Radio is widely acknowledged as the best medium for delivering farming information to smallholder farmers in sub-Saharan Africa, even as newer technologies are increasingly developed and adopted. In fact, rural radio has experienced a renaissance of late, both with respect to the widespread acknowledgement of its unrivaled potential for disseminating information and supporting positive change, and also in terms of the growing interest in radio on the part of donors and international NGOs.

But, prior to Farm Radio International’s (FRI) first African Rural Radio Program Analysis (ARRPA) study in 2011, little was known about the circumstances in which African farm broadcasters operate. As far as we know, this type of study had not been conducted before. There was little documentation or analysis of the production practices used in farmer radio programs, nor of whether the farmer programs broadcast by radio stations in sub-Saharan Africa effectively served listeners’ needs.

The goals of the ARRPA project were to deepen understanding of the state of farmer radio programming in sub-Saharan Africa, and to gain insights which could help make Farm Radio International’s services more responsive and effective.

KEY FINDINGS
FROM ARRPA 2011

In 2011, FRI conducted an in-depth investigation of 22 radio stations/organizations in five sub-Saharan African countries (Cameroon, Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, and Tanzania). We reviewed the stations’ main farmer program; identified station resources, procedures and activities; received feedback from farmer-listeners; and documented best practices.

Some of the farmer programs employed best practices: they included both men and women farmers in their programs, or featured guest experts, or offered repeat broadcasts on alternative days and time slots, or focused on only one complex topic per episode, or included dramatic elements and/or music, or featured good quality audio. Others did not include farmers, or did not feature guests (or had invited guests who performed long monologues), or did not do a good job of engaging and entertaining listeners, or had poor quality audio.

When asked what they did best to serve farmers, the majority of stations said they provided farmers with agricultural information. This was consistent with farmers’ preferences. When asked why they listened to farmer radio programs, the majority of farmers said they wanted information and knowledge from experts and other farmers.

Overall, the study found that FRI’s services (Resource Pack, Barza Wire, and others) were well-used and useful to those who received them.

The research findings underlined the challenges of making good farmer radio in sub-Saharan Africa. About two-thirds of the stations had Internet access, though connectivity was sometimes slow and/or unreliable. Most had some form of access to transportation for field work, though this access was often less than ideal, for example, relying on staff vehicles or rented motorcycles. Almost all stations said that access to equipment was inadequate: there were, for example, too few computers, no funds for cell phone airtime or transport to the field, a lack of office space, and inadequate recording studios.

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Stations identified a significant number of key challenges to creating more effective farmer programming. These included:

- the need for broadcaster training;
- inadequate equipment;
- financial constraints which block innovative programming;
- a lack of professional skill development to help retain staff;
- stations devoting a large portion of their income to facility rental; and
- challenges with transportation to the field.

For the ARRPA project, FRI developed a scorecard to rate farmer programs against our VOICE Standards. Generally speaking, stations found it easier to meet VOICE standards on Valuing farmers, providing relevant, credible and timely Information, and offering Convenient programming. Stations scored more poorly on standards related to providing Opportunities for farmers’ voices to be heard and broadcasting programs that farmers find Entertaining.

On some of the individual indicators related to the VOICE Standards, stations did well. All stations broadcast in local languages and most broadcast at times that were convenient for farmers to listen. Some stations used guest experts appropriately, had good quality audio, offered repeat broadcasts, included dramatic elements or music, and featured women and men farmers.

But few stations used formats which encouraged farmer discussion. Stations often did not use local music (a stated farmer preference) or provide farmers with opportunities to discuss important matters. Few stations provided engaging introductions to their farmer programs or offered promos for upcoming farmer programs.

One of ARRPA 2011’s key findings was the apparent mismatch between stations’ sense that they had strategies in place to include farmers in programming and many listeners’ feelings that they were not sufficiently included. Many listeners wished
that farmers could participate more frequently in farmer programs, with several suggesting that their local station produce on-location broadcasts. Listeners also wanted more local market information, improved sound quality, more repeat broadcasts, more local music, and wanted broadcasters to use vocabulary that was easier for farmers to understand.

