

Making information entertaining: Soap opera for development

Community radio: Local information for local people

Citizenship information for rural people: Putting culture at the heart of development

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Radio and television

Making information entertaining: Soap opera for development



Paul Mundy

“Why are you letting your goats into my side of the farm?”

Wafula's two wives, Wanjiku and Nanjala, are arguing. Wanjiku's goats have got over the fence into Nanjala's field and are eating her maize. Wanjiku says that Nanjala shouldn't complain so much, as the maize has been attacked by stalkborer pests, so is worthless anyway. Nanjala accuses her of plotting with their husband Wafula against her. Meanwhile, Sipe has left her husband, Nanjala's son Juma, because he has been beating her up... and Dr Owino's little son has just died of malaria.

Sounds like a soap opera? Right: that's just what it is – the story from one week's episode of *Tembea na Majira* (“Move with the times” in Kiswahili), one of the most popular entertainment programmes on Kenyan radio.

But *Tembea na Majira* is a soap opera with a difference. Normal soaps have their characters falling in and out of love, arguing, making mistakes, and rising to challenges. *Tembea na Majira* has all these, but it also has educational messages written carefully into each episode. These messages are woven so skilfully into the programme that most listeners are probably learning about them without realizing it (see Box 1).

The programme is aimed at women listeners, but research has shown that men own 80 percent of the radios in Kenya. If they are not interested in a programme, they may tune out or turn the set off. For any programme to succeed, it must appeal to both women and men.

Tembea na Majira is produced by the AIC, the Ministry of Agriculture's Agricultural Information Centre, in Nairobi, in partnership with the Mediae Trust, a British NGO working in radio and video. AIC's radio unit researches the topics, plots storylines, writes scripts and records programmes for broadcast on KBC, the national radio station. The programme, which has been on the air since 1996, is broadcast once a week, after the 8 o'clock news headlines.

The plot thickens...

At the time we visited Kenya there were three storylines running through the *Tembea na Majira* series: biological control of the maize stalkborer, domestic violence and control of malaria.



Herène Simbowo (left) and Suleiman Juma (right) working on an AIC video (Photo: Paul Mundy)

BOX 1

Grace and Charles Owino discuss stalkborers¹

- GRACE See for yourself the way these stalkborers have destroyed our maize crop.
- CHARLES These crop pests are really dangerous. They are now invading both the plant and the maize cob at the same time.
- GRACE Truly, farmers are in trouble. Cheruto, the animal-health assistant, has left us without offering a solution.
- CHARLES Well, Cheruto has left, and she was not a crop specialist after all. I understand she went to Mogotio on transfer.
- GRACE There is more to it than just the transfer. She is getting married in Mogotio next month.
- CHARLES Despite her departure, she has left us with some hope in maize farming.
- GRACE What are you talking about?
- CHARLES She had already arranged for farmers to be taken on a tour where they will be taught what the stalkborer is and how it can be controlled.
- GRACE How come I haven't heard of such an arrangement? What is the tour for?
- CHARLES To Mbita Point.
- GRACE Mbita?
- CHARLES Mbita Point Research Centre for destructive pests or insects; in short, ICIPE.
- GRACE Ooh, that's a very important arrangement. Who is going to Mbita?

¹ Translated from the Tembea na Majira programme broadcast on 18 November 1999.

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Take the maize stalkborer, one of the most serious crop pests in Kenya. ICIPE (International Centre for Insect Physiology and Ecology), a research institute in Nairobi, found that damage to the crop could be reduced dramatically by planting Napier grass around the maize plots. The stalkborer moths are attracted to the grass and lay their eggs there, rather than on the maize. And when the eggs hatch, the larvae get stuck in a gooey liquid exuded by the Napier, which holds them fast until they die. Unlike the chemical sprays that many farmers use to control stalkborers, Napier grass is cheap and environmentally friendly. Plus, it makes excellent fodder for the cattle, sheep and goats that many farmers keep.

