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**Interactive formats encourage listeners to participate**

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### Notes to broadcaster

The aim of the Farm Radio Resource Packs is twofold: first, to help African farm radio broadcasters provide accurate, relevant knowledge to farmer-listeners. The second aim is to support broadcasters to create programs which give centre stage to the opinions, desires, decision-making processes, and voices of rural Africans. Interactive programs are one effective way to encourage this second objective.

Farm Radio International’s VOICE standards for farmer programs captures this objective. The “O” in VOICE stands for ***Opportunity*.** The programs provide farmers with the opportunity to speak and be heard on all matters. They are centred on encouraging smallholder farmers to name their concerns, discuss them, and organize to act on them. [*Editor’s note: see end of document for the full standards*]

This broadcaster info doc defines interactive programming, gives some examples of typical interactive formats, and provides eight examples of interactive programs currently or formerly aired on African stations. These diverse programs show the wide variety of reasons for broadcasting interactive programs, and the range of benefits that an interactive program can provide.

**What is an interactive program?**

Interactive programsare programs which involve or encourage two-way communication between a radio station and its listeners. This communication can be face-to face; it can be via phone, text messages, or letters; or it can be via Facebook and other online mechanisms. The two-way communication can be between a listener and a radio broadcaster, a listener and a politician, a listener and an extension agent, a listener and an NGO representative, or between two or more listeners. Interactive programs can be recorded in the studio or in the field, and involve conversations between two persons or many people.

Interactive radio allows listeners to have their voices and opinions heard on the radio and in their communities. It helps to ensure that the content of radio programs is driven by community needs and community voices. For a radio station, one big benefit of interactive programs is that they are an opportunity to get feedback on what’s important to a community. By hosting interactive programming, a station can get a better sense of what its listening audience wants and needs.

Interactive programs that give listeners an opportunity to hear their voices on air are also among the most popular of all radio programs. Phone-in programs and text-in programs are popular partly because people love to hear themselves – and people like themselves – talk. We are all curious to know what other people think and feel.

Of course, talk shows are not the only way to engage an audience. Other types of programs are also interactive, including: musical requests, free classified ads, on-air competitions, games, talent quests, appeals, and "question and answer" programs. Vox pops, field broadcasts, and panel discussions can also qualify as interactive programs.

Interactive programs are participatory because they empower listeners to name their own problems and decide on their own goals, in the process of making their own decisions. Interactive programs can provide a forum for voicing community grievances and hopes, for celebrating community successes, and for addressing serious deep-rooted issues.

For example, a producer could identify a subject that is of concern for many in the community, then record people’s complaints and grievances in their own homes or workplaces. The recording is played back to the mayor or other responsible authority. The peoples’ complaint and the administrator's response are broadcast on a program that presents both sides of the issue, and listeners are invited to phone in or send SMS.

Another program might be a recording of a radio listening group which makes its own comments about a particular program. For example, from 1998-2001 there was a partnership between Panos, the Zambian national broadcaster and thirteen new rural women's clubs. The clubs met weekly to listen to radio programs and discuss development issues. They recorded their discussions, which were sent to a producer. The producer approach a relevant official, who was asked to respond to the issues raised by the club by providing information and, if possible, by making a commitment to practical action. The recording and response were edited together and broadcast weekly for the clubs to listen to and discuss. The producer followed up with respondents and clubs to ensure that commitments were fulfilled and clubs could access promised resources.

**One big question**

Ok, you might say. Interactive programs *sound* wonderful. But, for example, do phone-in shows actually achieve anything beyond increasing public debate? Do they actually get things accomplished?

In many cases they do. Here’s one example. In September 2010, a text message sent to the *Morning Show* on Joy FM in Accra, Ghana raised the issue of black fly infestation at a drinking water source in a rural community. The local Assemblyman had already tried without success to draw the attention of health authorities to the problem. Public discussions and careful follow-up by Joy FM eventually led to the problem being addressed by offering screening and medication to those affected, and provision of drinking water to the community (See <http://edition.myjoyonline.com/pages/news/201012/57189.php>)

One of the keys to this success is the fact that JOY FM had built and earned the trust of its listeners, and had cultivated relationships with civic officials over a long period of time. The station’s persistence and integrity over a long period of time resulted in … results!

