



COMMUNITY LISTENERS' CLUBS

Stepping stones for action in rural areas




FAO-Dimitra Project



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This publication has been prepared by the FAO-Dimitra team, together with Samwaki, ONG VIE, Olivier Bailly and Christiane Monsieur.

Dimitra thanks the women and men of the listeners' clubs, as well as the community radios and their staff. Their outstanding participation and deep commitment have made the success of the listeners' clubs possible.

Also, heartfelt thanks to the organizations which have enabled this experience to become a reality: Dimitra's project partners – ONG VIE, Samwaki and REFED-Katanga – as well as the King Baudouin Foundation and GTZ-Santé for the support they offered to the first listeners' clubs in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

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Preface

Many African rural communities, especially women, are excluded from the information and communication process. This situation, already highlighted in the *Strategy for Action (Gender and Food Security: The Role of Information, FAO, Rome, 2000)*, has intensified during the past decade, and it is clear that such exclusion increases food insecurity.

So one can only welcome the exceptional experience witnessed in Niger and in the Democratic Republic of Congo with the community listeners' clubs – highly participatory information and communication processes established by FAO-Dimitra. The goals of these listeners' clubs echo the recommendations of Member States of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations in its *Strategy for Action*: information as a decision-making tool, as a means of empowerment and as a tool in negotiation.

This timely publication offers several approaches for improving the access of rural men and women to the fundamental resources of information and communication and for helping to close the gender gap in agriculture.

I hope you will enjoy reading this publication.

Marcela Villarreal
Director,
Gender, Equity and Rural Employment Division, FAO



Introduction

It all began in 2003, in Goma, in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) during a meeting between FAO-Dimitra and Samwaki, a Congolese non-governmental organization active in South Kivu and interested in creating a space for exchange and discussion between rural women in the region.

This first meeting paved the way for a series of training and collaboration activities between Dimitra and Samwaki, leading up to the creation of community listeners' clubs in South Kivu in February 2006. In 2009, a similar initiative was launched in two regions of Niger, while other listeners' clubs were created in Katanga, DRC.

This publication presents the unique experience of the community listeners' clubs in the DRC (particularly in South Kivu) and Niger and the results that these initiatives produced. It is a unique experience because in a short time, these clubs succeeded in promoting social mobilisation of both women and men, as well as dialogue, collaboration and action on the part of rural communities, especially women. In this process, community radio is used as an information and communication channel, encouraging a flow of information and communication that places people at the centre of interactions.

The latest FAO Report on the State of Food and Agriculture (SOFA 2010-11) entitled "Women in Agriculture. Closing the gender gap for development" confirms the im-

portance of access for rural women to all resources that make improved production possible. Of these, information and communication are among the most precious.

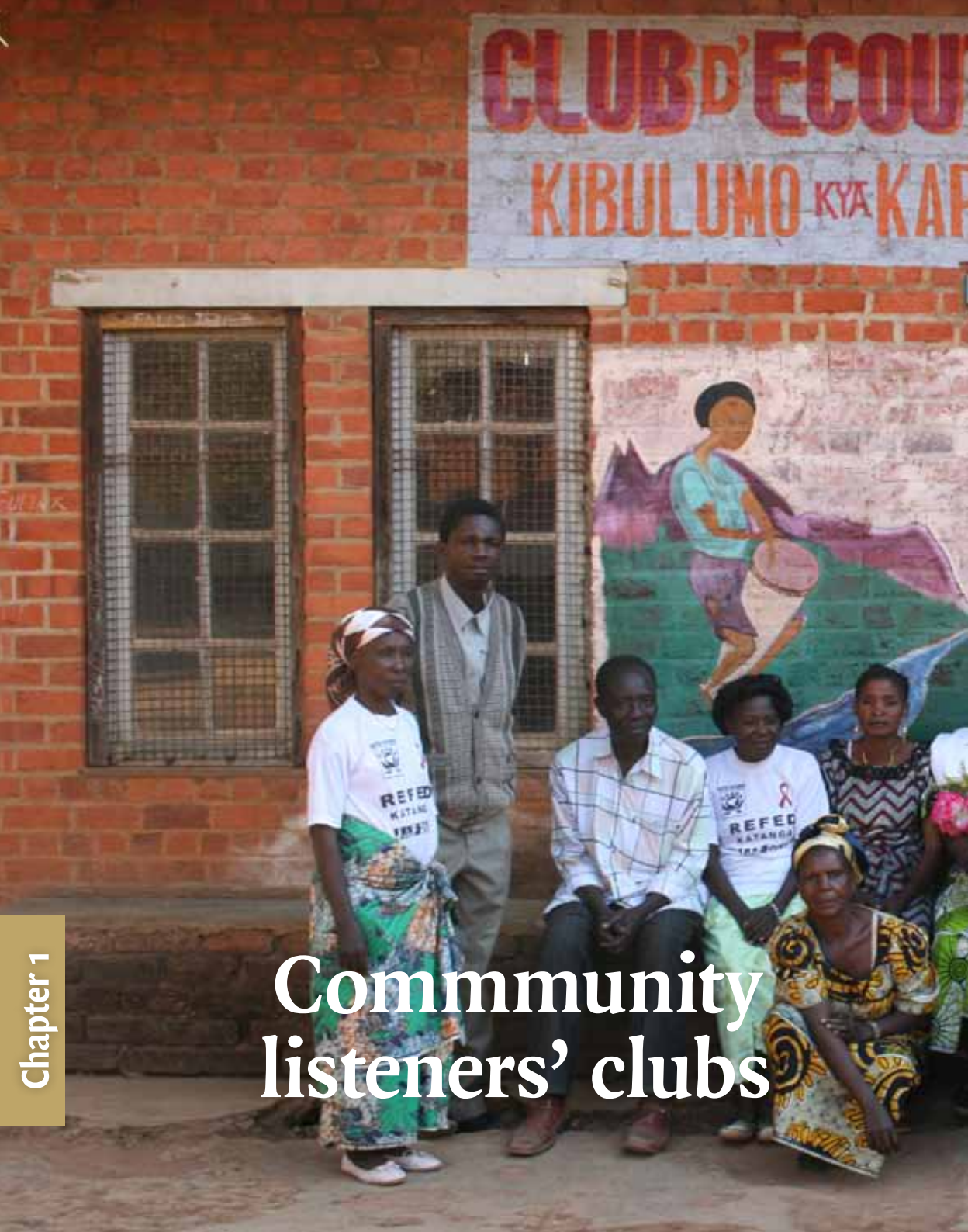
The listeners' clubs have been pursuing this approach for several years now: facilitating information and communication, dialogue and action in an effort to achieve greater economic and social empowerment for rural communities, especially the most marginalised, and improving their livelihoods. Sharing information and ideas has a direct impact on gender equality and plays a major role in improving the status of rural women.

For these rural communities, it is sometimes a question of survival. Exchanging knowledge on agricultural practices, nutrition, the struggle against HIV/AIDS, access to land, etc. is even more crucial for women as a way of reducing their isolation and providing them with a means for taking action. If information is the gold of the XXIst century, then the community listeners' clubs are deposits waiting to be mined.

Eliane Najros,
Coordinator FAO-Dimitra
Gender, Equity and Rural Employment Division, FAO

CLUB D'ECOU

KIBULUMU KYA KAT



Community listeners' clubs

**TEKIKI
POLOVE**



What they are, why they have been set up, how they work and, most important, the results that they have achieved.

This first chapter takes a close look at the community listeners' clubs.

“The last radio broadcast that I listened to? It talked about a real-life case: in a village, a young girl of 11 was going to be given in marriage even though she was still at school. In the first instance, there was an attempt to make the parents understand that it would be more sensible to let the child continue her education. Villagers also contacted the local authorities so they could give their viewpoint. People from other villages then reacted, using the mobile phones of the listeners’ clubs to recount their past experiences. Here, the effect was even more striking: it was all taking place there and then and the radio was having a direct impact.”

MOCTARE, ONG VIE KANDE NI BAYRA | NIGER

These words describe a radio broadcast aired as part of the community listeners’ club project in Niger, capturing in just a few phrases the importance and strength of these clubs.

The power of information and of using rural and community radio for development is well known. Radio is a media that can reach highly dispersed rural communities and be a tool for education, awareness-raising and agricultural extension, as well as a means of diffusing information and entertainment.

Perhaps less well known is the use of community radio as a participatory media for information and communication that focuses on action. This was the idea behind the community listeners’ clubs set up several years ago by the FAO-Dimitra project and its local partners in Niger and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Did you say “listeners’ clubs”?

Inspired by the radio-clubs set up in the 1990s, today’s community listeners’ clubs go way beyond collective listening: they offer a mechanism for opening up dialogue and a tool for empowering rural communities.

The clubs are spaces that stimulate mobilisation, dialogue, sharing of experiences, collaboration and above all action among men and women stakeholders in development. Community rural radio is the preferred media channel for disseminating information and facilitating communication, sometimes together with mobile telephones (as in Niger). As a result, the listeners’ clubs become a catalyst for exchanging experiences, for expressing opinions on the information delivered and for taking decisions on how to act.

Why these clubs?

In a general sense, community listeners’ clubs seek to improve access to information in rural areas, especially for women, and to empower them.

What is a community listeners’ club?

A community listeners’ club is “a group of men and women who wish to listen to radio programmes actively and systematically with a view to discussing the content and above all putting into practice the lessons learned”.

– definition agreed on by participants at a workshop organized in 2008 by FAO-Dimitra in Lubumbashi (DRC), in preparation for the creation of new clubs.

Their goal ties in with both the FAO mandate (fighting hunger and malnutrition) and its strategic objectives linked to food, agriculture and gender equality in access to resources, goods, services and decision-making. Their objective closely matches the Millennium Development Goals (MDG), in particular “reducing by half extreme poverty and hunger” (MDG 1), “promoting gender equality and empowering women” (MDG 3) and “combating HIV/AIDS and other diseases” (MDG 6).

Striving for gender equality is an important prerequisite for viable and sustainable rural development. A strong awareness of gender is woven into all the clubs’ activities and much importance is given to strengthening the visibility of women and their ability to take part in decision-making. This approach is not therefore focused on women, but on the relations between men and women, with strong emphasis on encouraging the involvement of men and on the expression of the respective needs of women and men. Both play an active and equal role in the life of the community listeners’ clubs.

Their internal organization

Whether made up of women, men or both, the listeners’ clubs encourage their members to express needs and expectations in their daily lives, while radio is a channel to offer responses, either through the comments of an expert, or by broadcasting discussions which develop within the clubs. In this sense, community or rural radio is a media that is produced by and for local people.

It is not a question of knowledge being transmitted “one way” or “top-down” by a media or an institution to a community, but rather of knowledge that results from the exchange of participants or from discussions conducted by the community itself. Community listeners’ clubs therefore differ from groups of listeners organized into ‘radio clubs’, where there are usually more men than women and interaction with the radio is inexistent, except to create a ‘fan club’.

Thanks to the active participation of their members, the clubs become citizens’ groups where men



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Internal functioning of the community listeners' clubs



and women share their concerns and needs, obtain information that would otherwise be inaccessible and undertake joint action.

Their internal functioning varies according to the context and country, but it generally follows this pattern:

1. Identification of a subject/theme

Listeners' club members discuss their particular development priorities and choose themes they want to investigate in more detail. This process and the discussions that follow are facilitated by leaders, often women, who have been chosen and trained for this role.

