



FARMERS VOICE RADIO

Options For Engaging Listeners

The Programme Reference Group methodology used by Farmers' Voice Radio guarantees regular feedback on your radio programmes from a core group of listeners. During these meetings, Programme Reference Group members are encouraged to raise questions relating to the programme content, share their experiences, propose new topics for discussion and flag any concerns, for example about language, balance of voices and broadcast signal.

However, the radio programmes reach many more people than this core group of 12 – in some cases up to one million farmers, depending on the range of the radio station. To ensure that your Farmers' Voice Radio project is working for as many people as possible, and for the programmes to truly become a two-way conversation, you also need to engage this wider audience.

How you do this depends on a number of factors: what budget you have available; whether you can make use of an existing network of field officers or community volunteers in the target areas; whether the target audience can read and write; the level of access to and control over mobile phones; and if feedback facilities are already in place at the partner radio station.

You also need to ask yourself how you will use the information received from listeners. Feedback is intrinsically valuable as it demonstrates that people are listening and engaged. However, it has two key additional functions:



It can be used to improve the radio programme content, quality and delivery by making it more responsive to listeners' needs and interests. For example, if a particular episode attracts a lot of questions from listeners, you may wish to revisit the topic in a future episode to clarify uncertainties or expand on the content. Or if listeners in a particular area report poor signal quality the radio station can investigate the reason and rectify the problem.

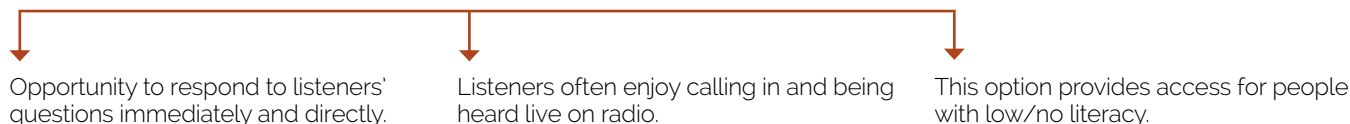
It offers insights into how listeners are responding to the programme content, for example demonstrating resistance to or welcoming new ideas, or sharing their own experience of a particular problem. In this way, listener engagement systems become an effective monitoring tool – you can even ask very specific closed questions to gather quantitative information.

Below are a number of different options for engaging listeners in your Farmers' Voice Radio programmes, which can either be used on their own or in combination.

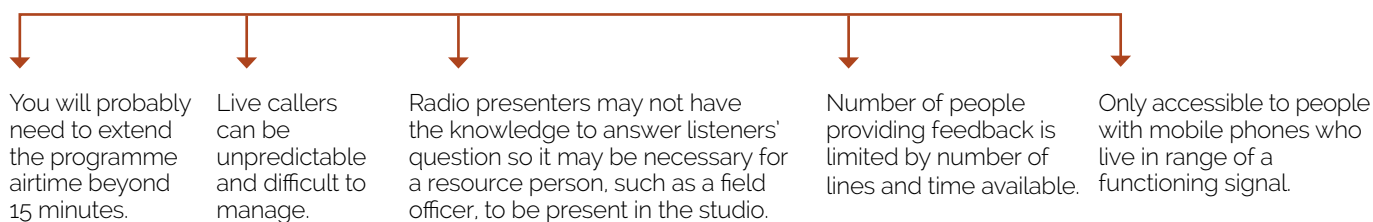
01 Live Call-ins

A segment of the radio programme is set aside for listeners to call or SMS into the studio and provide their comments and questions live on-air.

