
FIRST STEP ON THE ROAD

Karen Hampson and Kevin Perkins



Farm Radio International was invited by FAO to contribute content to an online course on experience capitalization, and later by CTA to attend the Inception Meeting of its project. Recognising the value of this approach – for improving relationships, for detailing gaps or successes, and for supporting innovation and learning – we decided to introduce it to some of our larger projects.

Cover Nelson Kawawa of Radio Citizen interviewing Magret, a mango farmer in Kenya

Right New information helps preparing healthier meals (Photo: Simon Scott)

In 2007, the launch of the African Farm Radio Research Initiative (AFRRI), funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, sparked a major change in the work of Farm Radio International. We grew in size, ambition, and reach. We opened offices in five African countries, developed new partners and implemented an action research project that sought to capture hard evidence – for the first time – of the extent to which small-scale farmers are affected by radio campaigns that aim to help them make productive changes on their farms. The results, reported in 2011, were extremely positive. Farmers throughout the areas covered by a broadcasters' signal could be expected to listen in large numbers (66% of potential listeners), learn from what they heard, and introduce the practice featured in the radio campaign (21% of listeners, on average). The results encouraged us to expand our operations as an organisation and move proactively into promoting the use of interactive radio as an efficient and effective means for communicating, sharing good practices and delivering a range of development outcomes at scale. As an international organisation, we began to develop long-term strategies and an institutional framework for consolidation, growth and development. In particular, we offered development partners our specialized approach to using interactive radio to help bring improved practices to scale.

Our success in attracting grants or sub-grants from development partners for interactive radio project was partly due to the strength of the evidence generated through AFRRI, and also through the contacts made during the research phase. FRI's interactive radio projects are run much like typical development projects, with an emphasis on participatory planning and inclusion (of target listeners, radio stations, local government and extension workers, relevant women's and farmers groups, local NGOs, etc.), at each stage of the project cycle. From the beginning, we understood the importance of monitoring, evaluation and generating evidence – not only to improve our results and impact on the audiences, but also to generate data and evidence to push us forward as an organisation, and constantly seek new and better approaches.





As such, every FRI project includes a number of evaluation methods and activities – formative research, mid-project reviews featuring community visits, group discussions, polls over the airwaves, an end-of-project summative evaluation (with community and radio station partners), and a full outcome evaluation based on a household survey of a randomly selected, statistically significant sample of potential listeners. In this way, each project adds to the body of evidence for the effectiveness of radio in rural development, and specifically for increasing awareness and adoption of agricultural practices in Sub-Saharan Africa. The evidence to date was recently summarised in a journal paper: Hudson, H.E., *et al.*, 2017, *Using radio and interactive ICTs to improve food security among smallholder farmers in Sub-Saharan Africa*.

FRI's early impact projects were largely based around the Participatory Radio Campaign approach that was developed and tested during AFRRI. As we evaluated our projects, and spoke with a range of partners and funders, we gained greater insights into how listeners

use radio, and we saw that there was room for other types of radio formats and approaches, aimed at different objectives and audiences. Some of the types we developed were radio dramas with follow-up discussion and phone-in shows, a Radio MarketPlace, cooking shows, and formats for weekly interactive farmer programmes (among others) through a cycle of iterative learning. While the outcomes of these approaches were evaluated through qualitative and quantitative means, we wanted to understand more about the process involved – we were getting good results, but why and how? What were the factors for success? How could we replicate them? If we could understand the details around causes for success (or where we fell short) we could further develop our approaches, and improve results for both listeners and partners.

The field of digital communication for development is ever-changing. Internet and mobile phone access in rural communities in sub-Saharan Africa increases almost daily, and the range of options for interacting

*Above Broadcaster prepares programme, Tanzania
(Photo: Simon Scott)*

*Right Radio-ICT
workshop, Tanzania*

and sharing information grows – smartphones, apps, online courses, and communication tools such as WhatsApp present many opportunities for creativity. Almost inevitably, these devices and applications are heralded as the “death knell” for radio. In fact, the opposite has been the case, with new communication technologies making radio better, more cost-effective, more interactive and demand-driven, and more popular than before. Because of the transformative potential of new technology for radio, we invest considerable time and resources in research and innovation – finding ways to strengthen radio with digital tools. FRI also built on the investments it made through AFRI in measuring and sharing knowledge about best practices in and impact of interactive radio. In 2014 it established a Knowledge Management Team with the mandate to evaluate the results of projects, capture and share learnings, and make sure our work is shaped by evidence from other research and development initiatives.