2. Producing the programme

Once the theme has been chosen, the community or rural radio is contacted and the programme prepared by the radio staff. Radio stations also receive specific training to help them fulfil their role as a channel for discussion and provide the best possible response to the process as it develops. They deal with the selected issue so as to provide a response to the request made.

3. Active listening

The programme is broadcast and active listening can begin. Listening methods may vary (group, individual, live/prerecorded, etc.).

4. Dialogue and discussion

Discussions are organized within clubs and with other clubs, with local authorities and all other stakeholders. Support from an outside woman or man expert is sometimes offered, for example in discussions of themes such as HIV/AIDS, nutrition, agricultural inputs, etc. The radio records and broadcasts the exchanges to fuel the discussions.

5. Decision-making

Discussion and dialogue lead to decisions for taking action.

6. Finding means of action

Members investigate means of action (human and financial resources, partnerships, etc.).

7. Actions

The actions planned are put into practice.

8. Feeding back the experiences

The experience, including the results, difficulties and successes, are documented and restituted to the communities.

COMMUNITY LISTENERS' CLUBS IN FIGURES (April 2011)



Niger

- Implementation: ONG VIE Kande Ni Bayra, through its network of literacy training centres.
- 398 active clubs, of which 281 are exclusively female, 105 male and 12 mixed, with a total of 7,698 members (5,704 women and 1,994 men).
- 112 villages involved in 2 regions in the west and south of the country: Tillabéri (departments of Téra and Kollo) and Dosso (departments of Dosso, Gaya and Loga); nearly 27,000 people indirectly touched.
- 280 women leaders and 100 men leaders identified and trained.
- 9 community radio stations: Téra, Bankilaré, Dolbel, Dantchandou, Kiota, Garantchéday, Gaya, Falwal and Tanda.
- 304 solar and wind-up radios distributed, as well as 100 mobile telephones equipped with solar chargers.
- 20 radio reporting kits.

Technical and funding support: FAO-Dimitra with co-funding from UNDP, UNIFEM, UNFPA and the Canadian International Development Agency.

Democratic Republic of Congo

South Kivu

- Implementation: Samwaki, Sauti ya Mwanamke Kijijini, through its network.
- 9 federations of clubs, each with up to 900 members (of whom 400-500 are women), with a total of about 8,000 members.
- 8 rural territories in the province of South Kivu.
- 5 community radio stations: Radio Maendeleo (Bukavu); Radio Mitumba (Uvira); Radio Mutanga (Shabunda); Radio APIDE (Mwenga) and Radio Bubusa FM (Mugogo).
- 45 solar and wind-up radios distributed.
- 5 radio reporting kits (dual cassette radios, digital recorders).
- 10 mobile telephones.
- 1 bicycle.

Katanga

- Implementation: REFED-Katanga, Réseau Femme et Développement au Katanga.
- 7 active clubs, each with 30-60 members (most of them women).
- Territories of Kasumbalesa and Kapolowe (District of Haut-Katanga) and Mutshatsha (District of Lwalaba).
- 4 community radio stations: Vespera, Voice of Hope (Kasumbalesa); RTCM, Radio-tele communautaire Mutshatsha (Mutshatsha); Paradoxe (Kasumbalesa) and RCK-Likasi (Likasi).
- 57 solar and wind-up radios distributed.
- 8 mobile telephones distributed.
- 5 recorders.

Technical and funding support in the DRC: FAO-Dimitra, King Baudouin Foundation and GTZ-Santé.



Some results

In a short time, the listeners' clubs have developed at a remarkable rate, surpassing all expectations, becoming valuable spaces for expression and action. The numerous and diverse results recorded so far reflect changes – at times slight and at other times radical – in the behaviour, practices and perceptions of rural communities. These include:

Access to information and knowledge

Radio waves can convey the knowledge required to satisfy certain needs, even in the most remote rural communities. The benefits linked to information and knowledge acquired through radio and exchanges are extremely varied: improved knowledge of rights (in order to be able to claim them more effectively) and awareness-raising on themes that closely affect communities – agricultural productivity, horticulture, access to land and water, HIV/AIDS, sexual violence, environmental degradation, farming and livestock rearing, etc.

Changes in agricultural practices

Thematic discussions and listening to radio programmes generate new knowledge. Dialogue, information and knowledge sharing have a direct impact on changes in agricultural practices. Clubs promote the exchange of knowledge, information and techniques; they prompt reflection – and hence change – involving all actors in the community, both women and men, on questions relating to land access, crop cultivation practices and solutions to problems.

A window on the world

The listeners' clubs provide an opening to the world outside the rural community. Information and communication enable villagers to discover their region, the surrounding villages, local groups and officials, etc. These encounters act as a first step towards local synergies and partnerships.

Self-confidence and women leadership

A feature often mentioned by observers in the field is the remarkable increase in the self-confidence of the women members of the listeners' clubs, who take up their role as participants in their own right in village life.

What do the clubs talk about?

In Niger, as in the Democratic Republic of Congo, the clubs have chosen to deal with different themes, covering a wide range of issues:

- Food security and nutrition, HIV/AIDS, hygiene and sanitation, health, as well as more technical themes such as animal and plant health, horticulture, crops for the lean season, environmentally-friendly fertilisers, input supply outlets and warrantage (a credit system and tool for food security);
- Women's access to land and water, to information, to education, to local decision-making authorities, democracy, governance, a culture of peace, sexual/marital violence, early marriage of girls, human rights.

Speaking in public helps to empower them and increase their confidence. Men hear their wives on the radio and are proud of them. Not only do they express themselves, but they are listened to. Their place in society changes and the whole community becomes aware of the value of participating in the development process.

Solidarity and dialogue

Differences can be resolved through dialogue and exchange of opinions, sometimes involving people who do not normally speak to each other or who have an on-going dispute. So listeners' clubs are also 'clubs of mutual understanding', and can stimulate collaboration and strengthen dialogue and solidarity. Clubs can prompt discussions of taboo subjects, such as those linked to sexual violence or HIV/AIDS. With radio as the intermediary, dialogue can be established in and between communities, helping to overcome disinformation, prejudice and harmful traditional beliefs.

Collaboration and social mobilisation

The community listeners' clubs promote collaboration and social mobilisation between development actors. Listeners' club members become aware of their role as citizens with rights and duties in their community, and of the importance of getting organized, of joining together to have greater scope for taking action and changing their environment.

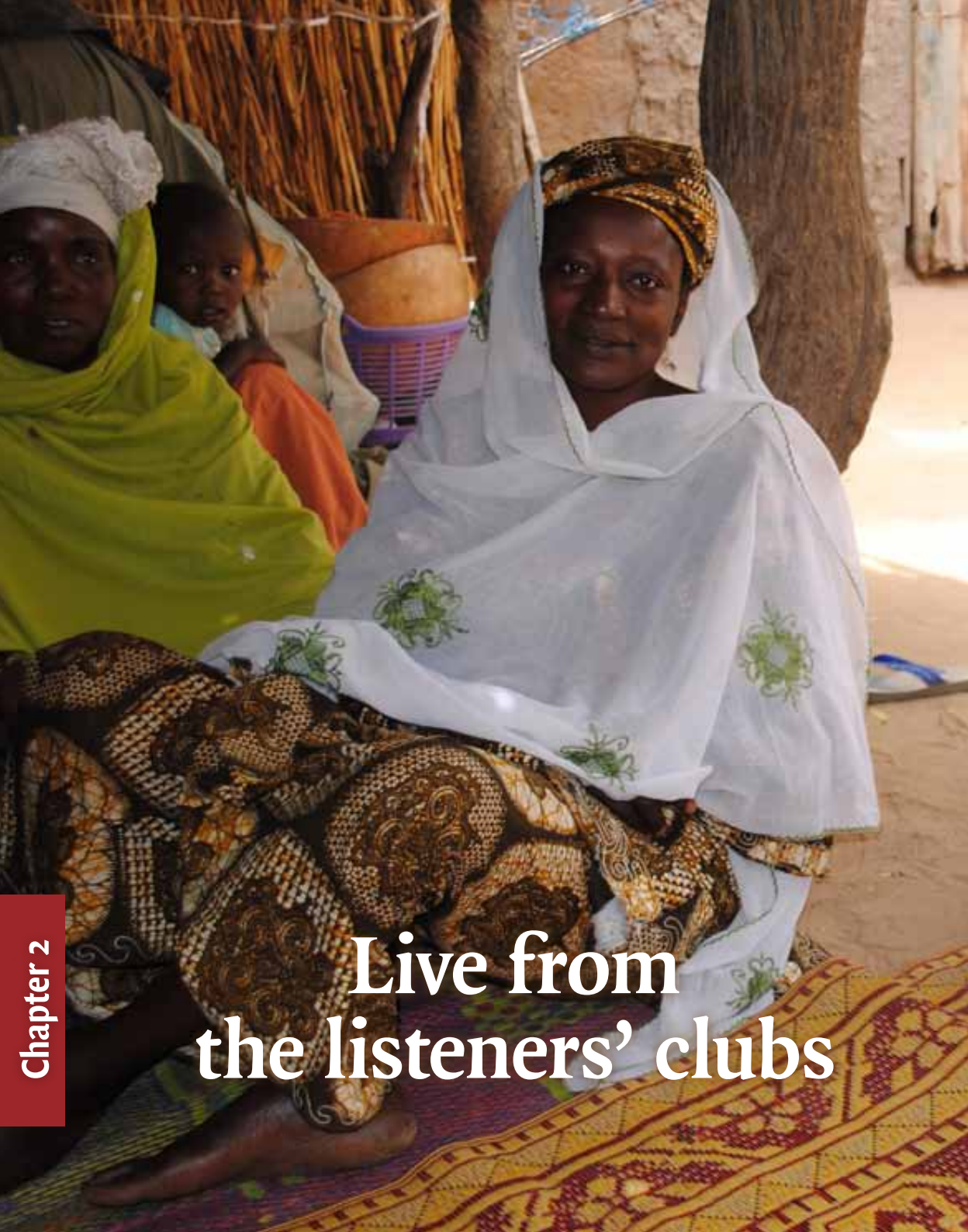
Organizing and listening capacities

At an institutional level, villagers must make their club work in a democratic way. This obligation strengthens the need for consensus and listening, as well as organizational capacities. In their search for common ground that will lead to action, listeners' club members strengthen their capacity to listen to the opinions of other actors – both men and women.