We found some correlation between a station’s level of resources (office/broadcasting equipment, production capacity in the studio and in the field), and the degree to which the station met the VOICE Standards. While there was no difference between stations with the highest level of resources and stations with a moderate level of resources, stations with the lowest level of resources were somewhat less successful at meeting the VOICE Standards. Thus, there may be a certain minimal level of resources required to air effective farmer programming, as defined by the VOICE Standards. However, some stations with all levels of resources—low, moderate, and high—produced both effective and ineffective programs.

**RATIONALE FOR ARRPA 2014**

The ARRPA 2011 findings, gathered mainly from stations where the colonial language was English, provided valuable evidence and made a number of recommendations aimed at helping radio stations provide more effective programming for farmers, and helping FRI improve its support to radio stations. Given that almost half of FRI’s broadcasting partners are in Francophone West Africa, and that the culture of radio in Francophone Africa is different from that in Anglophone Africa, FRI decided to conduct similar research in Francophone Africa.

In 2014, FRI investigated the work of six radio stations in Francophone Africa, three each in Burkina Faso and Mali. As in ARRPA 2011, we reviewed the main farmer program; identified station resources, procedures and activities; received feedback from farmer-listeners, and documented best practices, asking a number of questions that were not included in ARRPA 2011.

**FINDINGS FROM ARRPA 2014**

**Local languages:** Like ARRPA 2011, all stations use local languages in their farmer programs.

**Structure of farmer program:** Unlike the stations in ARRPA 2011 and unlike Burkina Faso, none of the ARRPA stations in Mali offers a single weekly farmer program. Instead, producers place agricultural items inside two-hour magazine-format programs which feature lots of music and are aimed at general rural listeners.

**SERVICES OFFERED BY STATIONS**

- Two stations offer a daily news service, and one offers a daily weather service. Lack of resources was mentioned as a barrier to providing daily news. In ARRPA 2011, 11 of the 19 stations offered daily news and 6 offered daily weather services.
- No stations offer daily local agricultural market reports. One airs market reports on a weekly basis. All stations wish to provide regular market reports in the future. In ARRPA 2011, 7 stations provided local and regional market reports of various types.
- When stations were asked what they thought they did best to serve farmers, three mentioned their regular farmer program. One replied that the station acts as a link between farmers and decision-makers, by, for example, making official announcements on the radio. Another station said that what it does best is regularly visit communities to listen to villagers and produce programs on their daily activities. This is consistent with ARRPA 2011. When asked what they did best to serve farmers, the majority of ARRPA 2011 stations said they provided farmers with agricultural information.
- All hosts and presenters are male, with the exception of one station. Similarly, in ARPA 2011, only 4 of 20 farmer programs were hosted by women, and 19 of 20 programs were produced by men.

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1. It should be noted that ARRPA 2011 did study several Francophone stations in Cameroon.
IMPORTANCE OF RURAL COMMUNICATION

- State broadcasters appear to attach significant importance to rural communication in Burkina Faso and Mali. In Mali, ORTM Koulikoro was created uniquely for this purpose, while a whole department at RTB, the state broadcaster in Burkina Faso, is dedicated to the production of programs for rural audiences (though the department wasn’t functional at the time of research.)

STATION RESOURCES

- **Email access:** Three (of six) stations have email access at the office; in some cases, Internet connectivity is poor. The other stations must travel elsewhere to access email. One station is able to access email only by travelling 15 km, another only 3-4 times a week, and another (at best) twice a month at a nearby NGO.

- **Computers:** Three of five stations with a farmer program have computers for staff use, ranging from 3-5 computers. In the other two stations, only the producers have computer access, via their own laptops. Almost all stations studied by ARRPA 2011 had computers for staff use.

- **Internet:** Three stations have Internet access at the office (very slow and intermittent for one station), though for one of these three, the wireless network has been out of service for some time, so the producer goes to an Internet café. The proportion of stations with Internet access was similar in ARRPA 2011.