Around the same time, FRI was invited by FAO to contribute content to an online course in experience capitalization (EC) by bringing examples of how to use radio, and sharing our experiences in documentation and reflection up to that time. A short time later, CTA and partners began to implement a pioneering project promoting this approach among development-focused organisations. CTA invited FRI to attend the Inception Meeting and join the Community of Practice and wider network. The EC approach and the network of partners we met through these events inspired us to introduce experience capitalization at the closing phase of two specific partnership-based projects in Uganda. In both cases, the FRI staff member that contributed to and participated in the EC course and CTA workshops briefed FRI’s in-country team in Uganda, and co-facilitated short

reflection workshops with all partners involved in the projects, including the radio stations that broadcast the programmes. Both capitalization processes led to and informed the development of a second project phase. The reflection workshops also strengthened the relationships between all project partners, and resolved tensions which formed during project implementation, largely due to poor communication.

Once we saw the value of the EC process – for improving relationships, for detailing gaps or successes in the project process, and for supporting innovation and learning – we decided to introduce it to some of our larger projects in other countries. Inspired in part by the EC approach, FRI’s Knowledge Management Team has introduced its own internal Insight Reports, through which project teams share simple, yet key insights about their work. Insight Reports answer questions like: What did they learn during a project? What tips can they share with the rest of the organisation for everyone’s benefit? Did they try something new for FRI and how did it go?



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In 2017, IUCN's SUSTAIN-Africa project in Tanzania put out a call for partners who could support the sharing of useful farmer-tested practices, learnings and technologies among their primary project groups, but also reach out and share with farmers beyond the project area. IUCN, the Africa Wildlife Foundation, FRI and CTA worked together in a unique EC+radio project to analyse and document a selected number of Inclusive Green Growth (IGG) practices from the SUSTAIN

programme, which were being used by farmers, relevant, interesting and easy to use. Together with two local radio stations, FRI transformed the written good practices into radio programmes and shared the practices and learnings – on beehive fencing, clean seed cane multiplication and cocoa nursery management practices – through interactive radio, thereby promoting widespread sustainable land and water use techniques to millions of listeners in the Kilombero valley.

Project summary

Project name	Experience Capitalization for analyzing, documenting and sharing SUSTAIN Africa learnings – EC4S
Partner(s)	AWF – African Wildlife Foundation, CTA – Technical Centre for Agricultural and Rural Cooperation ACP-EU
Funder(s)	IUCN
Location	To establish the proof of concept at the apex unit of operation
Date	2017–2018
Radio station(s)	Pambazuko FM Abood FM

Key results

Coverage	Broadcast area reaches 3,500,000 rural working-age audience
Stations	Two radio stations, 20 new interactive radio programmes aired in total (plus repeats)
Registered listeners	7,740 farmers



Above Members of a community listening group in Uganda

This year, 2019, FRI is developing its next five-year strategy, which we will begin implementing in 2020. As part of, and to support our intentions around innovation and learning, knowledge management and increased use of radio as a tool for rural development audiences, FRI has decided to institutionalise EC as part of its new plan. This is the first step on the road to formal institutionalization. It will be a process of testing, reflection and learning as we expand its use in the organisation. We will develop an in-house EC toolkit, incorporate EC in new proposal budgets and use it as part of the evaluation process in large ongoing projects. It is an exciting new phase and we are counting on the support of the wider EC community as we move forward!



Karen Hampson works as Senior Manager, Program Development, at Farm Radio International. She supports its organisational and programme strategy and builds partnerships with international organisations and research centres to use radio and ICT-enabled approaches for reaching and engaging with farmers.

E-mail: khampson@farmradio.org



Kevin Perkins has been working in the field of international and community development for 30 years. He joined Farm Radio International as the Executive Director in May 2006.

E-mail: kperkins@farmradio.org

This is one of the results of the process started by the "Capitalization of Experiences for Greater Impact in Rural Development" project, implemented by CTA, FAO and IICA and supported by IFAD.
<http://experience-capitalization.cta.int>

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