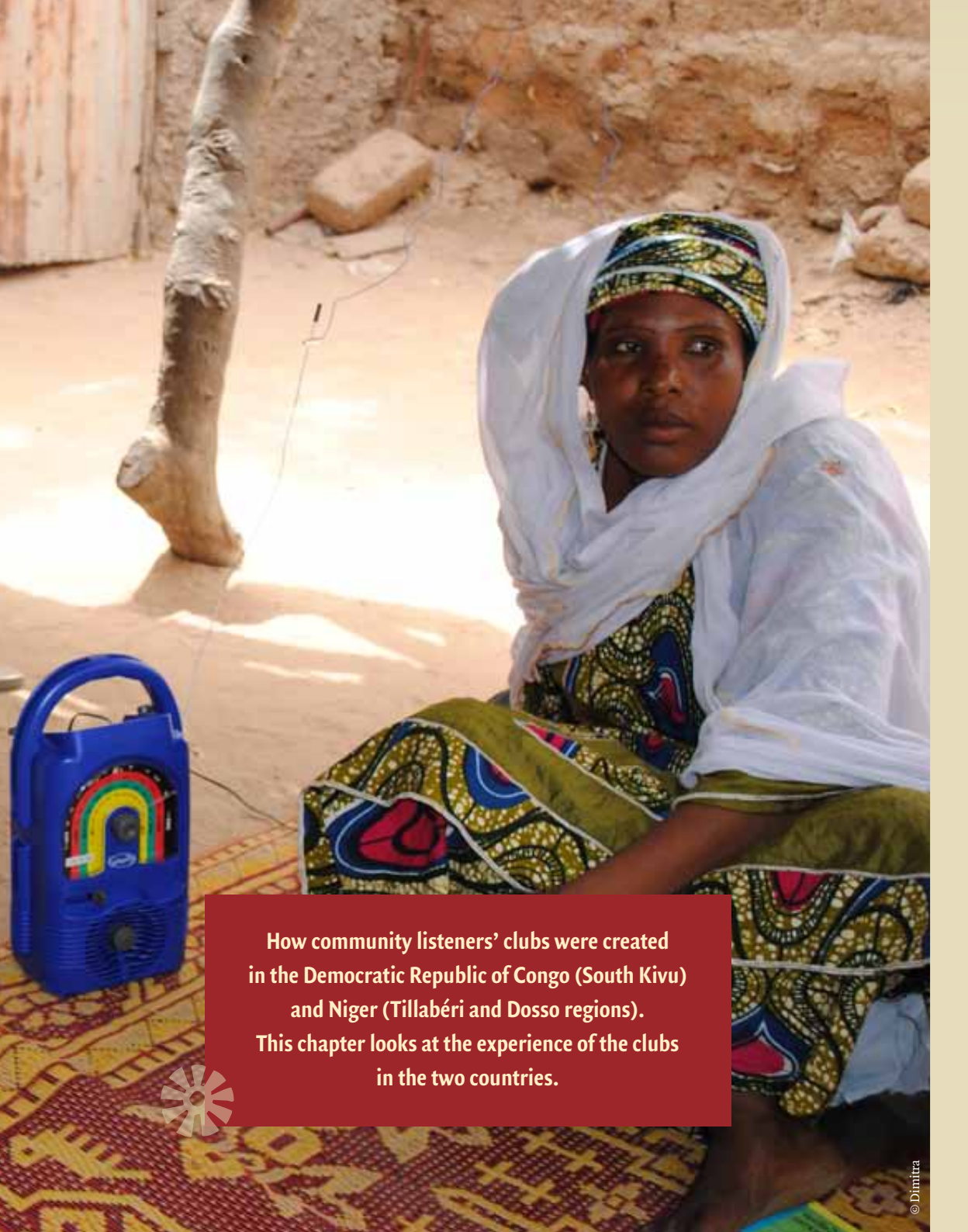
Pleasure in being together

This aspect is often forgotten, yet the simple pleasure of spending time together and listening to each other is a crucial factor in the success of the listeners' clubs.





Live from the listeners' clubs



How community listeners' clubs were created in the Democratic Republic of Congo (South Kivu) and Niger (Tillabéri and Dosso regions). This chapter looks at the experience of the clubs in the two countries.



Democratic Republic of Congo



Scarred by decades of war, the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) is one of the most devastated regions on the planet. There is still much to be done to improve the status and livelihoods of rural communities, especially women.

Many reports document the situation of sexual violence in South Kivu. In its last report on the state of the world population 2010, UNFPA notes that according to local health clinics in the province of South Kivu, an average of 40 women are raped each day.

Exacerbating the situation is the fact that fields have not been tended during the conflicts. Crops and small livestock have been pilaged by combattants. When women attempted to take up farming again, the “mosaic” disease, which struck the region in 2003, devastated the cassava, the main crop and food source of people in the province.

It is against this challenging backdrop that the Congolese non-governmental organization (NGO)

Samwaki, Sauti ya Mwanamke Kijijini (*The voice of the rural woman, in Swahili*) is working. Today, it supports and coordinates nine federations of community listeners’ clubs in the eight rural territories of the province of South Kivu: Walungu (two clubs), Shabunda, Mwenga, Idjwi, Kalehe, Uvira, Fizi and Kabare.



Mamans Majambere: “Women together”

Samwaki is active in South Kivu, where, in 2002, it began meeting rural communities in order to make them more aware of the importance of sharing information and knowledge on key themes such as HIV/AIDS, violence against women, food security, etc. In each village, women had formed groups called “Mamans Majambere” or “Mamans Mulungano” – Women for Development or Women Together. Each of these groups carried out its own project, with collective fields and a mutual aid fund. In spite of all this, Samwaki was eventually forced to accept a bitter truth: even though they were very determined, all these rural women remained cut off from the rest of the world. They were confined in traditions, a village and a system where knowledge was scant.

Each “Mamans Majambere” group had its goals and field of intervention, but Samwaki observed that the groups were largely unaware of each other. So they set about regrouping them around several “communication axes” and creating mechanisms to share information between them.

“The communication axes make a link between people in the same community and between villages grouped together for geographical reasons,” explains Adeline Nsimire, coordinator of Samwaki. *“These exchanges enable people to meet each other; there is an understanding between local men and women in the field. Women carry out a range of activities and we have supported them with training material. We have also started a farming and livestock activity and revolving credit system.”*

But the discussions between groups sometimes came up against the problem of lack of information. National radio did not reach the villages and the experts were all in the towns. The only access to

knowledge was community radio, the cheapest form of media and the only one available in rural areas.

The following year, in 2003, Dimitra and Samwaki met. *“I saw Boniface and Adeline arrive, after a night travelling by boat,”* recalls Eliane Najros, coordinator of Dimitra. *“Adeline was 8 months pregnant at the time, and they had come especially from Bukavu all the way to Goma to tell us about what Samwaki was doing.”*

After this first contact, Samwaki became the focal point for Dimitra in South Kivu.

Samwaki conducted an initial baseline survey of the situation regarding information and communication. It emerged that all the community radios were concentrated in the city of Bukavu, at the expense of rural areas. These radios rarely dealt with subjects of interest to rural communities, especially subjects that might interest women. For example, the villagers had little information about HIV/AIDS, a scourge in a region scarred by years of conflict. Also, the radio stations did nothing to open the door to discussion or an exchange of ideas with these communities, even though they were supposed to be their target audience.

The decision was taken: Samwaki and Dimitra would try to fill the existing gap between radio and rural women. The first step was to be in July 2005, when six community radios and 25 farmers’ organizations from the province of South Kivu met, in preparation for a workshop planned for the following year. This first face-to-face encounter between journalists and rural women was to pave the way for future collaboration between community radios and farmers’ organizations, and for recognition of the role played by each of these groups in the development of the province.

Women's organizations meet community radios

The process of creating listeners' clubs was started in the field. In each village visited, Samwaki identified leaders, accepted and chosen by their community, who were ready to serve its interests and had good listening and communication skills.

Two leaders, a man and a woman, were chosen by each community. A total of 18 people thus became the intermediaries between Samwaki and the rural community, their role being to organize debates to identify the themes and problems to be discussed, with a special focus on gender issues.

In February 2006, another key event was organized: Samwaki arranged a meeting in Bukavu between these 18 intermediaries and 60 representatives from civil society organizations, scientists from agricultural research centres, authorities, journalists and staff from community radio stations in the province (Radio Maendeleo in Bukavu, Radio Mitumba in Uvira, Radio Mutanga in Shabunda, Radio APIDE in Mwenga, Radio Maria Malkia, Radio Kahuzi, etc.). This workshop, attended by as many women as men, was supported by gender and communication experts from the FAO-Dimitra project, the Panos Institute Paris and other experts from development agencies (UNFPA, UNDP, Canadian International Development Agency, UNIFEM, GTZ, etc.).

The agenda included exchanging views so as to have a better understanding of one another's situation and finding the best method of communication. When the five-day workshop ended, the participants agreed on several courses of action: to create community listeners' clubs and strengthen synergies and exchanges between community radio stations and women's organizations. The community listeners' clubs would enable isolated rural communities,

especially women, to take part in the activities of the community radio stations, make their voices heard and benefit from the broadcasts and programmes.

Back in their village, the 18 leaders and the various representatives from the organizations explained how the clubs would work and invited each woman and man to take part. In a region where the main focus is on surviving to live another day, one might have expected the proposal to earn a lukewarm response. But villagers, men and women alike, were quick to show their interest in becoming involved in the clubs.

The distinction between listeners' clubs as a driving force for change and the radio fan clubs already present in the region was also clarified. "The fundamental distinction," explains Yannick De Mol, FAO-Dimitra Project Officer, "is that the clubs of listeners (*"clubs d'auditeurs"*) revolve around a radio while the listeners' clubs (*"clubs d'écoute"*) are centred on people."

The birth of the listeners' clubs


General assemblies were held in public locations, at markets or on football pitches. All public places could be used, so long as they were not identified with an organization close to a religious, social, ethnic or political group. The community listeners' clubs were born.

The activities, carried out by Samwaki, received technical support from FAO-Dimitra and financial support from the King Baudouin Foundation and GTZ-Santé from September 2006 onwards, as part of the "Strengthening community radios and their listeners' clubs to help combat HIV/AIDS in South Kivu and Katanga" project.

The next stage involved equipping the clubs. Samwaki and Dimitra distributed communication tools (CD players, professional recorders and

mobile telephones) to club members and partner community radio stations, while 45 wind-up and solar-powered radio receivers were supplied to the clubs. These highly resistant large blue radio sets have a powerful output, and are easy to use. Sixty turns of the handle and you have one hour's radio listening!

The club system is based on individual and collective radio listening by community groups of men and women who later discuss the subject, call the radio, asking for additional explanations and suggest ideas for themes to be dealt with in future broadcasts.



Shockwaves: honey for the community

In 2008, members of the listeners' club in Kalehe, a territory situated some 70 kilometres north of Bukavu, listened together to a programme developed by Samwaki and aired by Radio Maendeleo on honey production and its importance for health and income generation. In this region, honey is consumed as a food stuff and is used to treat a number of diseases in children. Discussions at the club meeting following the broadcast focused on the possibility of producing honey at local level, to avoid having to travel to Bukavu to get supplies. The expert who had appeared on the radio programme was invited to explain how to construct beehives. In the end, four women launched a pilot beekeeping project with traditional hives. They had never imagined that they had the capacity to produce honey and supply the territory. But that is just what they are now doing.

Even though groups can listen to any frequency, and later give an account of what they have heard to other members, privileged relationships have developed with five community radio stations: Radio Maendeleo (Bukavu), Radio Mitumba (Uvira), Radio Mutanga (Shabunda), Radio APIDE (Mwenga) and Radio Bubusa FM (Mugogo). *"Women can 'order' subjects for radio broadcasts; they can also make them themselves with their dictaphones,"* explains Adeline Nsimire. *"They record their thoughts and the cassettes are sent to partner radios which will broadcast them. Members living close to the station can also go and express their opinions directly on the radio."*

Three of the nine clubs (in Fizi, Idjwi and Kalehe) are not linked to any community radio in the sense of a formal partnership. However, the clubs in Idjwi and Kalehe receive Radio Maendeleo which broadcasts from Bukavu. And in Fizi, you can listen to Radio Umoja in Baraka and tune in to the national radio & television (RTNC) station in Fizi. As with the other clubs, they conduct individual and/or group listening sessions and discuss the content of the information they have been able to follow. Their discussion is then recorded and their opinions broadcast by partner community radios in the project, or by other radios, on an informal basis.