Advantages



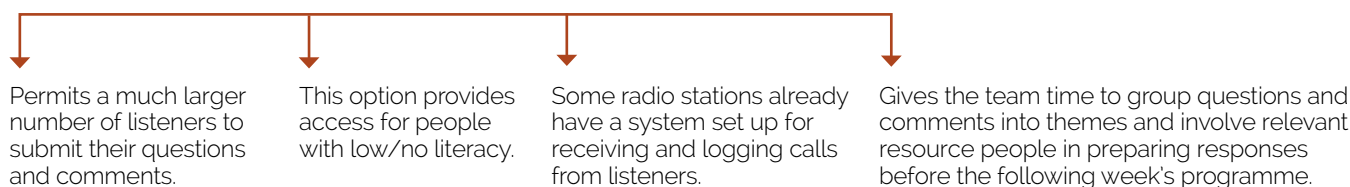
Disadvantages



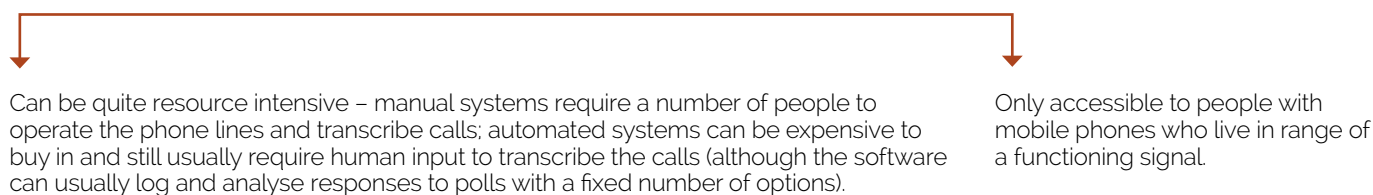
02 Offline Call-ins

Phone lines are open for voice calls or SMS for a limited period of time during and after the radio programme broadcast, but messages are recorded rather than played live on air. This can be done manually, i.e. by a team of people operating phone lines, or by automated software such as Farm Radio International's Uliza system – [see case study from Ghana below.](#)

Advantages



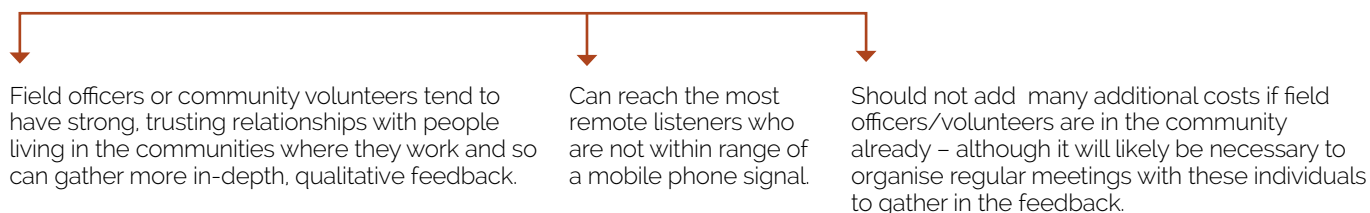
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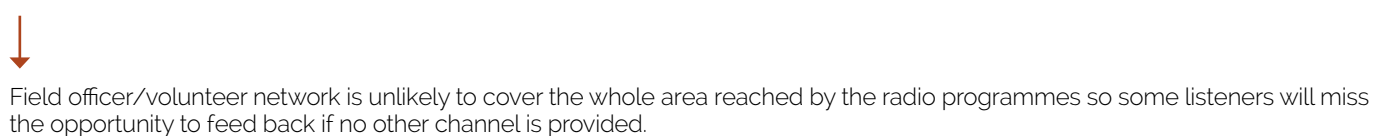
03 Feedback During Community Visits

Where there is a strong, pre-existing network of field officers or community volunteers in the target areas it may be possible to use these individuals to gather feedback from listeners as they go about their regular community visits. Scripts can be provided with a small number of simple questions and targets set for the number of people to be consulted. In northern Ghana, [Hope for Children](#) local partner, [RAINS](#), used their network of Change Makers to gather community feedback on a special radio series broadcast during the COVID-19 lockdown in 2020. This helped them to shape future programmes to respond to the most pressing needs and information gaps in the target communities.