**What interactive sounds like: Formats for interactive radio**

There are many reasons why radio stations broadcast interactive programs, and there are many kinds of interactive programs. Types of interactive programs include:

* Phone-ins, text-ins, write-ins (letters)
* Panel discussions – in studio or on location
* Town hall meetings
* Field broadcasts

Here are some popular ways to produce interactive programming:

* Invite an extension agent or other subject matter expert and have listeners call in about the subject
* Invite a local or regional or national politician to explain or take feedback on local government policies
* Host a panel discussion on agricultural topics
* Give a local listener group a recorder and have group members record their feedback on a particular program or a particular community issue. Use the recording on-air. (This can help educate the station about community priorities, needs and preferences.)

**Eight interactive programs**

The following eight examples show the many reasons that radio stations and development organizations produce interactive programs, and many of the benefits of interactive programs.

1. **Station:** Mega FM (Gulu, Uganda)

**Name of program:** *Kabake*

**Reason for initiating program:**

* To promote free debates on issues affecting communities in northern Uganda, including resettlement and social and political development
* To improve the lives of vulnerable people through identifying and discussing local development needs and solutions
* To encourage reintegration and peaceful co-existence among people formerly in IDP (Internally Displaced Person) camps

**Format:** Debates pre-recorded in villages

**Type of interactivity:** On-location debates

**Description:** In the Acholi language, *Kabake* is defined as a forum in which community members come together to discuss their problems and find shared solutions. *Kabake* provides citizens in both urban and rural areas an opportunity to discuss political and social topics in a group. A team of moderators and technical staff travel to even the most remote communities to record the debates. The program has been broadcast every Sunday for 90 minutes since 2003.

**Outcome:** A 2010 evaluation showed that the program is very popular. Local leaders take community views and complaints raised in the program seriously. *Kabake* has helped the community hold local leaders and civil society organizations to account. Through the debates and broadcasts, communities have organized themselves to engage in projects, including resettlement and peaceful co-existence. The debates are said to fill a communication and accountability gap related to government and democracy in the region.

**For more information:** Konrad Adenaeur Stiftung: *Kabake! Interactive radio at grassroots level in Uganda*. <http://www.kas.de/uganda/en/publications/23197/>

1. **Station:** CBS (Kampala, Uganda)

**Name of program:** *Nekolera Gyange (I Run My Own Business)*

**Reason for initiating program:** To provide marginalized business people (micro- and small businesses, usually self-employed and part of the “informal economy”) with a voice to influence their working environment and policy decisions, a platform for discussion, and a channel to receive information that is important to the survival of their businesses.

**Format:** The magazine format includes business news, talk shows, interviews with small business owners, technical experts and policy makers; and a live call-in. Seventy to eighty per cent of airtime engages listeners in interviews, dialogue and other kinds of interaction. There are competitions to promote business development, an opportunity for businesses who want to purchase from small and micro-businesses to announce their tenders free of charge, and follow-ups the program producers on complaints received by owners of small businesses.

**Type of interactivity:** Phone-in.

**Description:** Broadcast for the first time in October 1999. The International Labour Organization’sIn Focus Programme on Boosting Employment through Small Enterprise Development (SEED) provides technical support to CBS to establish the programs on a commercially viable basis, thus ensuring that the programs can grow and develop without ongoing public finance. Program staff research an issue using investigative journalism techniques, then interview small enterprise owners, technical experts and government authorities on location. Interviews are mixed and edited with the presenter's narrative to form a complete feature. Often, features are linked with a live talk-show, including representatives from all three groups. Then, staff organize feedback opportunities, either with live call-in during the feedback section of the program, or through calls, mail and fax write-in after the show. Finally, the team follows up on program issues to identify changes that may have taken place. This story-line spans several shows.

