

# Ag extension? Radio proves its worth again

## New participants exchange experiences and look ahead

The Syngenta Foundation has been working with radio stations in Kenya\* since 2015. The implementing partner is Kilimo Media International (KiMI\*\*). Our joint aim is to enable stations broadcasting in smaller local languages to make agricultural extension a standard part of their programming. KiMI Director Pamela Mburia recently ran a review meeting for the station staff and county extension officers who joined this initiative in 2018. We asked her about their experiences so far.



*Pamela Mburia addressing a radio listening group in Kitui*

**Syngenta Foundation:** *What was the thought behind this event?*

**Pamela Mburia:** The request to convene the meeting came from radio program staff and extension officers from the five counties in which we are currently working. They were very keen to share their experiences since initial training in January, and to learn from their peers.

*'Review meetings' often risk becoming 'talking-shops'. How did you avoid that?*

We focused strongly on practice, and got the participants to prepare well in advance! They all had to complete a questionnaire about their key accomplishments and challenges. The meeting then included both a field visit and a live show at one of the participating stations, where everybody played a part in developing a component of the one-hour live program. This naturally required careful preparation.

*What came out of the feedback session about the show?*

Everybody liked the lively mix of program elements. However, our partners are small stations, often with very few employees. Program variety takes up a lot of resources and expertise, which are generally a limitation for them. Stations can also find it hard to fit everything into 30-45 minutes of the typically available time. The time pressure mounts further for a very positive reason: smallholders call into the program a lot! Managing all this can be quite a juggling-act, as the stations had already discovered over the previous months. This is one reason we at Kilimo Media ensure close follow-up and coaching. We help the program producers improve their delivery.

*What else has this new group of station staff and extension officers learnt in the course of 2018?*

Well, we told them at the initial training workshop that smallholders would be very pleased to hear farm advice via radio – and they certainly are! It's clear to all that the farmers really listen, and put a lot of the tips into profitable practice. The stations and county agricultural offices now also understand why we emphasize so strongly that they must work closely together. The radio/extension collaboration guarantees delivery of appropriate and on-demand information to farmers.

*So is this second group essentially repeating the positive experiences of the first phase?*

Every station, extension office, audience and crop zone is different. But, yes, I'm delighted to say that, yet again, this group's experience is showing what a hugely valuable tool radio can be for disseminating farm advice. As is the case elsewhere in Kenya, local language radio is increasingly becoming smallholders' preferred source of ag information. However, our current radio group is also encountering challenges seen elsewhere.

*For example...?*

The best time to broadcast the programs is in the evening. However, nobody is in the field at night, and women agricultural experts or farmers don't like travelling to radio stations at night. This is also the case with some male experts, as they live quite far from the radio stations. An evening shift is also an extra burden for extension officers. So quite a lot of each program needs recording in advance. That puts pressure on station resources, and can mean a certain loss of liveliness on air. However, the extension officers are keenly aware that radio has greatly expanded their reach to farmers, and has enhanced their reputation among listeners.

*What are other challenges?*

Sometimes it can be hard to find enough ag experts who speak the relevant language, such as Borana or Massai. The modest equipment available is another hindrance. In some areas, radio could reach far more listeners with more powerful antennae. One of 'our' stations has started fundraising to buy a new one!

*You've now guided the stations through a first year of cooperation. What will be important aspects of the remaining two years?*

Radio employees come and go. So we have to be ready to train new ones when they arrive. We'll also be working with stations to further develop more sophisticated program formats, such as drama. Listening groups form a key pillar of success for radio extension. Kilimo Media will be helping those radio/extension teams that don't yet have such groups to establish some. Sections of the live radio program are recorded and given to community groups (whose members are usually farmers!) to listen to together, share experiences and ask the extension officer questions.

One crucial aspect is then the question of sustainability. Radio stations need to be able to earn money from their farm programs. So we'll be guiding them through the process of approaching local agro-dealers and other potential advertisers, for example. We'll also be continuing to emphasize to county officials how important their support is, and what excellent value for money radio extension represents for their agriculture staff.

\*<https://www.syngentafoundation.org/agriservices/whatwedo/radioextension>

\*\*<http://www.kilimomedia.or.ke/>

Here's what a German student found when he visited some of the stations in this group:

<https://www.syngentafoundation.org/news/recent-news/sometimes-it-all-runs-clockwork>