Several years have passed since the setting up of these listeners' clubs in South Kivu, and their impact on the life of rural communities is considerable, especially for women.

At first, discussions focused on the struggle against HIV/AIDS, *"Before, women victims hid themselves. They were ashamed,"* explains Jocelyne M'Mananga, president of the Ruhinduke community listeners' club in Mugogo. *"Now they come to ask advice and help and to tell their story."*



© Dimitra

Subsequent sessions went far beyond the health sector. “The clubs showed the importance of joining forces,” remarks Adeline Nsimire. “They open up discussion, people can speak without discrimination. These

discussions are conducted with full cooperation from the local authorities. The chiefs take part, and if they cannot come, they send someone to represent them.”

Rural women, agents of change

Free space for Faïda: with the money, my children go to school



Faïda is one of 250 members of the Mugogo community listeners’ club. “Before the club discussions, I was ignorant. I ate all the produce from my fields without saving anything. Nowadays, I fertilise my land with droppings from the guinea pigs I bought. I have increased output and been able to sell some of the surplus. With the money, my children go to school.”

The listeners’ clubs have also strengthened the capacities of members to get organized and identify and communicate their needs. Community radios take better account of the expectations of rural communities, opening up air space to women and allowing constant interaction between them. The women become not just actresses of development, but also agents of change.

Samwaki stresses the fact that discussions need to be followed up by concrete actions and results, such as an increase in voluntary screening for HIV/AIDS, a fairer sharing of tasks between men and women or an improvement in agricultural output. As Sophie, a farmer in Mugogo observes: “radio has given power to my activities.”

Jocelyne, president of the Rhuhinduke listeners’ club in Mugogo, claims that discussions and radio can lead to very concrete progress: “For example, we talked about cultivating climbing beans and using organic fertiliser from the compost we made ourselves. We now plant the beans in rows, a few centimetres apart. And the yields are much higher”.

If words can provide food, they can also give courage and dignity. These women, who had no opportunity of making their voices heard before, have found in radio and the listeners’ clubs a channel for expressing their opinions and expectations. This has enabled men to become aware of women’s capacities. Understanding the benefit of joining forces to tackle challenges, they now encourage their wives to become involved in the clubs. The women now dare to speak. And to speak about everything. While sex traditionally is a taboo subject, radio has made it possible to shatter groundless beliefs about HIV/AIDS and sexual abuse. Before, some traditional chiefs and communities believed that rape, which is seen as a cause for shame by the family of the raped woman, was not an offence, let alone a crime.

The members of the listeners’ clubs are well aware of the importance of these spaces. For Angeline, a farmer, “victims can come out of hiding and forget their shame. Women can reveal their problems to some members of the listeners’ clubs with complete confidentiality.” After discussions at the club where she is a member,

SHOCKWAVES

Sugarcane versus market gardening

The Rhuuyubak’Eka listeners’ club in Bugobe, Kabare, met to examine the impact on food security of the rapid increase of sugarcane cultivation in the area. From the discussions it emerged that men were taking over fertile wetlands to plant sugarcane. That way they earned money which was often not used for the family.

This land grabbing has contributed to a very significant drop in household food security, since women have often lost their capacity to grow crops, now that they have no fields to sow. The listeners’ club carried out an awareness-raising campaign to discourage sugarcane cultivation, but the results were unsatisfactory because men, who were the landowners, were both instigators and actors in growing this crop.

So the listeners’ club met the territory’s administrative and traditional authorities to bring the problem to their attention. These officials proposed applying taxes on sugarcane growers that were close to or higher than the revenues they expected to earn. As a result, in the wetlands of Bugobe and Mudika-dika, an estimated 70% of land has been returned to growing fruit and vegetables.

Gertrude pinpointed the importance of prevention for herself and her children. “I am now going to see the doctor, something I didn’t consider before, because now I understand that diseases exist, and that they are not curses cast by a neighbour.”



Community radios are also making progress thanks to the partnerships forged with the rural communities. They are gradually adopting a more participatory approach in their programmes and incorporating a gender perspective, presenting the opinions of both women and men. They are more sensitive to the importance of avoiding prejudice. Radio facilitator Dieudonné stresses that “radio works for the community”. The men and women radio staff have received training and Samwaki attempts to provide follow-up, despite a high turnover of staff, most of whom work on a voluntary basis.

Another noteworthy achievement is that the listeners’ clubs in South Kivu have become spaces of peace, where words defuse rancour and old hatreds. The clubs enable people who have had disagreements to talk to each other in a setting where the rules are clear and the atmosphere reassuring. In the words of Ruth, who belongs to the Mushinga listeners’ club: “The clubs are also meeting places. People who were once enemies find themselves working together in the community fields and talking. Working and discussing together have contributed to peaceful cohabitation and to the development of more and more ‘peace havens’.”

But these havens are fragile. And the region has already lived through the bitter experience of radio waves being used for destructive ends. That is one of the fears of Eliane Najros, coordinator of Dimitra: “that there wouldn’t be an organization or structure anymore to provide guidance to the clubs, in case one of them goes off the rails. Since words are potentially powerful weapons, they can also be dangerous. We need to set extremely clear goals for these listeners’ clubs. There shouldn’t be an organization that controls, but there needs to be an assurance that the information which circulates is beneficial to the development of all.”



SHOCKWAVES

Solidarity fund

At Lurhala, a village close to Bukavu, the listeners’ club has set up a solidarity fund. Each member – mainly women – makes a weekly contribution, in cash or in kind. That subsequently gives them the right to use the fund to pay medical expenses in the case of childbirth or if one of their children falls ill. The initiative has proved so successful that the fund is now able to provide cash advances for ceremonies such as weddings, christenings and even funerals.



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COMMUNITY LISTENERS' CLUBS | STEPPING STONES FOR ACTION IN RURAL AREAS

FAO-DIMITRA





Radio Bubusa FM, an open space for women

When Dimitra met Adeline Nsimire and Boniface Bahizire in Goma in 2003, they already talked about launching the radio station of their dreams. It would be a radio station in a rural area. A radio that would be the voice of women. A radio to and for them. Waves from another world.

The dream took root. On 4 January 2008, in the village de Mugogo, about thirty kilometres from Bukavu, a woman spoke. Radio Bubusa FM, “the voice of rural women”, a community radio for rural women, went on air for the first time.

The radio station offered information on themes of health and food security, including the spread of HIV/AIDS, in rural areas. It broadcast for six hours each day in two sessions (morning and evening), in an area that was so far not covered by the airwaves. Women are highly active in producing content in the Mashi language, in which 70% of programmes are broadcast, compared with 20% in Swahili and 10% in French. Some listeners’ clubs, such as the one in Mushinga, record radio programmes in the community fields and send them twice a month to Radio Bubusa FM. Their equipment has been provided with support from the FAO-Dimitra project, the King Baudouin Foundation and the World Association for Christian Communication (WACC).

Two years after airing its first broadcast, the radio station has moved into a building better

suitable for radio production. It now broadcasts from a house specially built for the station by the Réseau des radios et télévisions communautaires de l’Est du Congo (RATECO) with funding from UNDP. It is located in Mishaka, in the territory of Walungu, not far from the commercial centre of Mugogo.

Two extraordinary events marked the history of Radio Bubusa FM in 2010.

The sun and wind carry women’s voices

Kalinga (50 years-old) was sceptical: “I don’t believe in any magic that converts the sun’s rays into electricity. It will take a long time before your technicians can convince me,” she said. But in July 2010, Radio Bubusa FM replaced its oil-thirsty generator. Nowadays, the radio station is equipped with solar panels (see photo on following page). Even better, a wind-power kit serves as back-up should the sun’s rays prove too weak or in case of breakdown.

An ideal rural solution, Bubusa FM is the first community radio to have been set up by women in the province of South Kivu and now becomes the first radio to use renewable energy. In a setting where energy supply is both a major problem and expense, it marks considerable progress. The move will ensure that Bubusa FM is able to broadcast on a continuous basis.



Excellent communication strategies

On 12 August 2010, in Johannesburg (South Africa), Radio Bubusa FM and the community listeners' clubs of South Kivu received the second prize in the 2010 Annual Award for Excellence in HIV and AIDS Communication in Africa. The prize, awarded by the African Network for Strategic Communication of Health (AfricomNet, based in Kampala, Uganda), rewards innovative organizations for their communication strategies on HIV/AIDS.

Keen to share this recognition with all active community club members, Samwaki organized a ceremony in early September 2010. In the course of the day, the prize was officially presented to the local authorities, radio staff and other members of the community listeners' clubs, as well as to members of Samwaki.

On this occasion, Jocelyne M'Maniga, president of the Ruhinduke listeners' club in Mugogo, reminded those present that before the community listeners' clubs and Radio Bubusa FM were set up, HIV/AIDS had been considered a taboo subject, but "these days, issues linked to HIV/AIDS are the subject of frank and open conversations and discussions in families, churches, schools, community fields, by the river, etc. It is the success that our initiatives on HIV/AIDS have had in breaking this silence that has prompted AfricomNet to recognise them as being some of the most excellent strategies for combating this devastating virus."

To celebrate this international recognition in an appropriate manner, Radio Bubusa FM broadcast a non-stop programme on 4 September 2010 with the general theme (in Mashi): "Rhucikebuk'Esida Rucibikule Lyo Rhuyilwisa": let's avoid AIDS, let's talk about it to combat it more effectively.



The figures speak for themselves: a landlocked country in the heart of the Sahel, Niger ranks 167th out of 169 in the human development index; 63% of the population lives below the poverty line; three out of four poor people are women. This is without taking into account a major structural obstacle for rural communities: the very low rates of literacy and education, with marked disparities between men and women. Many causes are cited to explain these differences between men and women: women being restricted to domestic chores, early marriage, gender bias in labour division, high education costs, lack of equipment, etc.

In addition, access to information and communication for rural communities, which could enable them to increase their knowledge and exchange information and practices, is extremely limited. In rural areas, fewer than half of all households (46.6%) have a radio, and television is only available to 0.5% of the population; 64.4% of women have no access to any form of media, for technical reasons, but also due to social and cultural barriers.¹

In most cases, women do not own a radio set. As a result, they cannot choose what they listen to, or when to listen. Their perspectives, concerns, experiences and areas of interest do not receive radio coverage, even in the case of local radios whose vocation it is to give a voice to the voiceless.

National radio channels can be received, but they are broadcast in French, which is not necessarily understood by all men and women. The information

broadcast is national, and often there are no specific programmes on the problems facing rural women, and even fewer made by women themselves.

Combining literacy and communication

Convinced that better access to information and communication offers an opening to greater involvement in the social, economic and political life of a country, the FAO-Dimitra project and its partner ONG VIE Kande Ni Bayra organized a workshop in Dosso, in December 2006. Called “Rural women, literacy and communication – Literacy training for rural women as a lever for their empowerment and that of their families and for the schooling of girls”, the workshop offered an opportunity to identify the complementarity between literacy and communication when it comes to strengthening women’s capacities and education for young girls in rural areas.

Inspired by the emerging model of the community listeners’ clubs in South Kivu, the workshop “recommended creating synergies between community radio stations and literacy centres to promote rural women’s access to information and communication for development,” explains Ali Abdoulaye, coordinator of ONG VIE.