Advantages



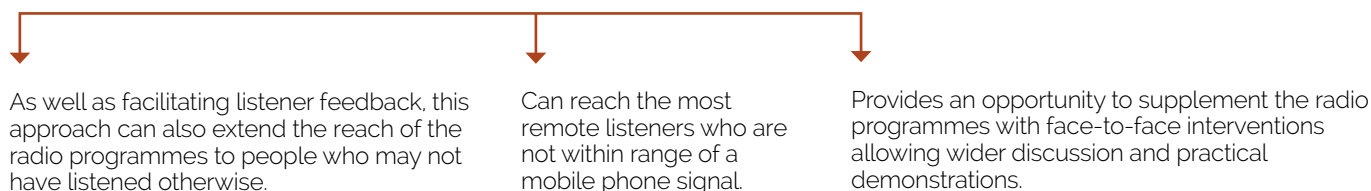
Disadvantages



04 Facilitated Communal Listening Session

In this model, individuals located in target communities- Radio Champions- are tasked with the responsibility of organising communal listening sessions and facilitating a discussion between participants during which people can share their questions and comments. Key messages are documented and transmitted back to the project team through face-to-face meetings or phone calls. If budget allows, it can be useful to provide Radio Champions with solar-powered/wind-up radio sets to ensure that communities always have access to a charged radio. If these radios also have a recording or MP3 playback function, it also means that communal listening sessions do not have to be held at the exact hour that the programmes are being broadcast and can be organised at times most convenient to the community. See the [case study from Sierra Leone below](#) for an example of how this can work. A sample Radio Champion agreement and terms of reference is also available to download.

Advantages



Disadvantages



Responding to feedback

It is good practice to provide a response to listeners' questions and comments as this can encourage people to keep tuning in week after week. However it is not necessary (or in most cases, possible) to respond individually and directly to every piece of feedback received. All of the following options are equally valid and have been used in different Farmers' Voice Radio projects:

- 1** Immediate response and discussion – only possible with live call-ins.
- 2** Weekly cycle – listeners' questions and comments received in response to one programme are addressed in the following week's programme and so on.
- 3** Monthly review – listeners' questions and comments received over a three-week period are collated into themes and responded to in a dedicated Q&A programme at the end of the month or discussed in the next Programme Reference Group meeting.



Case study 1: Automated listener interaction, Ghana

'The Farmer and the Water' was a Farmers' Voice Radio programme about farming in drought-prone communities, broadcast between 2018 and 2020 in the Mampruli and Kusaal languages in northern Ghana.

During the project design phase, formative research highlighted that although most smallholder farmers in the region have access to a mobile telephone, they are highly unlikely to communicate using text messages due to illiteracy and cultural norms. This presented a challenge to the proposed listener feedback system, which had been planned around SMS. In response, the LYF collaborated with Canadian NGO Farm Radio International to use its [Uliza listener interactivity service](#), which invites farmers to call a toll-free number and record their comments and questions as voice messages. This system enabled the wider listenership to feed into the radio programmes, increasing its relevance and reach across the region. In addition, a polling function provided valuable monitoring data for the project team by evidencing the level of engagement by listeners and providing qualitative information relating to listeners' experience and any changes in their knowledge and understanding. Over a 10-week period, Uliza received calls from 399 listeners, 301 of whom recorded a comment, question or feedback in response to polls about groundwater usages, crop yields and agricultural practices.



Case study 2: Communal listening sessions, Sierra Leone

The target audience of the Mende-language Farmers' Voice Radio programme, 'Forest Friendship' is cocoa farmers living in isolated communities around the edge of the Gola Rainforest in eastern Sierra Leone.

While the partner radio station, Starline FM, reaches into even the most remote locations of the Eastern Region, some households do not own a radio and even fewer are able to access a mobile phone signal – making listener feedback a real challenge. Lead implementing organisation, Gola Rainforest Conservation, trained up Radio Champions in key communities to operate [Lifeplayer MP3](#) recordable group listening radios and organise weekly communal listening sessions in order to extend the reach of the radio programmes. Immediately following the playback, these Radio Champions facilitated a discussion on the programme content with participants, captured their questions and comments in log books and transmitted these back to the project team. At the end of each month a panel of relevant experts—for example representing the Sierra Leone Produce Monitoring Bureau for questions relating to quality, or from the Agricultural Research Institute for queries on pests and disease—was convened to answer listener questions that have come in over the past three weeks in a special studio-based episode of the programme.