

A Radio Scriptwriting Competition: Training African Radio Broadcasters to Create and Exchange Programs on Climate Change Adaptation for Farmers

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INTRODUCTION

The focus of the paper will be a case study, based on preliminary results, on the effectiveness of a radio scriptwriting competition as a means of providing African broadcasters with training on how to create high quality radio programs on climate change strategies for farmers. The paper will detail how African broadcasters are increasingly accessing the Internet for information and learning opportunities and will also highlight how on-line or distance coaching can play a vital role in developing broadcasters' scriptwriting skills so that they in turn can create radio programs that promote learning amongst their listeners.

RADIO SCRIPTWRITING COMPETITION ON SMALLHOLDER FARMERS' CLIMATE CHANGE ADAPTATION STRATEGIES

Overview

In October 2007, Developing Countries Farm Radio Network (DCFRN – www.farmradio.org) in collaboration with the Technical Centre for Agricultural and Rural Cooperation (CTA – www.cta.nl), launched a radio scriptwriting competition for African radio organizations (including broadcasters, production organizations, NGOs with a radio project, farmers' associations with a radio show, etc.) entitled African Farmers' Strategies for Coping with Climate Change. Competitors were invited to submit a radio script on one of the following themes related to local adaptation to climate change: water and soil management, cropping strategies emphasizing drought-resistant plants, livestock management practices, fisheries and agroforestry and other original topics related to coping with climate change.

Participants were invited to submit a script in one of the following script formats: interviews, spots, discussion between two hosts, drama (with different characters), or a story (told by one or two narrators). Participants were offered the option of including an audio file with their script. The script was to be prepared with input from local people (especially farmers), be between 500-2000 words in length, include background notes about the topic and production notes for broadcasters, and include references to information sources used to prepare the script (e.g., farmers, agricultural institutions, NGOs, documents, etc.). The deadline was initially March 15, 2008 but then extended to March 25, 2008 to encourage more entries.

An international panel of judges will review the scripts, and all entrants will receive feedback on their scripts. There are seven judges from seven institutions that focus on radio, communication for development and/or climate change in Africa. The institutions include Panos London, the Radio Netherlands Training Centre (RNTC), Radio France Internationale (RFI), the German Organization for Technical Cooperation (GTZ), the Media Capacity Building Section at the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), OneWorld Radio Africa, and the International Development Research Centre's Climate Change Adaptation in Africa (CCAA) program.

The top 15 entries will receive high quality digital audio recorders and an overall winner will receive a farm radio training/internship award sponsored by GTZ. The winners will be announced in May 2008 and will be profiled on the competition's website. Winners will have several weeks to work with DCFRN's managing editor, using the feedback received from the judges, to improve

and finalize their scripts. The winning scripts will then be published in French and English and distributed by CTA and DCFRN to radio organizations across sub-Saharan Africa.

Competition Resources: Website/Blog and Resource Documents for Radio Practitioners

A competition website/blog (<http://scriptcompetition.net>) was set up at the same time the competition was launched. In the competition announcement that was circulated, radio organizations were encouraged to sign up for the competition on the website and in return they would be sent resource documents to help them write their scripts. The online registration helped provide the competition coordinators with baseline information about the participants including which country they were from, which radio organization they worked for, and whether they had previously written a script.

To assist radio practitioners with producing the radio scripts, a climate change resource kit and a guide to writing radio scripts was produced in English and then translated into French. The climate change resource kit includes information such as the science of climate change; climate change in Africa and its impact on people, agriculture and development; the importance of communication and information in climate change adaptation; examples of coping strategies: water and soil management, using drought-resistant plants, livestock management practices, fisheries and agroforestry, coping with extreme weather events, pests and diseases, alternative energy, social/community responses and on-line resources including organizations involved in climate change in Africa and around the world, national reports and adaptation plans, and other useful links. The two documents were primarily circulated electronically as pdf attachments but were also posted on the competition website and upon request were distributed by post.

INCREASED INTERNET and EMAIL ACCESS FOR INFORMATION AND LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

Both DCFRN and CTA communicate with around 70% of their radio stations by email in addition to communicating with them by post. DCFRN's network consists of 307 radio organizations (community radio stations, private radio stations, public radio stations, farmers' associations with a radio show, NGOs with a radio project, production houses etc.) in 39 countries across sub-Saharan Africa. One year ago, DCFRN only had email addresses for 45%. The increase is reflective of two factors: enhanced connectivity of radio organizations; and a concerted effort on the part of DCFRN to obtain email addresses of radio organizations in its network. CTA reaches 314 radio stations across sub-Saharan Africa. Several of the stations belong to both DCFRN and CTA's networks.

Increased access to the Internet and Email was one of the reasons that DCFRN and CTA felt the timing was right to launch a scriptwriting competition that primarily relied on email and Internet. The following sections explain the different ways that the Internet and email were used in the scriptwriting competition.

Marketing the Competition

The competition announcement was widely circulated electronically and via Internet by DCFRN and CTA. DCFRN also sent out hard copies by post to all of its radio partners in sub-Saharan Africa. CTA also distributed hard copies of the announcement to its network of stations across sub-Saharan Africa.

The announcement was circulated by many organizations including UNESCO, allAfrica, Soul Beat Africa, The Communication Initiative, IDRC's Climate Change Adaptation in Africa program e-newsletter. It is the websites of some of these organizations, along with those of CTA and DCFRN that figure most prominently in a Google search with terms related to the competition.