A pilot project for the creation of listeners’ clubs was launched by ONG VIE in 2009, with technical and financial support from FAO-Dimitra and several donors², taking the literacy training centres as starting point.

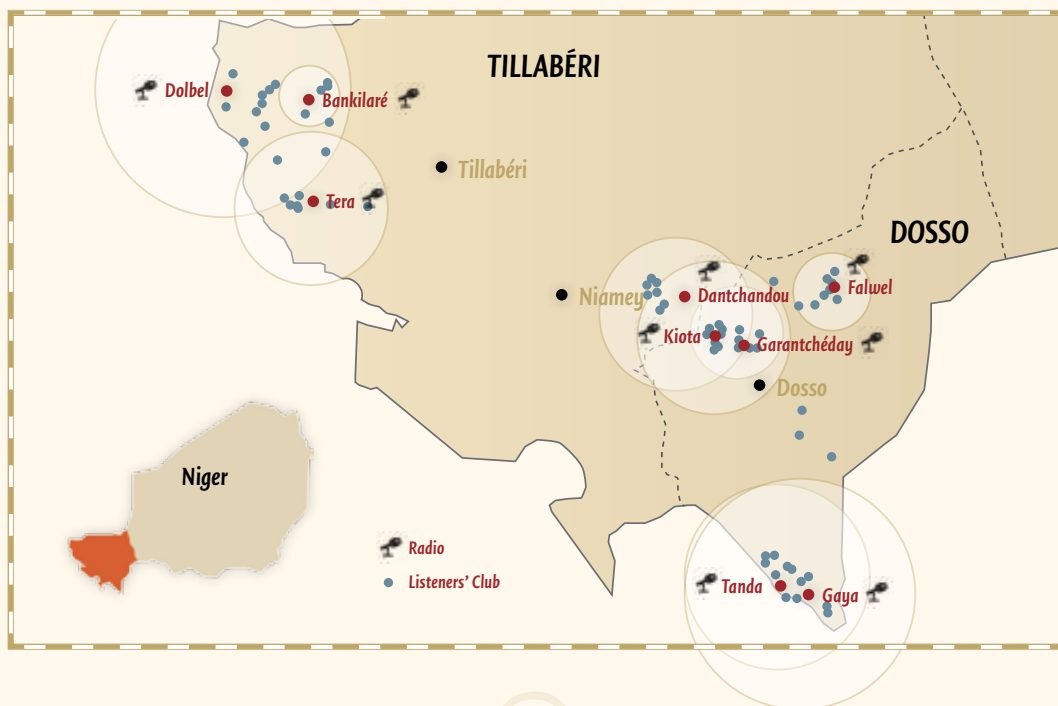


The setting up of listeners' clubs in Niger followed a similar process to that of the clubs in South Kivu and benefited from the experience accumulated by Samwaki in the DRC.

Simple criteria were used to select the villages, such as the motivation of the villagers, the presence of women who had the potential to form a club, the possibility of setting up literacy centres, coverage by a telephone network of the operator partnering with the project, perfect reception of the community radio's programmes. The following regions were thus identified: (i) Tillabéri: Bankilare, Gorououl and Tera (Department of Tera), Dantchandou (Department of Kollo); (ii) Dosso: Tanda and Gaya (Department of Gaya), Falwel (Department of Loga), Dosso and Kiota (Department of Dosso).

Once the areas had been identified, the literacy centres informed their members that listeners' clubs had been set up. "At first, I was at the literacy centre, and then I heard about this club project," explains Mariama Hassane from Fogou. "We were told it would involve both men and women, but with a preference for women. Since I have already made some progress in literacy, I told myself that I would certainly take part in this new initiative to improve my skills."

Solar and wind-up radio sets were made available to club members so they could listen to radio programmes, either taking turns or in group sessions. The women quickly began to discuss the subjects chosen and listened to on the radio.





While collective listening rarely involves more than 20 members, the discussions are open to larger numbers. Club meetings are held on a regular basis, outside the hours of the literacy centres. Mariama explains how it works in Fogou: “Our listeners’ club meets twice a week. I never miss a meeting. It takes between one and two hours for the listening sessions, which start at 8pm. When we are busy working in the fields and preparing the evening meal, we listen to the broadcast from 9 to 10pm.” These are live broadcasts. The broadcasting times are agreed with the radio station, so that they suit the women’s schedules, depending on the time of year and the farming calendar.

Participants in the radio programmes use local languages: Fulfulde, Tamasheq, Zarma and Haoussa. The same radio station can use up to three or four languages, and the language can change during a discussion.

“Each village has its club”, explains Ali Abdoulaye, “At the start, more than 200 women were trained in participatory communication and community leadership. In a village, not everyone can gather around a single radio set because the homes are scattered. So groups are made up according to distance. And the women get together to listen in a pre-arranged place.”

Each club develops its own group listening method. For example, in the rural district of Tanda, each village has two or three listeners’ groups for women and one for men. The women get together in the literacy centre to listen to thematic programmes

“One of the last programmes I listened to talked about fertiliser and conservation techniques. There are different ways of conserving or using fertiliser. The programme explained how to use manure rather than chemical fertiliser”.

Moctare, ONG VIE

“It’s fantastic! Imagine a small village where 60 people sit down to chat about the latest news and swap ideas so that knowledge emerges!” Bello Amadou cultivates millet, sorghum and corn in Tchiota Nazammé. This 50-year-old father-of-two is enthusiastic about the experience. However, his wife does not belong to the club. “She was interested, but there was only a certain number of places. There are three groups of 20 people each. Two groups of women and one of men.”

before discussing amongst themselves to define their position so that they can draw up strategies aimed at bringing about the required changes. If the women decide that a particular theme warrants the opinion or involvement of men from their neighbourhood, they invite them to come and discuss the issue and express their opinion. It may happen that all the groups will meet to make a joint presentation of the knowledge they have acquired and to compare their analysis of it. Sometimes, radio staff will subsequently come to the centre to record the reactions of those taking part and encourage the men and women listeners to talk about other aspects of the theme being discussed, or about a different subject altogether.

In Tera, women take part in discussions at the literacy centre and their conclusions are recorded by the radio and broadcast in the presence of qualified resource persons.

It should be said that although a key aim of the project is to strengthen the position of women within their community, the initiative targets the entire community. Focusing exclusively on women development actors could create tensions with the men of the villages. And when ONG VIE supplied the villages with radio receivers, one-third of them were offered to men, so that they would be fully involved in the project.

In Gassed, the men and women of the village each have their own clubs. They meet once a week for discussions. The clubs have changed the relationships within households, with men and women now speaking freely to one another.

The project also offers help through the women and men facilitators of the literacy centres who will support the listeners' clubs. Mactare works in the Tera area. "In concrete terms, I act as a bridge between the clubs and the radio. We have to explain to the clubs that it is their radio, and that club members must listen to it and call it. The radios are happy to have men and women listeners who follow their programmes." The work of a facilitator involves both organizing and teaching. They mobilise the community and help it with practical issues, but not with the choice of themes.

Agriculture: a key subject

The club members decide which subjects they want to deal with. It may be an issue about which

“ Our last subject? The day before yesterday, we talked about malaria and everything related to it. To overcome the disease, we need to clean up the areas where we live. We were asked to weed all around our houses, since mosquitoes lay their eggs in weeds. It is also important to remove any small containers, old cans and puddles of water near the homes since these are breeding grounds for mosquitoes. That's where they lay their eggs. In the evenings, we must take precautions after the sun goes down, protecting ourselves with mosquito nets, even while we are chatting. In addition, we have learned to detect the first signs of the disease, and as soon as we think someone may be suffering from it, we must quickly take them to the clinic.”

Mariama Hassane, Fogou listeners' club

members would like to have information, one on which they – men or women – have something to say, or they may choose it for some entirely different reason. What interests one club may not necessarily interest another.

“For example, the area of Tchiotia has no mining resources,” explains Ali Abdoulaye. “Since AIDS is not an issue that worries them, the villagers are rarely faced with this subject. But in Téra, where there are traditional gold mines which attract communities from far away, there is a risk of spreading HIV/AIDS. The young people talk about their experiences. People explain what has happened to them and there are discussions.”

While each club chooses its themes, there are some that are inevitable, such as agriculture. “We use radio to communicate about food security. For women and men, it is their prime concern, a question of survival. A week does not go by without this subject being raised. Soil fertility, speculation on crops, where to purchase inputs. All these sub-themes are dealt with in concrete terms. Where can we find these seeds? Should we choose this input or another one?” The discussions and programmes have to be very practical. “In October, there is a great deal of talk about the harvest and discussions about how to avoid selling straight away for a low price.”

It may prove necessary to turn to expert sources, but that is a decision taken by the club members. Each programme is prepared by a journalist or facilitator who researches the subject beforehand and can ask for the help of the FAO office in Niamey if the theme under discussion is appropriate. The journalist prepares the subject and refers to the clubs to sound out their ideas on issues relating to the theme. His or her role is not to do a complete report, but to introduce the main issues, allow experts to give their viewpoint, enable communities to react, ask questions or express a different opinion. This way the skills of the community radio staff are also improved.



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Concrete progress for rural women

One year after the listeners' clubs were launched, observers in the field were already speaking of a small 'revolution'. Moctare claims there has been a real change in the way people think: "women are daring to speak out", a development that represents a tremendous change in rural Niger. Mariama talks about the new freedom she has found. This 28-year-old mother of four children recently travelled to the capital Niamey, to take part in an international meeting and share her knowledge³. "I had never left my village before! Here, I hear voices that are different from those I hear back home. We have been able to meet other people. It has been a very enriching experience."

Ali Abdoulaye adds that "Women never had a voice. They sat behind the men and even when they were asked a direct question, they turned to the men who, being the only ones to have travelled, had a relevant opinion. These days, these same women have become aware of the knowledge they hold. They give their opinions, contradicting viewpoints imposed on them, and get organized so they can be heard and given greater consideration. Women's discussions have shown that they were able to analyse and synthesize."

Men's opinion of women has also evolved. In Borobon village, in the region of Tillabéry, the traditional chief asked several women to attend village meetings. Three of them now take part in these meetings, where important community decisions are taken.



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The coordinator of ONG VIE stresses that before the clubs were set up in the village, women did not always see the point of learning to read and write. “They thought that learning these skills would never be of any use to them. In handling new technologies, they discover how essential it is to communicate. To read or write a message. This initiative has led to an important increase of interest in the literacy centres.”

Over and above these advances, the technical skills and knowledge of club members, especially women, have developed in the course of radio programmes and discussions. Practical information is given on food security and themes linked to health and education. Good practices are presented as a model for other clubs.

“The subject of warrantage came up, a strategy of waiting to get better prices,” recalls Ali Abdoulaye. “Cereals

are stored in a warehouse for six months. You receive the market price, but six months later you can go and collect your harvest, sell it at a higher price, pay back the bank and keep the profits. We explain this so that all farmers understand why they should not sell their harvests off cheaply. Some time ago, discussions centred on traditional fertiliser practices; practices such as bush fires are discouraged.”

Mariama also acknowledges the very tangible progress in her daily life. “When we wanted to store onions, they all rotted and you could not sell anything. The subject was discussed and we were given explanations on how to proceed. When you use too much fertiliser, onions rot because they take in too much water. With less fertiliser, they don’t swell as much and remain more compact. When they are harvested, it is important to store onions in a well ventilated place and take the trouble to turn them. As soon as you see one that is rotting, you must remove it quickly.”

