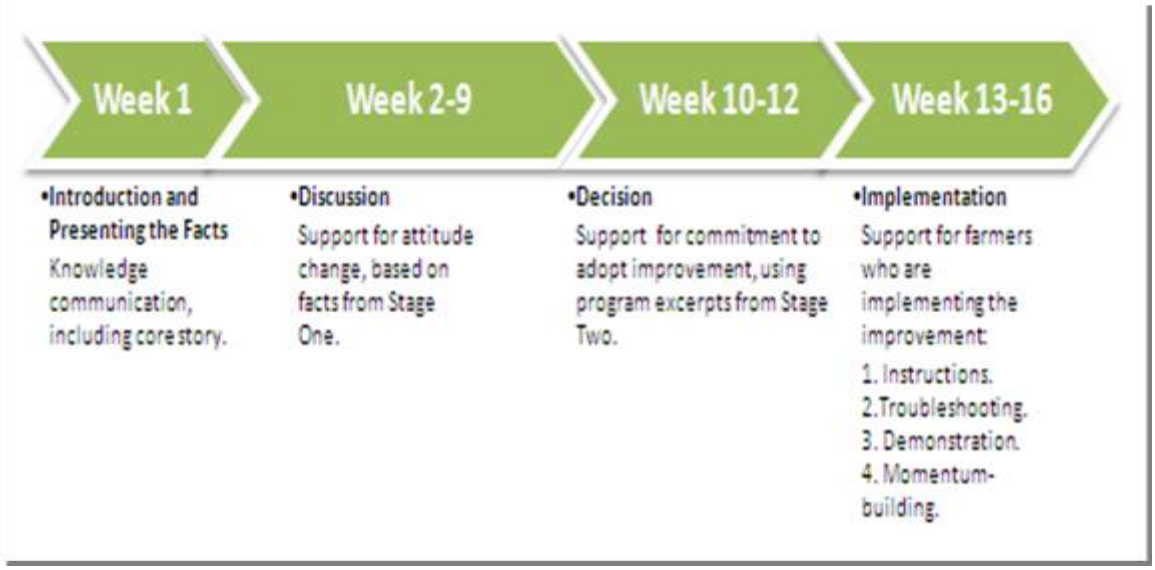

Figure 1. *Stages and duration of a four-month participatory radio campaign.* **Source:** PRC Manual (Ward, 2010)

As **Figure 1** illustrates**,** the PRCs were sequenced in such a way that the first stage of the campaign was regarded as the introduction where facts of the promoted technologies were presented aiming at creating general awareness in the communities about the improvement. Then the campaign passed through attitude moderation and change, support for farmer decision to adoption and practice stages. Some phases were short (one week) while others (like the discussion which lasted eight weeks) were long. Thus, it was expected that after the discussion stage famer's knowledge and eventual adoption of the practices would improve through attitude change. To measure this change in famers' knowledge, practices and attitude, a 9-question quiz was administered from to 2nd to 5th January, 2011.

Impact on Farmers' Knowledge

A descriptive analysis of the survey data indicates that

- More Active Listening Community respondents (ALC) (65%) had correct knowledge about the technologies that were being promoted than their passive listening community (PLC) (45%) and control community (CC) (22%) counterparts.
- Overall over 70% of the famers had good knowledge of the improvements being promoted.

These differences suggest a direct link between listening to radio programs and having relatively detailed knowledge about the improvement. Those who listened to the radio campaigns became more aware and knowledgeable about the agricultural technology. Further, this finding indicates that active participation, such as being involved in content production, being interviewed, providing feedback, among others, seemed to have increased the level of awareness and knowledge.

Impact on Farmers' Attitudes

As noted, the PRCs were also meant to support farmers' attitude change or moderation in order to clear out misconceptions, negative attitudes as well as beliefs about the improvement that made farmers hesitant to adopt the promoted technology. The descriptive data analysis shows that

- The majority of farmers (55%) developed a positive attitude regarding 1-1 maize planting. The general misconception was that 1-1 planting of maize was wasteful as it required more fertilizer.
- The misconception that compost manure damaged crops, increased the multiplication of crop-damaging worms and termites was virtually cleared, as on average, 80% of the farmers started applying compost manure. In ALCs up 95% of the respondents reported to have made and applied compost manure to their crops. Even in the PLC, 93% of the respondents said they had applied compost manure while only 35.3% of the CC respondents had applied compost manure.

This finding suggests a link between listening to radio campaigns. Further, the finding suggests that active participation in radio based campaigns may not matter much in the adoption of some technologies such composting since in both ALC and PLC the level of adoption of compost manure was high and almost the same (95% versus 93% respectively). Lack of access to radio campaigns had an effect on the adoption in the Control Community. Farmers might have been convinced that it is cheaper to make compost manure than to buy chemical fertilizers.

Impact on Farmers' Field Practices

This outcome evaluation shows that farmers in ALC and PLC implemented the promoted improvements more than their counterparts in the CC as **Figure 2** shows:

	Community Households			Community Households			Practising Households				Adoption Per
	Labvu	Makombe	Lovimbi	Magodi	Chambakata	Labvu	Makombe	Lovimbi	Magodi	Chambakata	Labvu
Promoted Activities	3666	112	280	150	119	311	79.0	266	105	22	85
Pegging and construct of marker ridges						275	65.0	230	85	18	75
Ridge realignment						13.0	5.0	9	3.0	0	3.6
Vetiver grass nursery establishment						66.0	39.0	101	22.0	2.0	18.0
Vetiver hedgerow planting and managment						348.0	101.0	266	140.0	42	95
Manure making						340.0	95.0	255	135.0	35.0	92.9
Vetiver grass nursery establishment						238.0	62.0	196	72.0	36	65
Vetiver hedgerow planting and managment						128.0	23.0	70	15.0	70.0	35.0
Manure making						239.0	79.0	266	133.0	24.0	80.1
Manure making						239.0	79.0	266	133.0	24.0	80.1

Conclusion

The above data indicate that AFRRI PRCs had a positive impact on the farmers in the impact or focus areas. In communities that participated and listened actively significant changes in knowledge, attitudes and practices were noted. The data on PRC impact on farmers in PLC is also worth recording because they indicate that radio listening on its own is important in agricultural extension. That some farmers in the control community also implemented the promoted technologies could indicate the importance of interpersonal and word of mouth communication and the contribution of other players in spreading technologies to communities not served by radio or extension officers; hence the need for integrated communication approach. There is need to scale up and domesticate AFRRI's pioneering work in order to advance Malawi's agricultural and social development particularly in rural areas where farming is the major source of livelihood.

References

Farm Radio International. 2011.
Agriculture Radio that Works.
http://www.farmradio.org/english/donors/publications/EightPager.pdf. Accessed 20 July, 2013.

Ward, D. 2010.
Manual for Participatory Radio Campaigns Unpublished revised manual for the programming Stages of AFRRI Participatory Radio Campaign Number Two. Ottawa: Farm Radio International.