**Outcome:** An evaluation of the program showed that 40% of owners of micro- and small enterprises are regular listeners. Nine of the ten businesses featured on the program reported benefits to their business as a result of being in the program. Half of featured businesses have increased sales and two (20%) had hired additional employees. Five of six policy makers who had appeared on the program reported that their attitudes and policies had changed as a result of the program. One said that he had received many calls after his radio appearance complaining about tax officials harassing traders. The official raised the issue with the Uganda Revenue Authority and the harassment stopped. Qualitative evidence suggests that the most significant impacts of the program included:

* Demonstrating the commercial, economic and political importance of the small business sector to commercial advertisers and policy makers
* Providing small business owners with a public voice and linking them to the developing political system, thereby contributing to the development of Ugandan civil society and democracy
* Demonstrating that magazine programs with an interactive formats can be effective and commercially successful

**For more information:** International Labour Organization, 2002. *An Information Revolution for Small Enterprise in Africa: Experience in Interactive Radio Formats in Africa*. Download at <http://www.ilo.org/empent/Publications/WCMS_117709/lang--en/index.htm>

1. **Station:** Radio Mang’elete (southeastern Kenya)

**Name of programs:** *Women and Development*, and *Cake Share*

**Reason for initiating program:** To enable rural women to speak out about their needs, experiences and opinions. To increase the status and involvement of women in community radio, and to give community radio listeners, especially women, a voice with which to respond to programming, and to participate in the creation of program content.

**Format:** *Women and development* includes interviews with women in women’s groups, plus interviews with other women – for example, a program on women’s traditional and legal rights interviewed women who work with gender-based NGOs, or were running for local office. *Cake Share* is a community debate program.

**Type of interactivity:** Women give their feedback on topics that interest them to the station via the AIR device (see below). Their words are featured in both programs.

**Description:** As part of a university research project funded in part by Microsoft, women in local women’s groups were given a hand-held device to record voice feedback with a technology called Advancement through Interactive Radio or AIR. Their messages were received at the station. (The device is designed NOT to look like a mobile phone because women stated that such a device would likely be taken by their husbands and sold.) Women’s groups have created content for broadcast, including group interviews, radio dramas, group-led conversations, and the debate show. Radio plays have focused on issues such as alcohol abuse, violence against women, money management, and on traditional knowledge held by individual women’s groups, such as planting trees and raising bees. Other topics include women’s group accomplishments, gender roles, church, HIV and AIDS, women’s rights, education, land rights, treatment of widows, sexism and culture. The issues that women discussed in the *Women and Development* program led to the creation of a radio debate program called *Cake Share*, in which both men and women debate topics of local concern. One episode debated the merits of traditional punishments for marital fidelity. Another discussed younger men having sex with older women.

**Outcome:** Impact assessments found that AIR-augmented radio provides a way to legitimize women’s concerns and allow them to be “heard” by men, which has led to shifting gender relations within communities. The project has shown that women are willing to discuss issues such as HIV and AIDS, prostitution, witchcraft, migration, and education, and are proactive about putting their voices and names on the airwaves, in part because they see community radio as the “place for development.” Programs on health information and domestic violence prevention have led to changes in the community, as has a program which gave information on a poisoned maize scare that was contained because of broadcasts regarding the potential danger. Both debate programs aired to date have resulted in more than fifty mobile calls and SMS messages to the station, and at least two dozen letters. Both young and older women have participated.

**For more information:** S. Revi Sterling. Advancement through Interactive Radio. Power Point presentation. <http://research.microsoft.com/en-us/events/indiasummerschool2010/sterling-msri_air.pdf>

Revi Sterling, 2010. 89.1FM: The Place for Development: Power shifts and participatory spaces in ICTD. *The Journal of Community Informatics*. Volume 6, No. 1, 2010. <http://ci-journal.net/index.php/ciej/article/view/637/461>

1. **Station:** Community radios broadcasting in French, Swahili and Lingala in the Ituri region of northeastern DRC; in Goma and Kasugho in North Kivu Province, DRC, in Bangui, Central African Republic, and in Berberati, Bouar, and Bambari, Central African Republic. (This project closed in July 2011.)