The mobile telephone, a tool for development

A practical problem emerged soon after the listeners' clubs were set up: "The women listened to the programme, but when they wanted to express their opinion they had to send someone to the radio station," explains Ali Abdoulaye. "This person had to make a round trip of between 10 and 50 kilometres!" The person chosen would highlight aspects that the club had found important, make a correction to a piece of information or ask for supplementary details. "After two months, with travel proving difficult, the women decided to call by telephone and summarise their ideas in one or two minutes. But this was expensive." ONG VIE approached a telephone company which offered a very reasonable flat rate, ten times better than the market price. "We bought a hands-free phone for each club, with an annual subscription."

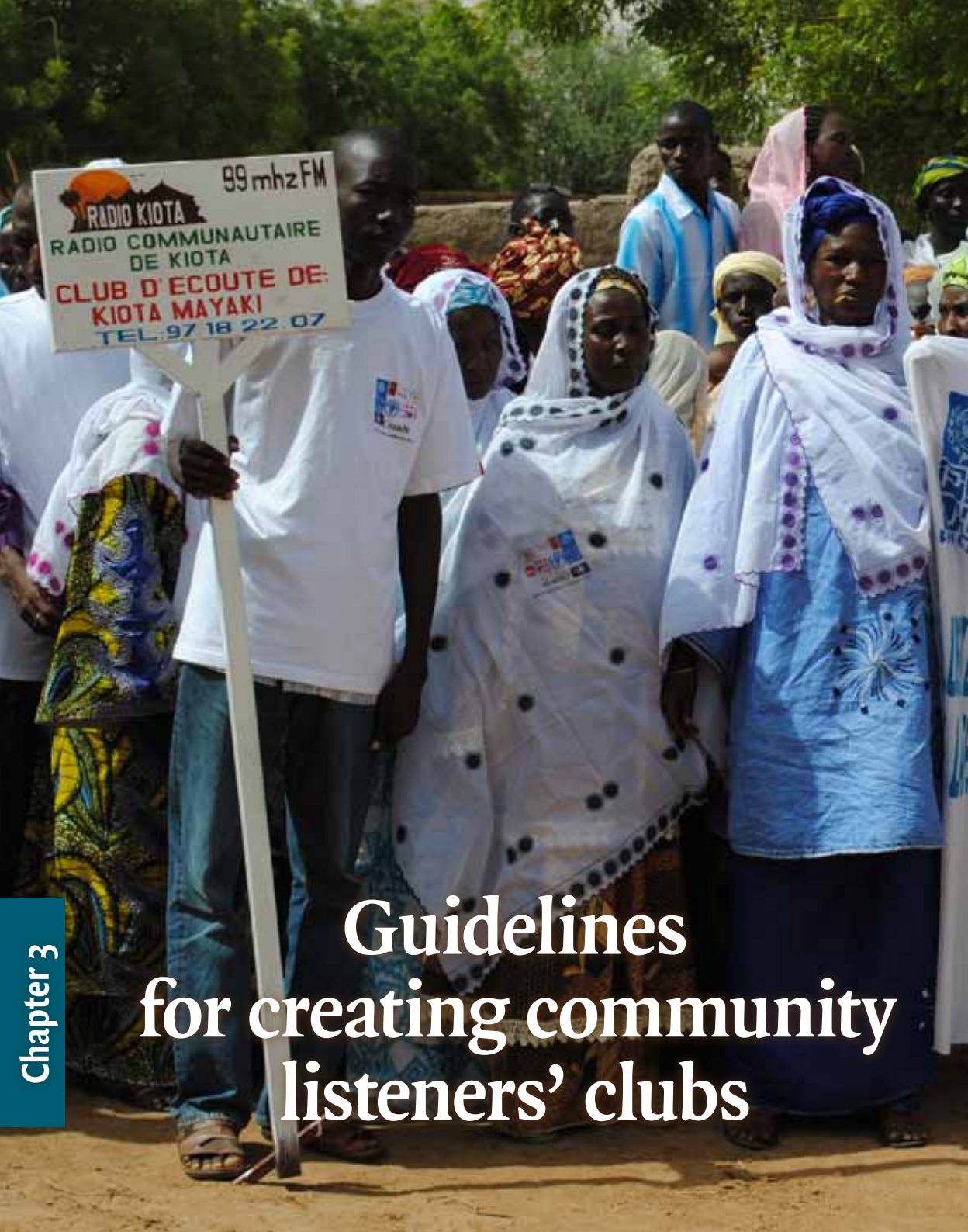
This "fleet" of 100 phones can also be used to make free calls to each other and to the nine partner radio stations. "This system has changed the way journalists work. The radios suggest a theme and open up the airwaves, often with a specialist. The women and men can call in during the broadcast to give their reaction. There is systematic live interaction."

Mobile telephones have made a major contribution in boosting participation and interaction between the clubs and the radio, as well as between rural communities. "In the area surrounding our village, there are nine other clubs, and when it rains somewhere, we call one another," explains Bello Amadou. "We contact one another every morning to exchange information such as the loss of livestock, theft, etc."

Dimitra Project Officer Yannick De Mol points to a key aspect of this modern tool: "Of course, the project is not based on a tool as such – even if the telephone offers extraordinary opportunities – but on the interaction between the community and other development stakeholders. What will make this dynamic process sustainable is not the telephone itself, but having a common project for local development."

Another more down-to-earth challenge is looming: the subscription renewal for the telephones. Given that the project has funding for one year, the villagers are pondering how to keep a telephone at their disposal to express their ideas, without being cut off. "Several strategies have been developed in the clubs," explains Ali Abdoulaye. "One of the solutions is a weekly contribution whereby each person gives 100 or 200 francs CFA (0.15 or 0.3 euro) per week." It is a big sacrifice for these rural women. "It's all relative, because these people have very little money," he says. "100 francs each week means 8 euros a year. For these women, there are periods when they can pay this sum in one go, and others when they would have to suspend the contract. Especially during the critical pre-harvest period, when they'll be forced to stop all contributions for three or four months."

Another option has already been implemented by the members of several listeners' clubs who have turned club-owned cellphones into public community telephones: villagers pay a modest price to talk to someone on a cellphone belonging to the same fleet (the call is free), or another telephone (the call is not free but costs less than a call without a subscription). These contributions go into a fund which will help the villagers to pay the subscription by themselves.



Guidelines for creating community listeners' clubs



A few basics for creating community listeners' clubs, presented in four stages, and the main success factors to be considered.



The success of the community listeners' clubs prompted the Dimitra project and its partners to analyse this experience from several angles so as to have a better idea of the process involved in establishing the clubs and factors likely to promote their success.

In systemising this process, the aim is to facilitate the future adaptation and implementation of this participatory means of information and communication in different settings. Factors considered important are presented in this section. However, this overview is not intended to be an exhaustive

guide to creating community listeners' clubs, nor the sole solution for their establishment and operation. There are infinite variations, which should be explored and adapted to each particular situation. An essential consideration is that the mechanism created can stimulate a process of dialogue and communication, through which the community defines itself, what it wants and how to obtain it.

In the experience of Dimitra and its partners, the process of creating community listeners' clubs revolves around four stages, as illustrated below:

1. BEFORE THE CREATION OF LISTENERS' CLUBS

- Preliminary contacts and baseline survey
- Participatory identification of problems
- Initial training
- Reporting and mobilisation

2. THE CREATION OF LISTENERS' CLUBS

- Vision/mission and goals of listeners' clubs
- Responsibilities and internal organization
- Privileged contacts with one/several radio station(s)
- Neutral meeting places
- Spirit of collaboration

3. LISTENERS' CLUBS IN ACTION

- Listening
- Discussions
- Decision-making
- Action

4. THE FOLLOW-UP OF THE PROCESS

- At the level of the rural community/ the listeners' clubs
- At the level of the community radio

1. Before the creation of listeners' clubs

Preliminary contacts and baseline survey

The experience of the clubs set up in Niger and the DRC shows the importance of basing the establishment of clubs on a sound network (or organization) that is already operating in the area. For example, in the case of Niger, the clubs were able to develop thanks to the partnership with ONG VIE, which is highly active in the two regions where

the project is operational and has the support of its network of literacy centres and facilitators.

In the DRC, the clubs are not built around such a highly structured network; the initiative developed thanks to communication channels between the facilitators from Samwaki and REFED-Katanga (Réseau Femme et Développement) who served as key focal points.

The body/organization wishing to support the creation of community listeners' clubs must be involved throughout the process. As well as an excellent knowledge of the local conditions and realities, it is essential that it has strong capacities for rallying interest in the project. Its first task will be to establish **preliminary contacts** in the community in order to:


- meet local authorities and talk to them about the proposed initiative;
- list local development initiatives and organizations working in this sector and review the impact of their activities on the community;
- identify and involve local social leaders, both men and women;
- draw an initial impression of the main development issues at local level.

A **baseline survey** is then carried out to improve understanding of the context in which the clubs will be created. This should include: a mapping of the stakeholders (men and women), the traditional and modern communication methods used (in terms of coverage, access, cost, programmes and efficacy) as regards the differing needs of the various community groups (men, women, youth), other development initiatives with a communication component operating in the region, an analysis of the situation in terms of gender and access to information, etc.⁴

Participatory identification of problems

Once the preliminary contacts have been established, the staff from the support organization will facilitate meetings at community level, with special focus on the participation of women, young people and groups that are generally less visible, as well as men and women considered to be leaders in their community. The idea is to get the participants to draw up a non-exhaustive list of the main development issues facing communities in the area.

From theory to practice



During a consultation meeting with representatives from different sectors of society in Kasika, in the territory of Mwenga (South Kivu), information was supplied on HIV/AIDS. A woman of about fifty said she wanted to break the silence about this disease in her own household, family and village. She used a popular Swahili saying: "Ukinyamazia mlozi, atakumaliza watoto", "If you keep silent with a sorcerer, he will eat up all your children". As a result of this meeting, the community started to understand the importance of having opportunities to dialogue and exchange information, such as those offered by the community listeners' clubs.

From theory to practice



A preliminary meeting prior to the creation of a listeners' club enabled inhabitants of the village of Kahimuzi, in Walungu territory (South Kivu) to learn that at least two out of three widows in their village had been victims of land grabbing by their eldest son following the death of their husband. Villagers identified the problem of inheritance as a major cause of the lack of access to land for women.


Initial training

Initial training is organized for women and men leaders previously identified in the communities, journalists and community radio facilitators working in the region and staff from the supporting body/organization. The aim of this first meeting is twofold: to bring all the stakeholders together under the umbrella of a common project to explain the functioning and establishment of community listeners' clubs and to strengthen the capacities of participants in terms of gender and participatory communication and on more technical aspects.

Regarding the selection of women and men leaders for this training, initial contacts and the baseline survey will already have helped to identify and approach the most charismatic and committed individuals. However, it is also essential that the leaders are chosen in a participatory manner by the community. In many cases, community members choose women and men leaders on the basis of criteria such as patience and wisdom, and because these individuals are particularly popular and respected within the community. Account should also be taken of representation of social groups. Identifying community leaders is crucial given the importance of the role that they will be called upon to play to stimulate the clubs and make them work.

In choosing themes to be dealt with during these training sessions, reference will be made to issues closely linked to the project: participatory communication, gender issues, community listeners' clubs, etc., as well as priority problems and needs identified during the previous stage.