A useful technology, but how to make sure that farmers hear about it? ICIPE persuaded the Gatsby Foundation, which had funded the original research, to support a series of radio programmes about it. AIC wrote a storyline that runs something like this:

- The *Tembea na Majira* villagers complain that their maize yields are dropping, even though they are using the recommended chemical sprays. They go to an agricultural extension worker, who calls in some ICIPE researchers.
- The researchers visit the villagers' fields, and find two problems: stalkborers and striga, a kind of parasitic weed. The researchers arrange for Wanjiku and her friend Grace Owino to visit the ICIPE research station in Kisumu so they can check things out for themselves.
- The women come back full of ideas, but the men in the village are sceptical: they say that they just went for a party.
- The women decide to try out the new pest-control approach. The villagers watch the trial carefully, and are eventually won over when their maize yields turn out to be much higher than the plots planted without Napier grass.

This storyline lasts a whole year, just like in real life. The broadcasts are timed so that different types of field work – ploughing, planting, weeding, harvesting – take place in the programme at the same time as they do in reality. Some of the characters, such as the researchers, are actual people. That ensures that the episodes sound authentic and touch listeners' own lives.

...and thickens

The two other storylines also touch large numbers of people directly. Malaria is the number-one killer of children under five in Africa, and it is becoming resistant to chloroquine, the most common prophylactic medicine. *Tembea na Majira* tells people how to destroy the places where mosquitoes breed, like cutting grass and removing empty bottles and cans that can hold water where mosquitoes lay their eggs. It also suggests that people use the correct prophylactic medicines to prevent themselves from catching malaria, and – most important – use mosquito nets on their beds.

Domestic violence is the third main storyline running through the programme. Wife-beating and child-abuse are common, yet hidden, problems in Kenya – as in many other countries. The audience hears how Juma, one of the characters in *Tembea na Majira*, hits his wife,

AIC's audio control room in Nairobi, Kenya
(Photo: Paul Mundy)



Sipe, after an argument. He insists that he has to do so in order to make sure she respects him. Sipe leaves Juma and refuses to come back, even though this means Juma has to take on humiliating “women’s work” such as fetching water. Slowly, *Tembea na Majira* is bringing this difficult and contentious subject out into the open.

The power of drama

Drama is a powerful way of communicating. It avoids teaching people by telling them what to do and what not to do. Instead, it raises awareness by covering different sides of an issue and allowing the listeners to make up their own minds. The messages are subtle: while it aims to teach, the programme does not sound like a classroom lecture. The characters talk and joke about their problems as would real people.

Different characters can voice different opinions, argue, and reach agreements, just like in real life. And the characters are complex and fascinating: Wanjiku is a clever younger wife; Nanjala is the older, more traditional wife who fears being upstaged by Wanjiku; Sipe is scheming and spiteful; Juma has a quick temper but cares deeply for his children; Moseti is a philandering chief who is chasing after Cheruto, the animal-health assistant, and so forth.

Above all, the story is entertaining. Carefully crafted storylines grip the listener, who must tune in next week to find out what happens next.

Paying for programmes

Tembea na Majira is self-sustaining: it pays for virtually all its costs. That means it can continue to be produced and broadcast as long as it continues to attract an audience.

How can it do this? The government pays staff salaries, but AIC must find funds to pay for production costs and airtime. AIC has semi-autonomous status: while it remains part of the Ministry of Agriculture, it is allowed to accept money from non-government sources. AIC

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and the Mediae Trust find sponsors such as research institutions and donor-funded projects to pay for production costs – about €600 per episode. And they persuade commercial advertisers (currently Colgate and Cadbury) to pay the €1050 that KBC charges for 15 minutes of airtime.

Getting going

It's not possible to build a successful, sustainable radio programme up overnight. It requires careful planning, skilled staff and enough money to get it going. For *Tembea na Majira*, the initial funding came from the DFID (Department for International Development) in the United Kingdom, which provided equipment and training for AIC staff, and support for research and for a regional pilot programme in the Ki-Meru language.

