

Radio for rural development

Use of mobile phones and similar technologies is growing across Africa, but radio remains a vital way of sharing news and communicating in many places – especially rural areas. Farming communities in remote parts of Eastern Africa risk increasing marginalization if they miss out on new opportunities such as emerging agricultural markets. ESAPP addressed this threat by supporting radio programming by and for farmers about sustainable land use and other timely topics of interest.

Sustainable development challenge

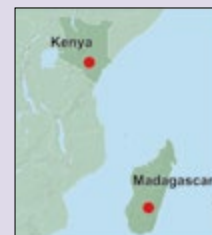
Rural populations in remote areas are often marginalized by their lack of access to timely and reliable information and means of communication. At the same time, government support for rural extension services is weakening. Rural extension and development staff increasingly fail to reach remote areas because of limited personnel, material, or financial resources in conjunction with poor road access. Thus, taking advantage of existing or emerging opportunities (e.g. markets) is a challenge for farmers because they miss out on relevant information, knowledge on new crops and varieties, or improved land use techniques. Further, rural people often lack the means and networks needed to make their interests and concerns heard, hampering their participation in societal processes.

In rural Madagascar and Kenya, as in other parts of Africa, radio remains the communication medium of choice and the sole source of supra-local information for many communities. Print media, television, and Internet are often inaccessible or unaffordable where they live (Myers 2011). The Kenya population and housing census of 2009 revealed that 74 per cent of all households own a radio set (Wiesmann et al. 2014). Thus, radio can play a crucial role in advancing rural development.

ESAPP's response

ESAPP worked to empower rural people by enhancing their participation in societal, economic, and political processes. It sought to enhance rural development by enabling local stakeholders to access relevant information and knowledge on topics of sustainable development and sustainable land management. It also aimed to provide them with opportunities to communicate and share their experiences with other farmers and stakeholders within and beyond their own community. ESAPP supported use of radio, the most easily accessible information and communication technology, to disseminate existing knowledge and research results, and to facilitate interactive communication between local stakeholders and more distant stakeholders.

In Madagascar, ESAPP assessed the impacts of a farmer-owned community radio programme named *Mampita*. Researchers examined the programme's ability to reduce the marginalization of remote communities and improve communication between rural communities, farmer organizations, and development actors (Bachmann 2013; Médiascope 2011). In Kenya, where fewer and fewer farmers receive government-supported agricultural extension services, ESAPP facilitated radio broadcasts of relevant knowledge and research results. It produced a series of radio programmes on sustainable agriculture, natural resource management, and governance issues. They were broadcast by Radio *Musyi FM*, a radio station belonging to a privately owned company, Royal Media Services, in Kenya (Kiteme et al. 2013).



Main messages

- It is possible to empower rural communities and partly overcome their marginalization by improving their access to information and exchange of knowledge and experience.
- The vast majority of rural people – even poor or illiterate community members – can be reached with radio broadcasts if these are made in vernacular language, and technical information is translated (literally and figuratively) into target audiences' language and discussion style.
- In light of dwindling government-supported extension services, it is important to maintain connections and lines of communication with isolated rural communities, especially by means of information and communication technologies.
- Innovation is needed to adapt these technologies and their contents to the needs of various local and regional contexts, even or especially in our age of fast-developing mobile phone access.



Radio *Mampita* broadcasts over Madagascar's FM band at 94 MHz. Its broadcast area covers a population of over one million, all of whom are potential listeners. Radio and similar media bear great potential for information dissemination and awareness creation, especially among remote rural communities. (Photo: Felicitas Bachmann)



The project story

Radio *Mampita* is owned and managed by an association of farmer organizations. This not-for-profit radio station reaches about one million people in the Haute Matsiatra area of the Malagasy Highlands, where many communities live relatively isolated due to difficult terrain. Its programmes have an educational focus, including news on local affairs, announcements from service providers, and entertainment such as music, radio plays, and audience contributions. Most programmes are produced by local correspondents and staff, but development organizations occasionally reserve broadcasting time for programmes they have organized or produced.

ESAPP conducted a study to assess the impacts of Radio *Mampita*. It revealed several ways in which the broadcaster was supporting empowerment and reducing marginalization among rural people. First, the radio station was shown to greatly improve people's access to important information on agricultural techniques, laws, and civil rights. Second, producer organizations' negotiation power improved and rural economies were supported thanks to better access to timely market information as well as strengthened linkages (and fewer middlemen) between producers and buyers. Third, communication among communities and family members became easier and cheaper. Fourth, security improved as messages conveyed over the airwaves enabled quick responses to threats. Fifth, rural people became more self-confident and proactive in their interactions with service providers, resulting in more demand-driven support activities. Overall, Radio *Mampita* established itself as a strong voice by and for the rural population.