BEST PRACTICES

- **Listeners’ clubs and relay agents:** At the request of villagers who wished to participate in radio programs, one station established listeners’ clubs in some villages. The station also has relay agents (agent-relais) in some villages. Relay agents live in communities which can hear the station, and keep the station informed about events in the village. They also act as facilitators when producers travel to the villages to meet farmers. The station regularly trains relay agents on agriculture and other important community issues, and relay agents help the station work on community issues by mobilizing villagers to attend village meetings and other opportunities for face-to-face interaction.

- **Collaboration between farmer programs and other programs:** At at one station, all reporters on field trips “behave like ambassadors for the farmer program while in the field,” and never pass up an opportunity to do research on an item for the farmer show.

- **Loyalty cards:** One station invites listeners to purchase a registration card (“loyalty card”) for 300 CFA (about $0.50 US) per month. The names of these registered listeners are read aloud during the show. During the harvest period, the farmer program producer can raise up to 15,000 CFA ($25 US) per month through loyalty cards.

ABOUT LISTENERS

This information was gathered from focus groups held with farmer-listeners.

- **Listening behaviour:** We found that listeners (and especially male listeners) in Burkina Faso and Mali generally discuss farmer programs with others in the family, but also outside the home. The men’s focus groups discuss the program with “those who didn’t listen,” or “among us here,” or “by meeting in the village square to discuss the issues among us,” or “with those who were absent at the time of broadcast.” Members of three women’s groups also talk about the program: “sometimes during meetings,” or “at home with our husbands.”

- **Listening on phones:** One men’s and one women’s focus group noted that listeners can now hear farmer programs on their mobile phones.

- **Learning from the radio:** Members of all men’s focus groups and two women’s groups have tried a new idea after hearing about it on the radio. Respondents gave detailed information about farming methods they had heard about on the radio and successfully put into practice.

- **Why do listeners listen?** When asked why they listened to farmer radio programs, members of 8 of 10 focus groups said that they listen primarily to hear useful farming information. When asked about the main sources of information on agriculture, radio was the most frequently named source, mentioned by men and women in all focus groups. In ARRPA 2011 as well, participants in listener focus groups said that they mainly listen to farmer programs to hear useful farming information.

- **Suggestions for improvement** varied widely between focus groups, with little overlap, and
included the following suggestions:

- Longer programming hours (focus groups for several stations)
- Spending much more time in the field, especially at the start of the farming season, and helping listeners learn from as many farmers as possible.
- Featuring more women on the program.
- “The program should deal with other issues related to our daily lives like widowhood and women’s access to property, especially farmland. Women here are expropriated when they lose their husbands. The radio should raise the issue and discuss it.”
- Always include local chibarani music (One male farmer says that when he hears this music, despite his old age, he feels like “taking the hoe and going back to the farm.”)

**USING FRI RESOURCES**

Few stations were aware of FRI’s Resource Packs, and even fewer of FRI’s other resources, such as Barza Wire, Barza discussions, and the FRI website. One station had used a Resource Pack to help create programming. The situation was much different in ARRPA 2011, where almost all stations received and used FRI resources in various ways.

**PROGRAM QUALITY**

In ARRPA 2011, stations found it easier to meet VOICE Standards on Valuing farmers, providing relevant, credible and timely Information, and offering Convenient programming. They did less well at meeting standards for providing Opportunities for farmers’ voices to be heard, and broadcasting programs that farmers find Entertaining.

The ARRPA 2014 findings were similar. Stations in Burkina Faso and Mali also received comparatively high marks on Valuing farmers and providing Information, and scored less well on providing Opportunities for farmers’ voices to be heard and on broadcasting programs that farmers find Entertaining. One difference was that, in ARRPA 2014, the stations had more difficulty offering Convenient programming (i.e., broadcasting at a time when farmers can listen, and repeating broadcasts later in the week for farmers who could not catch the original broadcasts.)

**RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LEVEL OF RESOURCES AND QUALITY OF PROGRAMMING**

We found no correlation in Burkina Faso or Mali between a station’s level of resources (office/broadcasting equipment, production capacity in the studio and in the field), and the degree to which the station meets VOICE Standards. There was a weak relationship in 2011, in the sense that stations with less than a minimal level of resources did not produce good quality programming. However, like the stations in ARRPA 2011, stations in Burkina Faso and Mali with all levels of resources produced both effective and ineffective programs, as judged by scores on the VOICE Standards.

**GENDER INEQUITIES**

- Women’s focus groups made many pointed comments about inequities between the status of men and women, and their desire for radio stations to address and help repair these inequities.
- The six stations employed 172 paid staff, only 23% of whom were women. This gender divide is consistent with ARRPA 2011. While ARRPA 2011 did not conduct a gender breakdown of all staff, it found that 16 of 20 program hosts were men, and 19 of 20 farmer programs were produced solely by men.

Because there were only five stations that were broadcasting a regular farmer program at the time of the research (RTB in Burkina Faso was not broadcasting a farmer program at that time), the ARRPA 2014 sample is too small to make even provisional generalizations concerning the relationship between program quality and type of station, or program quality and country. This conclusion applies to the other findings from ARRPA 2014.

Nevertheless, the many similarities between the findings of ARRPA 2011 and ARRPA 2014 support the provisional findings and recommendations noted in the executive summary and concluding section of the report.
RECOMMENDATIONS

DISSEMINATION OF REPORT

Recommendations:
1. FRI should ensure that an extended executive summary covering the findings of ARRPA 2011 and ARRPA 2014 is distributed widely.
2. FRI should make the full ARRPA 2014 report available on the FRI website.
3. FRI should connect with others who are doing similar research, including academics, governments, donors, and NGOs, with the goal of improving FRI’s services and those of others in the field of communication for development.

STRUCTURE OF FARMER PROGRAMS

Recommendation: With the Mali office, discuss the possibility of canvassing Malian broadcaster partners concerning the structure of their farmer programs, and the reasons why the current structures were chosen.

GENDER INEQUITIES

Recommendations:
1. For the Mali office:
   a. Consider developing programs to address issues related to widowhood as well as wider gender issues.
   b. Create community listener groups, provide groups with radios and potentially mobile phones, train them how to use these resources, and provide regular support.
2. Initiate focus group discussions and other community consultations so that women and men can identify burning issues. Provide opportunities for women to discuss issues as a group first, and then provide them with the opportunity to record a message to send to the radio or record an interview as a group. This will provide a safe space for women to discuss issues together, and feel more confident at expressing themselves publicly.
3. Provide gender training to broadcasters so they can a) apply a gender lens to every topic addressed on air, b) seek both women’s and men’s side of the story, and c) know how to challenge gender stereotypes.

QUALITY OF PROGRAMMING

Recommendations:
1. In its trainings, projects, and all services, FRI should pay specific attention to helping stations improve the entertainment level of farmer programs, and provide better opportunities for farmers to participate in programming.
2. FRI country offices should conduct in-depth interviews with selected partners to explore the factors that influence the quality of programming.

STATIONS’ LIMITATIONS IN ACCESS TO EMAIL, INTERNET, AND TO ESSENTIAL EQUIPMENT

Recommendation: Country offices should monitor connectivity at partner broadcasters and offer assistance and advice with technical and logistical problems.

LACK OF RESOURCES TO REPORT DAILY NEWS, WEATHER, AND MARKET INFORMATION

Recommendation: FRI’s country offices should monitor the availability of in-country services which provide daily news, weather, and market information that would be useful for broadcast partners. Stations could broadcast this information, and interview news, weather, and market specialists to make this information more practically useful to listeners.

REASONS FOR LISTENING

Recommendation: FRI should (continue to) strongly emphasize the information dissemination function of radio in all its services, in line with farmers’ wishes.

USING FRI RESOURCES

Recommendation: The offices in Burkina Faso and Mali should continue to reach out to partners and other broadcasters to inform them about FRI resources and gather feedback on how they are used and what modifications would make them most effective. When possible, FRI should make funds available to bring partner radio stations together for a face-to-face orientation to FRI resources.

To read the full text of the final report, go to: bit.ly/FRIARRPA2016