In Oloba kebele of Damot Woyide district there are five groups, with around 15 listeners per group. Three groups are men only and two are women only. They prefer it this way as men and women prefer to listen as a group in different times. The groups were formed about a year ago, so they have listened to both Murutta radio series about pulses. The women’s group tends to listen to the live shows, while the men record and listen it later. Each group has a solar recordable radio set from Farm Radio International.

While they are experienced farmers, they say that they learned many things from the radio series. For example they say they learned about benefits of row planting. They now plant their crop in row instead of broadcasting. They use specific spacing recommended on radio. They have seen that row planting is more productive than broadcasting. The increased productivity compensates for the extra labour. They also use less fertilizer in this method.

Alemi Biramo is the facilitator of Chisha radio listening group. She stands shyly, yet with a certain pride, in her haricot bean plot. She tells us how she used to grow “red Wolayta” haricot bean variety, but since listening to Murutta program on Fana FM Wolayta Sodo, she now grows “Hawassa Dume” variety.

A short visit to her compound shows us that she is successful and hardworking farmer. On one side is a plot full of carrots, interspersed
She learned how to harvest the bean plants to benefit her soils – previously she pulled out the whole plant, but now she cuts from the surface, leaving the roots in the soil which contributes to its fertility.

Listening in a group helps a lot because they listen together and then discuss what they have heard.

with mango and coffee trees, while to the other side is a keyhole garden full of cabbages. It is easy to see why she is the respected leader of one of the women’s listening groups in this location, as she is obviously making the most of the good soils and plentiful rain in the area. The surrounding fields are filled with maize, taro, haricot beans, fruit trees and ‘enset’.

She says that she used to broadcast beans in her field, but after listening about row planting on the radio, she now plants in rows. Her husband ploughed the field with oxen. She tells us how the radio program described land preparation, and how to use inputs such as bio-fertilizer/ inoculants. She learned how to harvest the bean plants to benefit her soils – previously she pulled out the whole plant, but now she cuts from the surface, leaving the roots in the soil which contributes to its fertility.

The Scaling-up Pulse Innovations for Food and Nutrition Security in Southern Ethiopia project promotes improved haricot bean varieties, and has an emphasis on nutrition. The radio shows are intended to support and scale out on the ground activities, providing information on agronomy, from land preparation through to harvesting. The programs also discuss the role of beans in family nutrition. Alemitu Biramo describes how she used to make only boiled beans, but now she inclines to prepare dishes of beans mixed with maize and ‘enset’. She notices that since eating beans in this way, children who were occasionally sick are now in better health.

She says that listening in a group helps a lot because they listen together and then discuss what they have heard. She learned some information from development agents of their locality, but the radio programs go into much more detail, even about depth and spacing of planting, and how protein and vitamins from beans help keep you healthy.

She agrees that it is because of the radio program that they now have in-depth knowledge of haricot beans. She says the most important thing about the radio program for her is that it is in Wolaytingna, her mother tongue. Previously any programs on farming that they heard were in Amharic, which they do not understand so well.

This is the first year she has grown the variety, Hawassa Dume. She plans to save seed from this crop to grow it again. Her plan is to eat most of the harvest in home and sell the surplus.

The kebele is outside the project areas that are reached by direct training and seed dissemination. So radio shows are being successful in scaling out the information on use of Hawassa Dume variety with recommended agronomic practices to wider audience. While the project provides target farmers with 2kg of seed, the listening groups in this area accessed seed through Agricultural and Rural Development office. This has the potential to be a sustainable exit strategy for the project. If farmers continue to plant this variety with enthusiasm shown by Alemitu Biramo, demand will grow and farmers like her across the zone will continue to benefit.