

Rural Radio

A Participatory Communication Approach

Rural radio is a vital communication tool for many developing countries. Despite the latest technological advances in telecommunications, radio is still the most pervasive, accessible and affordable mass medium available. Particularly in rural areas, it is often the only medium that can rapidly disseminate to large and remote audiences, critical information about emergencies, markets, weather, crops and livestock production, natural resource protection.

Rural Radio implies a two-way process, which calls for the active participation of the communities in the planning and production activities of the radio broadcasts. It is the expression of the community rather than a channel for the community, since it promotes the exchange of views, brings people closer together, stimulates information, and enhances the value of local knowledge.

FAO has been promoting rural radio for development since the 60's by providing support to member countries in terms of community mobilization, capacity building in all aspects of rural radio set-up and management, and networking.

The starting point of a rural radio project is a participatory needs assessment to evaluate, not only the material needs of the communities that are going to benefit from the project, but also of the perceptions, the expectations and commitments that community members are willing to invest in the initiative.

The Participatory Methodology of Rural Radio

Rural radio programmes are most effective when they are produced with the participation of the audience, in local languages and taking into account cultural traditions. Community participation is a fundamental characteristic of rural radio – live public shows, village debates and participation in the actual management of the radio station are just a few examples.

This approach empowers rural people to participate in the dialogue and decision-making processes that are essential for their own economic, social and cultural environment. It also allows them to play an active part in development activities.



Radio is a vital source of information for rural audiences. Radio Ntemo – Mbanza Ngungu, Democratic Republic of Congo



Through radio women can voice their opinions, express their concerns and share experiences. Radio Yangeni – Mansa, Zambia



Rural radio belongs to the community. Radio Ntemo – Mbanza Ngungu, Democratic Republic of Congo



Rural radio goes where the people are. Field radio recording in Mali

Our rural radio has to keep on otherwise we will lose our identity... Our radio speaks to us and about us.

Niamato, rural radio listener, Kati, Mali

"... Rural Radio has created a sort of feeling of local belonging and strengthened our ties with the local authorities and institutions..."

Micro finance officer, Kati, Mali

Radio provides a forum for rural people

In Chad, radio was used in a 1991-92 campaign to stop intentionally lit bushfires. These fires were traditionally used to clear agricultural land for planting. With degraded, fragile soils and the accidental spread to forest reserves, this age-old practice was no longer sustainable. Radio broadcasters were asked to encourage villagers to voice their opinions and propose solutions to the problem. What was the result? Within one year, forest fires were reduced by 90 percent, 22 villages had active bushfire control committees and protected 10 000 hectares of forest. A villager's story, recorded in a radio programme about bushfires: "My uncle once told me how a bushfire burnt his field: 'That bushfire was angry-- it charged like a herd of elephants, destroying everything! Even came near to our home!' I said, "Don't be scared. With the right words, a good hunter can stop a herd of charging elephants. We too can stop bushfires with the right words." "What words?", "Let's unite. If the entire village gets organized to fight bushfires you'll never be afraid of bushfires again!"

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www.fao.org/nr/dep/nrr_en.htm



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