**Name of programs:** The Interactive Radio for Justice project included the following programs:

*Interactive Radio for Justice Base Series*

*Debating for Justice*

*A Child: Yesterday in the Bush, Today part of the Community*

*Our Reconciliation*

*Our Dialogue for Peace and Justice*

*On the Track of Justice*

**Reason for initiating program:** To encourage dialogue between people and national / international authorities in regions where the International Criminal Court (ICC) is investigating crimes such as genocide and war crimes. The representatives of these authorities who participate in dialogues are those responsible for making legal decisions on the issues.

**Format:** *Interactive Radio for Justice* *Base Series* is a program in which interviewers ask ICC officials questions sent in by audience members. *Debating for Justice* invites international and national officials, local leaders, and members of civil society organizations to the studio to debate questions that have been posed by many listeners. In *Our Dialogue for Peace and Justice*, an international justice authority talks with community leaders in places where international criminal investigations are taking place.

**Type of interactivity:** Responses to listeners’ questions; panel discussions.

**Outcome:** A 2011 assessment found that the project’s main strength was in changing listeners’ knowledge and beliefs. For example, listeners showed increased knowledgeof the ICC and national and judicial authorities and their respective roles. Also, an increased number of community members believed that ICC officials and national authorities understand their needs. A very high percentage of listening group members reported increased awareness of their ability to effect positive change. The project showed progress in integrating the voices and views of a diversity of individuals by encouraging them to speak out and understand that their opinions and questions have value.

**For more information:** Interactive Radio for Justice website at <http://www.irfj.org/>

1. **Stations:** Mishapi Voice TV (Goma, DRC); Radio Maendeleo (Bukavu, DRC), RTG@ (Kinshasa, DRC); Contact FM (Kigali, Rwanda), Radio Salus (Butare, Rwanda); Radio Isanganiro (Bujumbura, Burundi)

**Name of program:** *Génération Grands Lacs*

**Reason for initiating program:** Produced by Search for Common Ground, *Génération Grands Lacs* is designed to provide a space for university students from Rwanda, Burundi and the DRC to communicate with each other, to bridge the divides between them, and bring messages of peace in situations of unrest and violence like those currently experienced in the Eastern DRC and across the Great Lakes region.

**Format:** Sixty-minute live phone-in talk show for youth recorded live every Saturday. The program includes invited studio guests, pre-recorded interviews, vox pops, music, and audience participation through phone, email, SMS and Facebook. Young people call in, debate and share their viewpoints.

**Type of interactivity:** Phone in, text in, email and Facebook.

**Description:** Each week, the production of *Génération Grands Lacs* rotates between DRC, Rwanda and Burundi and between a team of journalists from across the region. The program provides young people with an opportunity to talk, listen, and learn about the issues and challenges facing their region. Issues addressed include gender, violence, identity, youth participation in political life, and issues of ethnicity and nationality.

**Outcome:** There is very high listenership among university students in Rwanda, Burundi, and DRC, and the program reaches 30-60% of non-university youth. An impact assessment showed: a strong correlation between listenership and reduced prejudices and positive attitudes; that the program leads to increased tolerance and reduction of negative attitudes; that the program equips youth to constructively address conflicts. The assessment stated that, given the recent resurgence of violence in the region, the show plays a crucial role in transmitting messages of peace and tolerance and providing a space for dialogue.

### For more information: Radio for Peacebuilding Africa. *Generation grands lacs: using media to bridge differences and find common ground*. <http://www.radiopeaceafrica.org/index.cfm?lang=en&context_id=22&context=features&action=oneFeature&feature_id=1>

### Search for Common Ground. *Generation Grands Lacs. Weekly Dialogues for Peace, Live on the Radio*. <http://www.sfcg.org/programmes/drcongo/pdf/generation_grands_lacs.pdf>

1. **Station:** Malawi Broadcasting Corporation (MBC) Radio One (nationwide public broadcaster)

**Name of programs:** *Kanthu n’khama*

**Reason for initiating program:** Topromote national dialogue around development issues.

**Format:** A 30-minute magazine program broadcast every Saturday afternoon at 2 o’clock.

**Type of interactivity:** Radio listening clubs develop a program based on their concerns (called a “village voice”), then dialogue with a relevant service provider (the “dialogue”), and produce a program based on the village voice and the dialogue.