Training and collaboration have also been vital. Radio and video specialists from the Mediae Trust worked closely with AIC staff to plan and script programmes, acquire recording equipment and computers, and persuade advertisers and sponsors to support the programming. They also negotiated with the government to allow AIC its current semi-autonomous status, without which it would be impossible to seek money from non-government sources. By 1996, when DFID withdrew its support, AIC had the skills and the track record to keep production going. The partnership continues: while AIC produces all the programmes, the Mediae Trust still helps with the storylines, and identifies advertisers and sponsors.

Audience research

Audience research is doubly important to the programme. It is vital to ensure that large numbers of people are listening, so as to attract advertisers. And just as important, research is needed to design the programmes and make sure they are addressing issues that people feel are important.

Studies conducted by an independent research firm have shown that about 5 million adult Kenyans – about 36 percent of the population – listen to *Tembea na Majira*. The numbers used to be even higher – 6.5 million – when the programme was broadcast immediately after the 9 o'clock evening news. It is now broadcast at 8 o'clock in the evening, when fewer listeners are tuned in. The move was made to save money, but at the cost of a drop in listenership. The programme producers are hoping to raise advertising revenues so they can revert to the original time slot.

The number of listeners also varies quite a bit from place to place. In Meru, 48 percent of people interviewed said they listened to the programme, while in Kitale the figure was 60 percent. In Nakuru, where *Tembea na Majira* competes with a popular local FM station, the figure is “only” 20 percent – though even that is a figure that many producers and advertisers in other countries would kill for.

Research was also key to the original design of the programme. In 1993, an AIC team studied the farming practices and listening habits of people in four districts in southern Kenya. The team found that 69 percent of all households owned a radio, and only 7 percent had no access to a radio at all. They also learned a great deal about the issues that people found important, the types of programmes they liked, and what times they listened to the radio.

This research resulted in a programme in the Ki-Meru language, called *Ndinga Nacio* (“Hit me with it”), a programme that is still broadcast on KBC’s Central Service. *Ndinga Nacio* became, in turn, a pilot for the nationally broadcast *Tembea na Majira*.

Video

AIC’s video unit is also aiming to be self-sufficient. The unit produces documentaries and training videos at the request of clients such as development agencies and NGOs. Recent titles have included stall-feeding of livestock, post-harvest handling of export crops, irrigation, and participatory research methods.

The videos are used in various ways. Some are designed for farmer-training courses held at centres throughout Kenya – indeed, all over Africa. Such videos are often designed to trigger discussion among the course participants. A typical programme begins with a case study of a particular farmer or a situation. The course facilitator then turns the video player off and invites the participants to analyse what they have seen and heard. After the discussion, the facilitator then turns the player on again and the programme continues, often with a description of the more technical aspects of the situation.

Other videos are shown on televisions located in marketplaces around the country. Studies have shown that these programmes attract large audiences: people who come to buy or sell at the market, but who stay to watch the video.

AIC and the Mediae Trust have also produced a series of training videos on communication skills for extension workers. This series, produced in collaboration with the University of Reading and the Open University in Britain, covers face-to-face communication, farm visits, demonstrations, public speaking, working with groups, and using visual aids. The full training package includes six videos and a handbook. It has been used to train thousands of extension workers and NGO staff in Kenya and other countries, and is also used by the University of Reading to introduce trainers to these techniques.

Professional productions

AIC’s videos are professionally made. The camera work is excellent, with tightly framed close-ups, smooth pans and zooms, and crisp editing. Unlike many video units around the world, AIC uses broadcast-quality equipment, meaning that its programmes can be shown on television as well as to small groups as video.

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Some clients know exactly what they want: they bring with them a completed script and storyboard. Others need more help. Because AIC's video staff are all qualified agriculturists as well as having training in video production, they can help develop the storyline, write the script, identify locations and set up interviews.