From theory to practice



In Niger, training and awareness-raising activities targeted the following groups:

- **Women and men community leaders:** on the listeners' club approach, their goals and how they function; roles and responsibilities of leaders in managing a listeners' club; gender issues; participatory communication features such as facilitation, mobilisation and group management; use of radio receivers and telephones; summary of discussions.
- **Community radio stations:** on participatory communication, gender and communication, and capacity building to produce radio programmes using this approach.
- **Staff from the support organization:** on managing listeners' clubs and facilitating discussions; understanding the approach; supporting clubs in carrying out their activities; the process of identifying and developing themes and group management; the importance of gender issues; organizing radio contributions; mobilising resource people.
- **Administrative, religious, municipal and traditional authorities/communities:** activities to disseminate information and raise awareness on the listeners' club approach, the stages involved in setting up these clubs and the participation of men and women in development.

Targeted training sessions may be organized, for example, for community leaders, journalists/ community radio staff or resource people from the support organization. However, it is important that all these groups of stakeholders are brought together in joint meetings so as to strengthen links and exchanges between them.

Feed back and mobilisation

Participants in the training sessions will subsequently be called upon to raise awareness in the community about the “listeners’ club approach”. It is important to highlight concrete short-term potential achievements of the mechanism, especially improvement in knowledge of different subjects of interest to most people, changes brought about by members of the community, etc. The awareness-raising sessions seek to arouse the interest of both women and men and to encourage more people to join the listeners’ clubs. Individuals who are interested will later take part in a first meeting organized by community leaders with the help of the support organization. This stage marks the beginning of the setting up of the listeners’ club, during which responsibilities may be assigned. Regarding participants from the radio stations and the support organization, feed back sessions will be organized so as to raise awareness among colleagues.

2. The creation of listeners’ clubs

A community listeners’ club is not a simple ‘club of listeners’ or a ‘fan club’, linked to a radio programme or station. A listeners’ club is driven by common values and goals. The project is not centred on the radio, but on the **community**. These clubs are citizens’ groups that enable members to share their concerns and needs, to obtain certain information that would otherwise be inaccessible and undertake constructive initiatives together.

Vision/mission and goals of listeners’ clubs

Ideally, the listeners’ club should have a **vision** and a **mission**. The vision is how the club wants to develop in the long term. All members must be able to feel involved in the vision. The vision enables members to feel part of something quite important. The vision is formulated succinctly and is easy to remember; it is often reflected in the club’s name. The **mission** is a precise description of what the listeners’ club does. It describes the club’s activities and expresses its purpose. In the DRC, the mission and vision feature in the club’s statutes (together with texts that describe how the club works and how it is managed).

From theory to practice

In Tchiota Nazamn  (Niger), Amadou Bello was immediately captivated by the idea of a listeners’ club. *“When they came to explain, I realised it was a strategy to give us a lot of information, to change things, and I found that interesting.”*

In South Kivu, the names of the nine federations of listeners’ club vary widely, but each one clearly reflects these clubs’ mission/vision. For example, those in Kabar  are called “Rhuyubak’Eka” (Build Our Village), the ones in Uvira: “Masikilizano” (Reconciliation), while those in Walungu and Idjwi are called respectively “Rhuhinduke” (Let’s Change Behaviour) and Rhudosanye” (Let’s Talk).

Generally, the **goals** of a listeners' club are the following:

- To generate information, promote local knowledge and encourage information sharing, especially to benefit communities with limited access to the media.
- To use radio to prompt community members, both women and men, to take part in development activities/projects at local level.
- To enable women and men in the community to express themselves freely on issues of community interest and to play an active and voluntary role in undertaking concerted initiatives as a response.

To these three goals, others may be added that are relevant to each particular listeners' club. If the goals vary according to circumstance, it is important that they are always sensitive to gender issues and respect local culture.

Responsibilities and internal organization

Methods for organizing community listeners' clubs may vary according to the situation and the way the support organization works. For example, the listeners' clubs set up in Niger have quite an informal structure. By contrast, in the DRC, the organization of the clubs is dictated by the election of members at a General Assembly, and of a man or woman chair and vice-chair, etc. At this stage, the tasks of each person are clarified (leaders, facilitators, secretary, members) and the internal regulations and/or dispute procedures are established.

Depending on the circumstances, the listeners' clubs may be made up entirely of women, of men, or they may be mixed. In this latter case, it is essential that the club's decision-making bodies have gender parity, to ensure that women can really play an active role in club proceedings.

Operational planning is useful for defining the place and time of meetings, discussion of themes, individual or group training sessions on the use of radio and telephones, interactions with community radio, other clubs, facilitators, etc.

Anyone who shows a real wish to contribute to the development of their area should be allowed to join a listeners' club. In the DRC, there is no limit on the number of members for each listeners' club. However, it should be borne in mind that group listening around a radio set becomes problematic if there are more than twenty people. Not all club members have to listen to radio programmes. Some may just take part in the discussions and debates held after the broadcast.

From theory to practice



Eliane Najros (Dimitra) recalls how the listeners' clubs are organized in South Kivu: *"The clubs are highly structured, but nevertheless there is a great deal of discussion. I realised that organization varied greatly, with one club meeting twice a week while another chose to meet once a fortnight. Others still work with the radio set in the fields. So the organization is not as rigid as it seemed at first. The statutes do not control the means of communication, but they offer a framework to work with."*



Privileged contact with one/several radio station(s)

A special partnership will be established on the basis of common interests between the listeners' clubs and at least one community radio station. The clubs allow the radio to be more effective in fulfilling its role as a participatory media, in tune with the community. The radio allows the clubs – and hence the community – not just to have access to information, but also to express its concerns and needs, as well as its knowledge. It is incontestably a win-win partnership and it is important that both parties see it in that light.

The nature of the partnership, including the terms of collaboration, must be established through dialogue between the radio and the listeners' club. It is important to set out these terms clearly in writing in order to ensure the commitment of the radio management and avoid any future misunderstandings.

The radio and listeners' clubs can start by exploring together areas of common ground between their respective missions. Essentially, the community radio's goals include contributing to local development and encouraging communities to participate in public life, which is also the case for listeners' clubs.

For example, the radio station can become involved in different ways: by producing a programme that gives a voice to the clubs and including it in its radio schedule; by facilitating exchanges or finding resource people to talk on various subjects; by organizing public broadcasts in a club's village, etc. As for the clubs, they can commit to playing an active role in the radio (making programmes, providing feedback, taking part in drawing up programme schedules, etc.), to listen to broadcasts and to share their opinions. There may be scope for working together in other ways too, for example by jointly organizing activities of general interest. The two parties may decide on a joint schedule so they can





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coordinate their activities. It can also prove useful to appoint someone as a focal point at the radio to make contact easier.

The support organization has an important role to play. Radio facilitators are often personalities recognised by the community, while club members may not be used at this stage to speaking out and defending their viewpoints. Building self-confidence is part of the listeners' club process. It is therefore important that the club does not leave it up to the radio alone to establish the procedures, the methods of collaboration or the topics to be addressed by the club.

Support for community radios should be offered as an incentive to encourage their whole-hearted involvement. Naturally, contributing to local development is an integral part of the community radios'

mandate, but this type of media often operates in difficult circumstances. Not to mention the fact that activities undertaken with listeners' clubs will involve mobilising staff and resources (especially for transport). It is therefore important to make sure that the radio station sees the partnership in a positive light.

It should also be noted that, in certain cases, listeners' clubs are located in areas where there is no community radio reception. Although such situations are not ideal due to the inevitable loss of impetus that this will involve, alternatives do exist. For example, a system for listening to and exchanging recorded radio programmes may be set up and staff from other radio stations, including ones further away, may be programmed.



Neutral meeting places

The club must be free of any political, religious, community or other leaning. Special attention must be paid to choosing a meeting place which should be as neutral as possible.

From theory to practice

In Fogou, close to Téra (Niger), the club of Mariama Hassane meets “next to the mosque, in a meeting place. Under the stars. The place is equidistant from all the homes.” In Doumba, a village in the same area, the women meet in a warehouse which is used by the literacy centre.

Spirit of collaboration

A key feature of a listeners’ club is the climate of collaboration and solidarity among its members. Dialogue within a club allows members to plan strategies together for resolving common problems. The facilitators and group leaders should use participatory techniques and tools for collaboration to promote this team spirit.

3. Listeners’ clubs in action

Listening

Each club decides how often and in what manner listening sessions should be held. These must be planned and organized. The listener, whether man or woman, should choose the subject to listen to and then find the best possible conditions (be undisturbed, in a quiet place and avoid doing other tasks while listening, etc.), and then choose the time and the place for the listening session. However, it is not easy to make time and cut oneself off for this listening session. Sometimes, listening sessions are held in the fields.

Listening is organized in two ways, which can sometimes be complementary: individual or group listening.

- **Individual listening:** This involves listening as an individual or household. The listener knows in advance what time the programme that interests him/her will be broadcast. Individual listening sessions are followed up by a report based on the programme content to be shared with other club members using a method agreed with the club (recording, written report, listening report form, etc.). The listener prepares the material needed to make the report.
- **Group listening:** For group listening, club members divide into groups which meet in a neutral location accessible to all to listen to programmes together and discuss them. Each participant can take notes to ensure lively participation in the discussion that follows. Group listening has proved more effective than individual listening in terms of absorbing programme content. The feedback of participants can be useful as a summary and record of the discussions; as the saying goes: “two heads are better than one”.

From theory to practice



Several methods of listening and sharing can be used together:

— **Special live programmes:** negotiation of air time to broadcast these programmes, often lasting between 1 and 1.5 hours and generally aired during the evening, between 8 and 10 pm.

— **Conference:** a discussion on a theme prepared by one or more clubs, facilitated by a member of the radio team who plays the role of focal point; there is no live radio broadcast. In Niger, club members listen to and take part in the discussions using mobile telephones (with loudspeaker if possible).

— **Reporting :** the radio broadcasts an item made by one or more clubs in the village (for example a sketch) and solicits the reaction of other clubs.

— **Participation in radio programmes:** these programmes are part of the radio's regular broadcast schedule; women in particular participate in these programmes by giving their feedback in an individual manner (for example by phone). It should be noted that this is not the same as group listening.

Discussions

This is a highly important moment, as the discussion should enable each member to take part so as to reach a better understanding of the problem. A successful discussion will enable the group to define the issue, analyse the causes, identify the consequences at both individual and community levels, and, above all, to propose concrete actions to solve the problem. It is not supposed to involve verbal sparring, with winners and losers.

During the discussions it is important to use every means possible to encourage the most silent and marginalised individuals to speak out and express their opinion. That does not mean simply asking their viewpoint at a meeting. It means showing them that they have something to contribute, that their opinion is just as important as that of anyone else. It is only in the medium term that behaviour change will be seen. So patience is called for.

From theory to practice



"Women meet up and share their experiences, even talking about what goes on in their private lives. In the end they pour out everything. There are only about 20 people in a club, but in the village, everyone knows what is going on; nothing is secret."

Moctare, ONG VIE, NIGER



Decision-making

When a club decides to take action, it is advisable to respect the majority opinion. To do this, a listeners' club must establish and respect democratic rules. These rules are set out in the internal regulations and ensure good organizational management. However, it is important not to fall into the trap of 'majority dictatorship': it is good practice to listen to the arguments of each person and preferable to reach a position through consensus and general agreement.

Hurried discussion will result in unpopular decisions being taken which are often not implemented since most members do not feel any sense of ownership towards them.