**Description:** *Kanthu n’khama* consists of a five minute review of the previous week’s program, followed by ten minutes of a village voice from communities, drama excerpts performed by radio listening clubs, and then fifteen minutes of action-oriented responses from service providers.

Producing *Kanthu n’khama* involves two steps: First, radio listening clubs (RLCs) record a discussion in which they analyze a local problem and map out how they think it should be solved. This recording is known as *mawu* (village voice). Village voices are expressed through drama, traditional songs, poetry and discussions. Second, the village voice is taken to a service provider, who listens to the recording and organizes a discussion with the community on the issues raised. A second discussion – between the RLC and service provider – is recorded as a “dialogue.” By the end of the dialogue, an action plan has been developed and the responsibilities of both the listening club and the service provider are clearly stated. The dialogue is largely recorded and facilitated by listening club members. The MBC producer polishes the program technically, writes the script, does a voice over, and mixes the program segments. Dialogues have taken place between RLCs and policy makers and front line staff. Service providers have included public, private sector and civil society organizations.

**Outcome:** The program has empowered communities to summon high public officers such as cabinet ministers to the village to account for decisions or services provided by their ministries. In Mulanje district, for example, a Ministry of Health surveillance assistant was asked to vacate a building which the community had constructed as an under-five clinic but which the surveillance assistant had temporarily occupied for two years after his house was swept away by floods. The official had never bothered to get his own accommodation. The community summoned the official and demanded that he pay them rental fees in arrears since he had been claiming his housing allowance despite not paying for his accommodation.

Being field-generated, *Kanthu n’khama*promotes a sense of ownership of the national airwaves by giving communities the ability to determine program content. The day and time of broadcast was chosen by the communities.

**For more information:** Linje Manyozo, 2007. Method and practice in participatory radio. Ecquid Novi: African Journalism Studies, 28 (1 & 2): 11-29.

Susan Sisya, *Campaign for Social Change through Kanthu-N’khama*. <http://www.freewebs.com/linjem/kuchezanewsletter.htm>

1. **Stations:** Sanyu FM (Kampala, Uganda), Radio WA (Lira, Uganda), Savior FM (Amuria district, Uganda), Delta FM (Soroti, Uganda), Radio Pacis (Arua, Uganda), Radio Pacis (Gulu, Uganda)

**Name of programs:** Various talk shows enhanced by special software

**Reason for initiating program/project:** To involve local communities in reporting problems with public services, and provide them with a platform to participate and discuss policy issues. To promote transparency, awareness and accountability. To give listeners a sense of ownership of the provision of public services.

**Format:** Text-in, plus interviews with local leaders based on listener text feedback.

**Type of interactivity:** Text-in.

**Description:** Trac FM (an NGO) provides radio stations with software to operate online polls. Listeners send in reports or opinions on topics suggested by the broadcaster in English or local languages by free SMS. Radio presenters receive an instant and clear graphic overview of poll results on their computer monitors which they feed back to listeners during talk shows. Stations invite local leaders to comment on collected data and Trac FM makes sure data reaches responsible authorities.

**Outcome:** Outcome assessment in process.Trac FM suggests that the shows give a voice to ordinary Ugandans who have no other way of speaking out.

**For more information:** Voice of America, February 3, 2012. *Innovative Radio Talk Show Gives Ugandans a Public Voice*. <http://www.voanews.com/content/innovative-radio-talk-shows-give-ugandans-a-public-voice-138712619/159555.html>

TRAC FM website at <http://www.trac.pro/>

TRAC FM monitoring service delivery. YouTube video at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lx_BivgFyww>

1. **Stations:** Peace FM (Accra region, Ghana); Joy FM (Accra region)

**Name of programs:** *Wo haw ne sen* (Akan language); *Feedback* (English – no longer on air)

**Reason for initiating program:** To provide airtime for listeners to call in about problems they encounter with services (private or public) in Accra.