Given its success in video production, AIC is considering whether to follow the lead of the radio unit and produce a regular agricultural programme for broadcast. Television airtime is even more expensive than radio: about €2000 for 30 minutes. AIC hopes to produce a sample programme that it can use to attract potential advertisers, and so cover these costs.

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Community radio: Local information for local people



Jacques Sultan

“Radio Benso – it is our radio”

“The radio has changed our lives. It makes us feel part of Mali. Before, we listened to the radios of Côte d’Ivoire. Now, we can keep up-to-date on what is happening here. We get information on cotton farming, we can put announcements on the radio to tell our relatives about important events, we can listen to our village music. Radio Benso – it is our radio, it is the radio which speaks about the farmers.”

So says a listener in Kolondieba, one of four places in southern Mali’s cotton-growing zone to be served by a community radio since early 1999. These farmers do not have an easy life. Their incomes are very dependent on the capricious world cotton market, and their production activities are controlled by a powerful, omnipresent parastatal, CMDT (Compagnie malienne de développement des textiles).

So communication is a strategic tool to help them organize as groups, manage production jointly, exchange experiences, obtain technical and economic information, make choices, and defend their interests. There used to be many barriers to communication: the multiplicity of local languages, illiteracy, geographical isolation... until the community radio station arrived.

Meeting listeners’ needs

Four stations were born: in Kolondieba, Bougouni, Koutiala and Bla. Their birth was made possible by financial support from the Netherlands and technical expertise from FAO (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations). Each station serves about half a million people within a radius of about 100 km.

Recording a programme in the studio of Radio Kafo Kan
in Bougouni, Mali
(Photo: Jacques Sultan)



BOX 2**Recipes for success**

Southern Mali's radio stations have involved the communities, farmers, village organizations and local partners in all stages of their development.

The radio project was designed together with local people. A public awareness and information campaign was organized in most of the districts covered by project. Public meetings allowed questions about the radio stations to be discussed.

The stations are independent. Their activities (staffing, programmes, resources) are managed by a board of directors and a programme committee, elected by the community: The staff is recruited locally, on the basis of precise criteria: firm roots in the area, ability in local languages, motivation and educational qualifications.

The community's contribution to building costs guarantees its involvement. The villagers themselves constructed the stations' buildings, drawing on their own resources and with the local partners' support. Interest in the communities was so strong that the buildings were ready only nine months after the project began.

Everyone was trained. The entire station staff (technicians, facilitators and producers) and all the board members attended a basic training course run by CIERRO (Centre interafricain d'études en radio rurale de Ouagadougou) (see p. 36). The course covered all aspects of the stations' operations: production methods, station management, sound-recording techniques, use of equipment, and administrative and financial management.

The requirements for sustainability are met. The station-operating costs were studied to ensure the stations would be able to survive on their own. Each station has two separate bank accounts: one of them is reserved for replacing equipment. Mechanisms for sustainability were established: listeners' clubs, citizens' groups in the broadcast area, service contracts with local partners, publicity materials and announcements.

Audience interaction was planned. A study of listeners' information needs was undertaken for each station with a consultant's help. This study used a participatory approach and gathered quantitative and qualitative data. It identified the various categories of listeners and measured their access to radio receivers, the number of hours they would spend listening, and the languages they used. It listed the topics and types of programmes people would prefer. It also identified potential partners for the stations, their needs, and their readiness to collaborate.

A system of monitoring and evaluation is under development. A method of contacting listeners is being designed, as are techniques to monitor and evaluate the stations' impacts. These will enable the stations to stimulate discussions about the broadcasts, collect comments and criticisms, and increase listeners' participation in the design, development, production and monitoring of the programmes.

FAO is to organize a special training course on monitoring and impact evaluation. Participants will learn simple techniques to determine who is listening to what programmes, whether they change their farming practices as a result, and what, if any, impact this has on farming, livestock rearing, health and natural resources.

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Editing a radio programme at Radio Kafo Kan in Bougouni, Mali
(Photo: Jacques Sultan)

After less than a year of operation at the time of our visit, these stations were already much loved. Their programming was based on listener needs as identified in preliminary studies, and on ideas contributed by various actors involved in setting the stations up (see Box 2).

