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VIDEOS ON THE RADIO

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Farm Radio Trust in Malawi is a champion of radio for agricultural extension. Established in 2009 after a research project by Farm Radio International, Farm Radio Trust is an independent NGO. FRT uses radio and other information and communications technologies (ICTs) to increase smallholder farmers' access to agricultural information.

Farm Radio Trust reaches out to thousands of rural farmers in Malawi through weekly radio broadcasts on partner radio stations (national, community and private stations), sharing stories about farming. Farmers like radio because it makes education locally available to them.

Farmers in Malawi face challenges ranging from food shortages to climate change. It is hard to get information because there are few extension workers. Newspapers and internet are penetrating rural communities, but slowly, because few villagers can read. If farmers have no extension agent and cannot read, they can still get agricultural information on the radio.

Farm Radio Trust helps broadcasters to design and produce radio broadcasts that meet farmers' needs. But making new content is difficult and takes time. Under-staffed rural radio stations struggle to make a lively radio programme based on a written script, if that is the only aid at hand.

Constant thought and innovation in agricultural radio programming is required to maintain quality radio

programmes and a loyal audience. So Farm Radio trains broadcasters to combine radio with other interactive ICT platforms, such as mobile phones and farmer-training videos.

With Access Agriculture, agricultural videos are gradually becoming available in Malawi. Farm Radio Trust distributes videos in DVD packs for free to smallholder farmers, and through its partner radios. However, the challenge for farmers is to find a way to watch the videos with no TV, DVD players, or electricity. A few people who do own the right equipment have established video show rooms as businesses.

In 2015, Farm Radio Trust therefore saw an opportunity to raise awareness on farmer-to-farmer videos from Access Agriculture. Through the project, Scaling up Radio and ICT in Enhancing Extension Delivery (SRIEED), funded by the government of Flanders, Farm Radio Trust turned existing radio-listening clubs into video-viewing clubs and information hubs, where farmers can meet regularly to discuss and share ideas about farming.

A hub comprises at least 10 members and is coordinated by a community radio station. Farm Radio Trust has supported and trained the farmers to use digital equipment such as solar radios, MP3 voice recorders and smart phones to enable them to access information from a variety of platforms. The smart phones used by the farmers' hubs had



Rural radio broadcasters learn from training videos to make interesting radio programmes.

pre-loaded farmer training videos in Chichewa from Access Agriculture.

Ten out of the 60 hubs across seven districts have received smart phones with training videos uploaded. With the help of community radio staff, Farm Radio facilitated briefing sessions with extension workers and farmer representatives to show them how to use the devices.

During the briefings, training videos were shown to the farmers to give them the chance to give feedback on them. Farmers were compelled by seeing fellow farmers in the videos narrating their stories of success in farming.

Farmers welcomed the development of video as a new mode of receiving extension apart from using radio. “I have always expected agricultural extension officers to be experts in all my farming activities, but it is not possible. Now with a video I think I can learn more on my own”, said Master Englesi during the training video briefing in Mangochi.

Radio stations have helped promote the distribution of videos on DVDs as well as encouraging farmers to watch and share them with others through mobile phones.

Nkhotakota Community Radio Station also makes a link between radio and video programmes. Presenters carry out research by visiting farmers and asking them what they want to hear on the radio. They then show the farmers a training video to put them at ease before interviewing them on the topic.

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If a relevant video already exists in Chichewa, the audio track of the video is then combined with feedback from the farmers in the field to make an appealing radio programme.

With such knowledge on information needs, broadcasters help decide which videos should be given to a specific group depending on farming practices. They also use the voices extracted from farmer videos or downloaded from the Access Agriculture website and include them in their programmes to promote the videos.

They also direct farmers to where they can access the DVDs especially by sharing the locations of farmers’ hubs. The radio station monitors how farmers use and benefit from the training videos.

Radio creates imagination, but words and pictures combined build a lasting memory.

Matilda Gwetsa is the lead farmer in Chipwatu Listener Club and she safeguards the radio and mobile phone handed to the hub by Farm Radio Trust. “Videos have a long-lasting impact in my mind because I can hear and see how it is done and thereafter try it on my own,” she says.

Gwetsa facilitates discussions among the group, where the farmers learn how to put the messages accessed through radio broadcasts and videos into practice.

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