**Format:** Phone-in, text-in (Radio Peace only), plus interviews with local leaders based on feedback.

**Type of interactivity:** Listeners call in or text in

**Description:** Listeners call or text in with complaints about public or private services. Stations follow up on complaints and try to ensure that the relevant institutions respond or resolve the problems where necessary. Stations then announce on-air whether the problem has been resolved. *Feedback* invited officials to the studio to answer calls and questions from the public. *Wo haw ne* has a permanent in-studio panel, consisting of a legal and medical practitioner and a computer expert. The panel provides answers and solutions to calls about health, legal and other matters.

**Outcome:** Radio presenters’ responses to complaints are carefully crafted, based on thorough investigations and official responses from the most appropriate source. Presenters investigate complaints and confirm that they are genuine. For example, one presenter received a call from a street hawker who claimed that city council employees were maltreating hawkers and stealing their wares under the guise of keeping them off pavements. To follow up, the presenter disguised herself as a hawker and joined other hawkers on the pavement. Although she did not experience what the hawker had complained about, she managed to get evidence on it and carried the issue forward.

Joy FM and Peace FM were at the time the most listened-to and trusted radio stations in Accra. Of those who listened to Peace FM, almost six in 10 listen to *Wo haw ne sen,* while half of Joy FM listeners listened to *Feedback* when it was on the air. For *Feedback*, 50-60% of problems raised by listeners from 2005-2008 were resolved, meaning that the problem was investigated by the team, key contacts in institutions made and followed up on, and final feedback given live on-air that the problem had been resolved.

**For more information:** Edem E. Selormey, 2012. *Rethinking citizen voice: The case of radio call-ins in Accra, Ghana*. <http://www.institutions-africa.org/filestream/20120814-rethinking-citizen-voice-the-case-of-radio-call-ins-in-accra-ghana>

**Liability and safety issues for interactive programs**

It’s particularly important when you’re broadcasting interactive programming to be familiar with and to follow your country’s laws on libel, slander and, more generally, what is considered acceptable journalistic practice. Familiarize yourself with the relevant laws and regulations. Most countries have an official media council which monitors the media and penalizes stations and individuals who break laws, regulations and practices.

Some governments and some individuals or groups may also try to punish (with extrajudicial measures such as violence and/or threats) those who broadcast content they don’t like. While broadcasters should uphold the right to free speech within the confines of national law, it’s vitally important for broadcasters to act with common sense and a strong commitment to personal safety.

**Further resources**

DW Academie: 10 tips on how to be a good host: <http://blogs.dw-akademie.de/africa/?p=1313>

DW Academie: Vox Pop: What’s good and bad about this journalistic format. <http://blogs.dw-akademie.de/asia/2012/05/18/vox-pop-whats-good-and-bad-about-this-journalistic-format/>

PANOS Eastern Africa. Getting it Right: A Journalist’s Guide to Conducting Community Radio Debate. 2011. <http://www.panosea.org/resources/publications/RRD%20Debate%20Guide%20full%20Doc%20A5.pdf>

<http://radio.frontlinesms.com/2012/08/frontlinesmsradio-adds-an-exciting-tool-to-the-mix-at-rite-fm-ghana/>

**Farm Radio International's VOICE standards for farmer programs**

Farm Radio International, with the help of many farm broadcasters across sub-Saharan Africa, has identified important characteristics that should be reflected in radio programming that serves smallholder farmers. The characteristics are summed up in the acronym "VOICE." *The VOICE Standards are a work in progress and are regularly revised in light of new learnings.*

V – The programs value smallholder farmers, both women and men. They respect farmers for their hard work producing food for their families and the markets, often in the face of major challenges. They reach out to farmers to understand their situation, and are dedicated to supporting them in their farming work and in their efforts to improve rural life.

O – The programs provide farmers with the opportunity to speak and be heard on all matters. They are centred on encouraging smallholder farmers to name their concerns, discuss them, and organize to act on them.

I – The programs provide farmers with the information they need, when they need it.

C – The programs are broadcast consistently and conveniently, on a reliable, regular basis, at least weekly, at a time when farmers can listen.

## E – The programs are entertaining and attract large number of farmers. There is no excuse for boring farm radio programs!

## Acknowledgements

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