

Extending the power of extension

Kenyan radio project opens new routes to farm info

Our project devoted to *Agricultural Extension via Radio in Northern Kenya* provides farming information in local languages. Begun in June 2015, it aims to raise productivity in a region so far lacking major extension initiatives of this type. Initial results point to positive impact.

Radio vastly increases the reach of extension services in remote areas, at a very low cost per person informed. Our project works with four stations broadcasting in six languages across five counties. Kalya FM serves West Pokot and the wider North Rift in the Pokot language. Star FM covers Marsabit, Isiolo and Garissa, broadcasting in Rendille, Somali and Swahili. Serian FM run programs in Samburu, and Kenya Broadcasting Corporation (KBC) transmits locally in Rendille and Borana. Our implementing partner is Kilimo Media International* (KiMI), in collaboration with the Department of Agriculture, Livestock and Fisheries.

An important feature of the programming is smallholders' personal involvement, typically by calling in. "Interestingly, farmers call from way beyond the core counties", comments the Syngenta Foundation's project manager Rachel Temoi. "Star FM has registered calls from Somalia, Kalya has farmers from Uganda and Eldoret asking questions on the live shows, and KBC's Rendille and Borana experts get calls from eastern and western Kenya." The stations are receivable digitally over a wide area. KiMI will track program-reach as part of its monitoring and evaluation work.

Hearts and heads

"Successful extension is always a form of change management", says Paul Castle, the Syngenta Foundation's Communication Manager. "In northern Kenya, English or usually even Swahili just don't do the job. By providing information in local languages, we hope to reach farmers' hearts and heads." Paul's own research* has highlighted the value of radio and minority languages in extension. "The broadcasters in our project talk about farming the same way as the smallholders."

The project already seems to be making an impact. "Smallholders and other agricultural stakeholders in the five counties are enthusiastic", reports KiMI's Pamela Mburia. "In response to food security risks occasioned by climate change, the County of West Pokot is using radio to promote perennial fruit crops. The aim is to cushion farmers against potential crop losses and widen their sources of income".

Bananas, chickens and healthier goats

The Department of Agriculture, Livestock and Fisheries is also using the opportunity to promote adoption of tissue culture banana (TCB) technology. Kalya FM aired a program on banana establishment and management. Extension officers reinforced the messages with visits in the targeted areas. "The success in the last six months has been tremendous", says Senior Agricultural Officer Peter Kodwaran, the contact man for Kalya's agricultural programming. "After learning that TCB had higher yields and a shorter maturity period, and that they could benefit from guaranteed clean planting material, many farmers asked for the plantlets. This led to the establishment of 172 acres. We anticipate that the farmers will increase their income as result."

In West Pokot, farmers want to step up poultry production after listening to the broadcasts. Veronica Daimoi is one of them. She is excited about the chicken coop she has built, and is now starting a rearing

business with the first 50 chicks. Veronica plans gradually to increase her bird numbers, so as to benefit fully from the County's plans to establish a slaughterhouse – plans about which she learned through Kalya FM. She also shared all the radio news across her women's group.

In Marsabit, the programs have attracted the attention of the private sector and NGO's keen to expand their partnerships with farmers. That is likely to be well received and highly beneficial. "In the predominantly pastoralist communities of Rendille and Somali speakers, farmers are keen to embrace modern livestock management and reduce animal mortality rates", says Rachel Temoi. "One method promoted on the radio is cultivation and storage of fodder to counter lack of grazing during drought." One livestock keeper told KiMI that he had reduced deaths among his 400 goats from 200 to just five after listening to Star FM and putting questions to the radio guest, a livestock expert.

* www.kilimomedia.or.ke

**Here's Paul's essay on local language radio extension, written for Basel University's Certificate of African studies: www.syngentafoundation.org/_temp/Ag_Radio_&_Languages_Castle.pdf