Action

The listeners' clubs are an information and communication tool centred on action. Without action, there is no prospect for change. There is little point in members losing themselves in sterile debates

which do not lead to concrete, widely supported measures to change a certain situation, improve ways of doing things and a better quality of life for the community, both men and women.

This is an essential characteristic of the community listeners' clubs. Action must be central to the process. All members should assimilate this principle and be committed to the idea that the most important outcome is the implementation of concrete actions that benefit the community. Again, the support organization has a key role to play in this stage.

From theory to practice



In the village of Kapolowe-mission, in the DRC, after much discussion, the listeners' clubs reached the conclusion that it was essential to make the authorities aware of the links between corruption and sexual harassment, and that action must be taken to this effect. They took the opportunity of an official visit and a meeting with the traditional and administrative authorities, notably the Director of the Cabinet of the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development and the District Chief, to put on a sketch illustrating these links. The women asked the men to play the role of the men, but when they refused to play the "bad guys", the women decided to dress up as men and play the role themselves. The sketch explaining the situations in which women find themselves on a daily basis prompted much laughter from the audience, but it also made people more aware of the serious extent of corruption and sexual violence.



4. The follow-up of the process

The organization that provides support to the establishment and functioning of the community listeners' clubs must facilitate the monitoring of activities, at community and listeners' club level and at community radio level.

Follow-up at the level of the rural community/the listeners' clubs

This level essentially has two aspects:

- Providing information on the **achievements** of the listeners' clubs: feed back on the experiences through the radio will allow more community members to become involved in development activities. The range and nature of the changes incurred can be discussed within the group and by the media channels, especially community radio. Disseminating information about achievements is also a good way of stimulating more impetus in the clubs.
- Identifying **means of action/resources**: it is not sufficient to take decisions following discussions. It is essential to define ways to put the actions into practice, so that they have a visible impact on the lives of beneficiaries. Given the recurrent lack of available resources, the listeners' clubs must identify priority issues. If they are to be effective, they will opt for challenges that they can hope to meet and for which they can find local solutions with the human, material and financial resources available.

From theory to practice



In South Kivu, a radio programme enabled members of the Ruhinduke listeners' club in Mugogo to find out about a two-pronged initiative by women in Fizi. They had successfully set up a mutual aid fund for women and an activity to make corrugated tiles for the roofs of their kitchens.

Discussing the programme, members of the Mugogo listeners' club took up the idea of their peers in Fizi and decided to create their own savings and credit cooperative. On the basis of cautious calculations they estimated that rearing 20 rabbits could generate a revenue of US\$1,500 dollars in 12 months. To get started, they used their contributions to buy 20 rabbits which were distributed as revolving credit among the 20 club members – 15 women and 5 men. After nine months, the number of beneficiaries had reached 162. Each member now has at least three rabbits. With each rabbit fetching an average price of three dollars, this small livestock initiative has brought in some US\$1,558 dollars in one year.



Follow-up at the level of the community radio

Following up on the activities of the community radios must be carried out by the supporting organization and the listeners' clubs, paying particular attention to the following aspects:

- Ensuring **collaboration** with the community radio: it is important to maintain a good working relationship with the community radio in the long term, for the benefit of all. The community radio should be seen as a resource for supporting activities and local development projects as a whole.
- **Participating** in the life of the radio: participation (via listeners' clubs or not) is not just a question of taking part in a programme. Far from it! It also involves playing a role in making programmes (choosing subjects and making editorial choices, sound recording, production, editing, etc.). Generally, it means taking part in the life of the radio, for example by giving an opinion on the programme schedule and, ideally, helping to make it more in tune with the needs and interests of the community.
- Setting up **permanent communication channels** between the radio and the club: in order to promote the exchange of information and allow different actors – men and women – to take part in discussions on development, the listeners' club must set up communication systems based on regular exchanges between radio staff and club members. This interaction will help ensure that programme content is more appropriate.

All the monitoring activities mentioned should enable the evaluation of the experience. This will give a clearer understanding of its impact and will allow adjustments to improve the functioning of the listeners' clubs.



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COMMUNITY LISTENERS' CLUBS: SUCCESS FACTORS

The experience of Dimitra and its partners has made it possible to identify a certain number of success factors for community listeners' clubs. These good practices should encourage clubs to become even more active and help avoid stumbling blocks. The list is not exhaustive, but it brings together success factors for the four main stages described in the guidelines: before the creation of listeners' clubs, the creation of listeners' clubs, listeners' clubs in action and the follow-up of the process.

Before the creation of listeners' clubs

- Support and assistance from a well organized body/ organization with a good knowledge of the local context and whose abilities and credibility are held in high esteem. This body must have a network of skilled resource people available, capable of following the process and engaging, convincing and motivating members.
- Identifying men and women leaders recognised by the community, able to give the listeners' club impetus.
- Awareness by the community and local authorities of how the clubs work and their involvement in the process.
- Real support from as many people as possible for the initiative and ownership by the community and club members, especially with regard to the principle that action is the key feature of the process. Without this support, clubs may be set up, but they will have little prospect of lasting in the long term.
- Training in techniques of facilitation and participatory communication for women and men leaders.

The creation of listeners' clubs

- Establishment and functioning based on the cultural, social, economic and political context.
- Creation of partnerships and alliances with community radio stations, local media and other development partners (NGOs, etc.).
- Preparation of clear regulatory documents (statutes including the club's vision and mission, agreements for collaboration with radio, internal regulations, etc.) on club organization and management that are accessible to all and respected by the members (the arrangements may vary according to the country and context).
- Training (and/or retraining) to assist women and men leaders and facilitators of the support organization and community radios on development themes and tools.
- Support to community radio partners who should benefit from capacity building initiatives (facilitation, technique, etc.).
- Setting up of effective collaboration between the support organizations, listeners' clubs and radio stations (mutual strategy).



Listeners' clubs in action

- Effective facilitation and mobilisation by men and women leaders.
- Focus on one or more themes and not on all the problems affecting the community.
- Clear understanding of the development problems identified by club members.
- Special care not to weigh down club meetings with purely organizational discussions.
- Regular exchanges with other listeners' clubs and development actors of both sexes as a source of inspiration to find solutions.
- Special efforts to give a voice to the most marginalised members of the community, especially women. It is important to open the debate to all, taking care that one or more individuals do not monopolise the discussions.

- Equal treatment for all club members, both women and men, and consideration for all opinions.
- Directing discussions towards realistic, concrete and relevant courses of action that can be implemented by the community, without turning to outside resources. Translating words into deeds is essential.
- Taking account of partnership and alliance opportunities with other development initiatives set up in the region.

Follow-up of the process

- Media coverage/dissemination of results and actions using various communication channels.
- Ensuring a long term relationship of trust, with frequent and regular contact, between the rural community and community radio.



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Conclusion

Since their establishment, the community listeners' clubs have enjoyed a massive boom and engendered great enthusiasm, especially among rural communities, but also with local and national institutions and development partners.

They have gradually proved themselves to be an effective means for isolated rural communities to access information and engage in participatory communication, becoming stepping stones for action. As for development partners, they have quickly seized the potential offered by the listeners' clubs, both as a means of empowering rural communities and as a lever for change. They have seen the results achieved in various sectors, including the economic, technical, social and political fields and their impact on the perceptions, behaviour and sense of ownership of the communities.

The experience of the community listeners' clubs is unique, in the sense that they have rapidly had an indisputable effect on the life of people, especially women, who have been assigned a pro-active role in the development of their community and have received recognition for it too. Their success underscores the importance in development initiatives of mechanisms that focus on people, information, communication and exchanges and therefore on human values.

Furthermore, the listeners' clubs promote a form of action which, like "all forms of collective action can be an effective means of building social capital and addressing gender gaps in other areas as well, through reducing transactions costs, pooling risks, developing skills and building confidence" (FAO Report on the State of Food and Agriculture, 2010-2011).⁵





The considerable potential of the community listeners' clubs should be exploited so as to help improve nutrition and food security and strengthen the capacities of women and men to make their voices heard. It is important to promote their progressive development, taking care to include them in the global development context, by creating partnerships and synergies with development initiatives.

Another issue that is key to the development of listeners' clubs is the participation of young people of both sexes. It should be remembered that in Africa, 60% of the population is under 25 (UNFPA, 2008) and that young people are rarely at the centre of agricultural development activities or represented in civil society organizations. Listeners' clubs could serve as stepping stones to achieve greater visibility for young people, stimulate discussion on issues that

are important for them and strengthen their participation in the development of their community.

Participatory development will involve the use of innovative measures to strengthen the empowerment of rural communities, especially women, and narrow the divide between men and women. In this sense, the community listeners' clubs have an original role to play, not just in encouraging access to information for as many people as possible, but also serving as a framework for a form of collective and participatory involvement in development projects and programmes, while enabling isolated communities to take better advantage of new information and communication technologies.

Notes

- 1 Data from the following documents: UNDP, 2010. Human Development Report. The Real Wealth of Nations: Pathways to Human Development; UNICEF, Niger 2008. State of Women & Children; SDRP, 2007. Accelerated Development and Poverty Reduction Strategy; National Gender Policy, Niger, 2008.
- 2 Project “Listeners’ clubs for the empowerment and leadership of rural women and youth attending literacy training centres”, with the support of FAO-Dimitra, the Canadian Embassy in Niger (FAES), UNFPA, UNDP, UNIFEM, Swiss Development Corporation, BTC, Belgian Technical Corporation.
- 3 The Knowledge Share Fair, organized by the FAO Knowledge Management and Gender programme, of which FAO-Dimitra is a member, took place in Niamey from 15 to 17 June 2010.
- 4 FAO-Dimitra, 2011. Communicating Gender for Rural Development – First step, Analysing the context and the subject, p. 52-58.
- 5 FAO, 2011. The State of Food and Agriculture (SOFA 2010-2011). Women in Agriculture. Closing the gender gap for development, page 60.





To find out more

The experience of the FAO-Dimitra project with community listeners' clubs

- FAO-Dimitra website: workshop reports and various publications
www.fao.org/dimitra/dimitra-workshops/en
www.fao.org/dimitra/dimitra-publications/en
- FAO-Dimitra Newsletter (a number of articles in issues 12 to 19)
www.fao.org/dimitra/dimitra-publications/newsletter/en
- FAO-Dimitra, 2011. Communicating gender for rural development. Integrating gender in communication for development.
www.fao.org/dimitra/dimitra-publications/publications/en

Community rural radios

- FAO, International Workshop on Farm Radio Broadcasting, 2001.
www.fao.org/sd/2001/radio
- Special Issue n° 8: Plaidoyer pour l'appui des radios locales de service aux communautés en Afrique de l'Ouest. Guide à l'intention des ONG et des bailleurs de fonds. Edited by Stéphane Boulc'h (COTA) with the Panos Institute West Africa, December 2008. In French only
www.cota.be/SPIP/IMG/pdf/Hors-Serie_8.pdf

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This publication summarises the unique experience of the community listeners' clubs set up in Niger and the Democratic Republic of Congo by FAO-Dimitra and its partners. These action-based information and communication processes have proved so successful that Dimitra decided to share the experience.

The first chapter offers a brief overview of the community listeners' clubs, their goals and internal functioning and the results achieved. The second chapter tells the story of the listeners' clubs in the words of the stakeholders, explaining how they were established in the two countries. The third chapter sets out more practical guidelines on the stages involved in creating community listeners' clubs.