The study assessment was shared with the Centre for Training and Integrated Research in ASAL Development (CETRAD) during one of ESAPP's annual capitalization workshops. CETRAD was inspired to sponsor production of a series of radio broadcasts on sustainable agriculture, livelihoods, and natural resource management. This helped mitigate the decline of government-run agricultural extension services in Kenya. Extension services have become more client-oriented and demand-driven, with the result that fewer farmers benefit from them. Together with CETRAD, ESAPP produced close to 40 radio programmes broadcast over privately owned Radio *Musyi FM*, reaching over 2 million people in south-eastern Kenya, including Makeni County. Listeners were encouraged to call CETRAD to ask specific questions or to suggest new topics for further coverage. Depending on the issue raised, CETRAD would address it in-house or connect listeners (e.g. farmers) to relevant experts.

Top: Radio *Mampita's* programming includes entertainment but also information on relevant livelihood issues. Community members often listen to broadcasts together and debate their content. In this way, radio can also shape efforts towards community mobilization and organization. (Photo: Ernst Gabathuler)

Bottom: The studio crew of Radio *Mampita* maintains a well-equipped studio. Taking care of technical infrastructure is a major challenge for such community-based undertakings. Keeping studios running on a long-term basis requires careful planning, especially regarding reinvestment of funds from listener contributions and broadcasts paid for by development actors. (Photo: Ernst Gabathuler)



Innovation and relevance

Having access to the latest information is crucial to avoid disempowerment in our age. So it is essential to find efficient, reliable ways of conveying relevant information to marginalized communities. This project demonstrated the continuing relevance of radio in this regard. It showed how rural radio stations, especially farmer-owned and managed radio, empower rural communities. It also directly supported on-air dissemination of relevant research results, knowledge, and experience on sustainable agriculture to rural communities. In addition, the reaction and feedback received from listeners offered important hints as to improvements that would help programmers reach an even bigger audience.

Despite fundamental differences between the two radio stations (e.g. public versus private ownership) studied and the role of rural people in production, both broadcasters were highly valued by their listeners especially because of their exclusive use of vernacular language in their programmes. Radio *Mampita* proved to be a truly innovative model for local radio. It was revealed to play a dynamic role in Haute Matsiatra and was highly appreciated by both its target audience and rural development workers. The following innovative elements and key success factors were identified. First, it established itself as a station by and for rural farmers, firmly anchored in their world. It broadcast exclusively in the local dialect, and 90 per cent of its programmes directly addressed issues in rural communities. It acted as an independent platform for interactive discussion on matters of importance to the community. Second, its political and religious independence was highly appreciated by development actors. By maintaining strict neutrality, Radio *Mampita* survived several political crises. Third, its local correspondents – villagers themselves – were intimately familiar with the needs and concerns of rural people in the region.



Top: An agro-pastoralist in Makeni County, Kenya, listens to a broadcast of Radio *Musyi FM*. Small radio receivers are affordable for much of the population, also in rural areas. Good existing coverage means that information disseminated via radio may even be accessed in very remote regions. (Photo: Samuel Makali)

Bottom: Radio *Mampita* works exclusively with local correspondents, who travel the area in search of interesting stories. It has become an important communication channel enabling community members to air their views on specific topics while informing and entertaining other listeners. (Photo: Ernst Gabathuler)



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Highlight profile

This highlight is based on the achievements of 7 ESAPP priority action projects.

Implemented during:
1999–2014

Total funds contributed by ESAPP:
CHF 223,000

Implemented in Madagascar by:
Médiascope, Antananarivo, Madagascar

In collaboration with:
Association Radio Mampita, Fianarantsoa, Madagascar

Implemented in Kenya by:
Centre for Training and Integrated Research in ASAL Development (CETRAD), Nanyuki, Kenya

In collaboration with:
Radio Musyi FM, Royal Media Services, Nairobi, Kenya

Main beneficiaries:
1 million people in the Haute Matsiatra highland area of Madagascar, and over 2 million people in lower eastern Kenya, including Makueni County

References and further reading

Bachmann F. 2013. Radio Mampita – the powerful voice of rural people. In: Wymann von Dach S, Romeo R, Vira A, Wurzinger M, Kohler T, editors. *Mountain Farming is Family Farming: A Contribution from Mountain Areas to the International Year of Family Farming 2014*. Rome, Italy: United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), Centre for Development and Environment (CDE), and University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences (BOKU), pp. 32–33.

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This highlight

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What is ESAPP?

The Eastern and Southern Africa Partnership Programme (ESAPP) is a research implementation programme funded by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), coordinated by the Centre for Development and Environment (CDE) of the University of Bern, Switzerland, and implemented jointly by CDE and a network of partner institutions in Eastern and Southern Africa. Launched in 1999 and completed in 2015, ESAPP implemented over 300 priority action projects in the programme region, which included Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Tanzania, Mozambique, and Madagascar.

What are ESAPP Highlights?

ESAPP Highlights are a series of 24 project descriptions providing insights into ESAPP's research and implementation partnerships. Each Highlight describes a succession of demand-driven priority action projects addressing local and regional sustainability issues. The 24 Highlights are collected in a publication that includes additional background information on ESAPP (see citation above). The individual Highlights and the entire publication are also available for download on CDE's website: www.cde.unibe.ch (keyword search: "ESAPP").