Information regarding the competition has diffused much more widely online, however, and can now be found on several dozen websites, including message boards, African-focused news sites, NGO websites, blogs, African-based think tanks, and media institutions.

Who Signed Up to Participate and E-mail Submissions

The website/blog was an effective tool for encouraging people to register, resulting in 97 people from 24 sub-Saharan African countries signing up. Of the 97 people, 33 of them (34 per cent) indicated they had never written a radio script before.

We received 49 entries from 20 countries across sub-Saharan Africa. The majority of participants submitted their scripts via email. Some of the broadcasters sent emails indicating that submitting scripts by email was problematic for them, which is why they sent their script by post. Other challenges with using email for script submission were that some people did not check email regularly and others lacked word-processing skills.

ON-LINE COACHING FOR BROADCASTERS

Blog/Website

It was anticipated that professional coaching and mentoring on scriptwriting would be provided to participants throughout the process on the competition website. The blog encouraged broadcasters to post questions or seek information that could then be responded to by resource people. However, there were very few posts by broadcasters on the blog site prior to the submission deadline. Some asked questions via email rather than website. The blog/website will be used to post updates about the competition and will also be used to provide general feedback to participants and profile the winning entries.

Judging Process

The judges were sent all the entries electronically after they had been received and categorized by DCFRN. The judges will review the entries and evaluate them according to the following criteria (each script is marked out of 100 points):

- The extent to which the script addresses the specified climate change topic;
- The extent to which the writer solicited input from rural people and/or organizations for the script and linked the script to the local situation;
- The clarity of the script, the accuracy of the information and the extent to which the script explains the benefits of following recommended activities;
- The “entertainment value” of the script
- The appropriateness and effectiveness of the script format and style;
- The length (between 500-2000 words);
- The inclusion of background notes about the topic, production notes for broadcasters and references for information sources;
- Whether the script is ready to broadcast; and whether the script is creative and original.

DCFRN staff will compile the results from the judges to determine which are among the 15 best scripts. All judges will participate in a teleconference call in order to finalize the results, discuss general feedback comments and debrief on the process.

Finalizing the Scripts – One-On-One Coaching with DCFRN’s Managing Editor

The 15 winning scripts will receive the judges’ feedback electronically from DCFRN’s Managing Editor. He will work with each of the winners via email and phone to coach them in integrating the judges’ suggestions in order to improve their scripts. All other participants will receive one page of

general tips on how to write effective scripts on climate change adaptation for smallholder farmers based on the judges' general observations and feedback. These tips will be sent out electronically and by post in *Voices*, DCFRN's newsletter for radio organizations, which will accompany the winning scripts.

THE ENTRIES

A total of 49 entries from 20 countries across sub-Saharan Africa were submitted. Eight (16%) were written by women. We received entries in all categories. There were nine entries on cropping strategies emphasizing drought-resistant plants, four entries on fisheries and agroforestry, two entries on livestock management practices, 14 entries on 'other' topics and 20 entries on water and soil management.

Preliminary Analysis of Strengths and Weaknesses of the Entries

Participants submitted scripts in a variety of formats. Several of the scripts were written in a radio drama format, which blends education and entertainment and can be appealing to listeners. Other scripts did a good job of incorporating different perspectives including farmers, NGOs, and researchers.

One of the observed weaknesses is a tendency for some scripts to be excessively prescriptive – they tell farmers what to do without including farmers' perspectives and coping strategies. A number of scripts dealt only with the challenges of climate change without discussing coping strategies. In some cases the scripts' messages were unclear and the accuracy of the information was doubtful. These weaknesses create a good learning opportunity, allowing judges and the managing editor to provide constructive feedback that will allow scriptwriters to strengthen future work.

CONCLUSIONS AND NEXT STEPS

Conclusions

1. Understanding broadcasters' training needs

This competition is an innovative way for CTA and DCFRN to learn about the skills-building needs of African radio broadcasters, particularly in the areas of script research, scriptwriting, and climate change adaptation options for smallholder farmers. Once the entries have been assessed we will be able to develop additional training activities for radio organizations.

2. Can learning by doing, with distance coaching, be an effective way to build scriptwriting skills?

This competition provides broadcasters with on-the-job opportunities to sharpen their skills in researching and writing effective scripts about climate change adaptation for smallholders. Through the provision of resource kits, coaching, feedback, and the incentive of prizes for competition winners, broadcasters are expected to gain improved skills in script development. The results of the Climate Change Scriptwriting Competition will help CTA, DCFRN and other organizations with an interest in radio capacity building, to learn the optimum use of this skills-building strategy.

3. Email and Internet Should Not be Used Exclusively

Radio organizations' increased access to Internet and email are permitting innovative training and information exchange activities that are creating new learning opportunities and improving content for farming programs.

However, early results of this competition confirm that post should not be ignored as a communication tool. Many radio organizations still do not have regular access to email while others prefer to receive resource tools in hard copy. Thus while, email and Internet are strengthening communication amongst those with access, they should not be used exclusively if it means that organizations will be excluded from participating.

Next Steps

An evaluation of the Climate Change Scriptwriting Competition will be completed in August 2008. Based on experiences to date, and using the results of the final evaluation, CTA and DCFRN intend to cooperate on another scriptwriting competition in 2009. The notional theme of the next competition will be "Farmer Innovation".