

## Putting our ears to the ground: How can African broadcasters help improve Farm Radio International's services?

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In 1979, Farm Radio International (FRI) distributed its first package of radio scripts on sustainable small-scale farming practices to 34 broadcasters at radio stations in developing countries. It was an innovative way to provide open learning resources – from a distance – to rural broadcasters, who themselves are distance educators. Thirty-four years later, we continue to revise these offerings to better meet the needs of our broadcasting partners.

In addition to our packages of scripts – now called Farm Radio Resource Packs (FRRPs) – FRI provides African broadcasters with other types of distance education, including e-courses, e-trainings, and scriptwriting competitions.

The items in our Resource Packs focus largely on agricultural issues, but also touch on other vital rural issues such as health and gender. Items are directed at farm broadcasters, and the introduction to each item includes suggestions for adapting the item to local conditions.

Our research shows that, while some radio stations broadcast the scripts as-is or with little adaptation, the majority of broadcasters use them as inspiration and background information for creating their own programming. Our materials are distributed in English and French, and we are translating an increasing number into languages such as Kiswahili and Hausa. Our FRRPs are posted on our website and distributed electronically and by post to more than 440 radio organizations in 38 sub-Saharan African countries.

We recently launched a review of our FRRP program by inviting a panel of experts to review a selection of recent scripts. The reviews were thoughtful, constructive and comprehensive, and generated many recommendations, some of which are already being used to improve the program.

We would like to broaden the discussion about how Farm Radio can better serve African broadcasters through our FRRPs by including more African broadcasters in the conversation. A number of African broadcasters will be attending PCF7, and this provides a perfect opportunity to initiate a wider discussion.

With this in mind, FRI will host a half-day participatory workshop during, or in conjunction with, PCF7. The workshop will bring together some of FRI's African broadcasting partners – as well as a few broadcasters who are not FRI partners – to focus on improving our Resource Packs. This discussion would likely stimulate broader conversations and recommendations for how NGOs can better support broadcasters by delivering distance learning materials that meet broadcasters' needs – as well as addressing the points listed below as FRI's goals for the workshop.

The workshop would gather feedback from African broadcasters on how to improve the quality, relevancy and usefulness of the resources provided by FRI. It would take a similar approach to that taken in a face-to-face meeting with our script review panel in Ottawa earlier this year. This included a focus on: things to *avoid* in resources for radio broadcasters, things that *must be included*, music and SFX, and beginnings and endings. We would also make time for a more general discussion of what broadcasters actually *do* with the resources they receive from NGOs and other organizations.

Workshop goals are to:

1. Present the recommendations of our review panel to African partner broadcasters, and get an on-the-ground perspective of how to improve them; and, more generally,
2. Investigate how best to use our resources (and, by extension, distance educational resources offered by other NGOs) to:

- a) improve rural broadcasting
- b) make rural broadcasts more responsive to local needs, and
- c) help broadcasters address their programming challenges.

We hope to include partner broadcasters not attending the workshop through Skype. Attendees will be experienced broadcasters with a rich experience of developing programming for farmers, a demonstrated dedication to understanding and meeting the needs of their listeners, and a good sense of the kinds of resources that are most useful for developing effective programming.

FRI will support two West African broadcasters to attend. One FRI staff will attend in order to facilitate. FRI broadcasting partners who meet the attendee criteria and are attending PCF7 for other events will be encouraged to attend. We are happy to invite a few other qualified broadcasters who are not currently Farm Radio International broadcaster partners to attend the workshop. We aim for about eight participants.