

# Using radio to share farmers' adaptation strategies

*Farm Radio International recently held a script-writing competition on the topic of adapting to climate change. Working together with different partners, the fifteen winners' scripts were distributed to over 500 radio organisations across sub-Saharan Africa. These are now being broadcast, bringing accurate and engaging information about climate change and adaptation strategies to rural farmers all over Africa.*

**Blythe McKay**

Only when farmers can understand the negative effects of climate change and its impacts can they prepare for and adapt to them. While many farmers are already coping with varying climatic conditions, the weather is becoming less predictable, and some of their strategies may no longer work. Effective communication approaches are critical to help farmers adapt to climate change.

Radio is an effective way of reaching small-scale farmers throughout Africa, where rural farmers are among the most vulnerable to climate change. The challenge for radio broadcasters is to give relevant climate change messages and to ensure that their audience can understand them. Radio programmes can encourage



Photo: Blythe McKay

*Extract from script by Kwabena Agyei, from Classic FM, Techiman, Ghana*

**"Mangoes to the rescue:  
A local response to climate change"**

**Mr. Agyei Boahen:** *Hi, you two. How is life treating you?*

**Benedict and Joyce:** *(together) Fine, Nana! Benedict: We're just worried about the rapid changes we are witnessing with the weather and the environment.*

**Nana Boahen:** *Sure, I am worried too. Erratic rainfall patterns, too much heat, disappearance of the forest cover with its animals and plants, drying up of streams and rivers, loss of soil fertility and more erosion – these all lead to low crop yields. It wasn't like this when I started farming forty years ago.*

**Joyce:** *Hmmm! Then farming was not as costly as today.*

**Nana Boahen:** *True. But I have noticed something in one of my farms that I think can be tried and replicated elsewhere. Obviously, it is not a one-stop answer to global warming, but it can help as a local initiative.*

**Benedict:** *What is it?*

**Nana Boahen:** *About six years ago I planted some maize and garden eggs in a portion of my farm where I have 10 mango trees, spaced about 50 metres apart and covering a large area. I noticed that the leaves of the other plants were greener and bore bigger fruits.*

communities to assess local problems and identify local solutions, while also providing listeners with other useful information such as weather forecasts.

Plenty of research in Africa focuses on testing methods for farmers to adapt to climate change. Some research looks at the traditional approaches farmers have relied on for centuries, while other projects test new methods. The thousands of radio organisations across Africa can play an important role in publicising research results and transforming them into programmes that their audiences can understand and use. Also, by interviewing local farmers, radio organisations can pass on information about how different communities adapt to droughts, improve soil fertility, or select which crops to grow.

## Scriptwriting competition

To encourage African radio broadcasters and producers to research and write innovative radio scripts about farmers' strategies for coping with climate change, Farm Radio International and the Technical Centre for Agricultural and Rural Cooperation (CTA) launched a scriptwriting competition in November 2007. Four months later, the competition had received 51 script submissions from 20 countries across sub-Saharan Africa. An international panel of seven judges reviewed the scripts, selecting the top 15 winners. Following on the success of Farm Radio International's first radio scriptwriting competition in 2006 – on the Millennium Development Goals – this initiative aimed to strengthen the capacity of rural radio broadcasters in Africa to provide relevant information to farmers.



**Anthony Lwanga, the Station Manager of the Kagadi-Kibaale Community Radio (KKCR) interviews rural farmers in western Uganda.**

Jean-Paul Ntezimana from Radio Salus in Rwanda won the grand prize, with his script on managing rainwater to prevent soil erosion and provide water for crops. This is an important adaptation practice for farmers who face extremely heavy rains on some occasions and droughts on others. Other winners covered topics including the importance of manure for increasing soil fertility, water-conserving irrigation practices, drought-tolerant rice, preventing deforestation, and livestock management.

The 15 winning scriptwriters worked for several weeks with Farm Radio International's managing editor, using the feedback received from the judges, to improve and finalise their scripts. The finished products were published in French and English and distributed to over 500 radio organisations across sub-Saharan Africa. All scripts are also available on the website of Farm Radio International. In addition, the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) supported the audio productions of two of the best scripts, in time for World Food Day (October 16, 2008).

### **Radio drama on climate change**

Another interesting idea currently underway is the development of a radio drama to strengthen farmers' capacity to adapt to climate change. One of these projects is focused in four states in northern Nigeria: Kaduna, Katsina, Kano and Borno. The initiative is led by the African Radio Drama Association (ARDA) in partnership with Farm Radio International, the Canadian University of Guelph and the Women Farmers Advancement Network (WOFAN). With

the help of farmer-led focus groups to shape content, a twenty-six episode radio drama called *In kidi ya chanza* ("When the drum beat changes you must change your dance steps") is being produced in Hausa and Kanuri languages. The drama will be broadcast weekly by six radio stations over a period of six months starting in early 2009.

The drama focuses on four agricultural topics:

- general climate change indicators based on farmers' observations;
- the reduction in water available for rainfed crops, livestock and human use – successful adaptations include diversifying the number of crops planted to reduce risk of crop failure, as well as using household grey-water to irrigate vegetables in home gardens;
- the implications of climate change for livestock – adaptation measures include improving livestock feed availability; and
- the loss of trees and shrubs – adaptation measures include planting of barrier hedges along contours to reduce soil erosion and provide fuelwood.

Radio drama is a popular format that resonates with Africa's oral narrative traditions. Drama, music, story-telling and proverbs are central to traditional education and information sharing in African culture. Drama imitates real life, is entertaining and can be used to demonstrate actions for comparisons and consequences. It can objectively portray, through multi-dimensional characters, models of responsibility, community leadership and ideal behaviour. Radio drama can attract and keep listeners' attention. It can also motivate them to imitate the actions of their favourite characters. Radio soap operas are particularly successful because of the slowly evolving nature of their plots as well as the gradual building up and subtle integration of the topics and messages over time.

### **Challenging topic**

One thing that was clear from these projects is that writing about climate change for radio is challenging. Creating a factually accurate yet entertaining or engaging message is perhaps the most challenging aspect of all. The key to writing for radio is to write in a simple and clear language, as if you are talking to one person. Messages need to be communicated in such a way that people from different backgrounds can understand a difficult topic like climate change. When talking about farmers' situations, getting farmers' voices on the air is essential to help them understand the issues enough to make relevant adaptations. Although it is still too early to evaluate the results of this competition, surveys completed by 90 of Farm Radio International's network of radio broadcasters over the last two years indicate that on average broadcasters use half of the scripts in a package, and 82 percent adapt and translate them into local languages. Each script is broadcast at least twice.

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*For the list of winners and the full winning scripts, go to Farm Radio International's website at <http://www.farmradio.org/english/radio-scripts> and look at Package 84.*