What do the listeners want to hear?

The most popular programmes are on social topics (children's education, juvenile delinquency and family problems; relations between men and women and between parents and their children; health and unplanned pregnancies); farming and livestock (especially cotton production, from sowing to marketing); and local culture (village history, local music and oral traditions).

The prime listening times are before 8 o'clock in the morning, and after 6 o'clock in the evening. Fewer people tune in during the day: they are all at work in the fields. The listeners clearly prefer broadcasts recorded in the villages, in which local people participate, which deal with burning issues or which emphasize the local cultural and musical identity.

"It would be nice if the radio would talk about things that can improve our lives, our health and education, and how we can do things better," says a woman who listens to Radio Benso. "Women's programmes should come when we are relaxing, at around 8 o'clock in the evening."

"On market days," says one of the staff of Radio Kafo Kan in Bougouni, "farmers from all over the district invade the station to see the station's equipment, meet the staff and bring in messages they want to have broadcast."

What do the partners want to say?

The stations' main partners include local government departments, public service agencies and NGOs. Parts of the timetable are reserved for them to use for educational or social broadcasts or for entertainment.

CMDT, the largest partner, has organized listeners' groups for its farming programmes (see Box 3). Extension workers use these groups to strengthen the listeners' understanding of technical messages, especially about cotton.

Planning the timetable is a hard task: all the partners must be given the chance to contribute, but at the same time the station must provide a public service.

BOX 3

An inseparable companion¹

“From CMDT’s regular broadcasts in southern Mali, people learn farming methods, especially the use of fertilizer. The radio also serves as a post office and telephone: people communicate with each other via messages and announcements. They use the radio to find things that have been lost or stolen, locate stray animals, or inform relatives and friends about important events. The radio has changed the way communities work. Local people use the weather forecasts when planning a trip, for example. Interest in the radio is growing. That is reflected in the rising ownership of radio sets, and in listeners’ loyalty to certain programmes. Nearly everyone interviewed said they had bought their FM receiver after community radio came to southern Mali. The radio has become peoples’ inseparable companion.”

1 Taken from a study on rural communities’ needs in areas in southern Mali served by community radio.

A social mediator

“The radio listens to its audience,” says Yaya Kone, director of Radio Kafo Kan in Bougouni. “We try to be at the forefront of our listeners’ concerns. Our reporters use their motorbikes to go into the field and talk with village associations, women, young people. Sometimes the listeners criticize CMDT heavily. We play their complaints to CMDT and tell them, ‘This is what our listeners think of you. How are you going to respond?’ ”

Tackling the problems of communities...

“In the village of Sido,” Yaya Kone continues, “there was a big problem because there was no maternity clinic. People were waiting for a mother to die so they could attract help from outside donors. They did not know that the solution was in their own hands. We did a programme in the village square; we organized a play, put on a public-speaking contest and discussions. The broadcast was very lively, and it brought out all aspects of the issue. The winner of the contest was a man who related a proverb, in wonderful Bambara: ‘If you want to be helped, you must first start to help yourself.’ We used this proverb to make a public service announcement on the radio. Now the people of Sido have started collecting contributions to build their own clinic.”

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...and of village associations

“One of the most serious problems here is the illicit sale of cotton,” says Fagotoma Sare, director of Radio Uyesu in Koutiala. “It causes a lot of conflict. Village associations asked us to use our programmes to denounce this antisocial practice.”

Certain farmers sell part of their crop directly to a trader, often at below market prices. They do this so they can get their money immediately, before the official sales. That means the village association has less cotton to sell to CMDT. But CMDT has provided inputs in advance, and deducts the cost of these from the sum it pays the association. That means less money for the association to distribute among its members. Farmers who have legally sold their whole crop have to pay the debts of their less scrupulous fellow farmers.

“These programmes were very interesting because they led to a collective realization of the problem. We aired interviews with producers who admitted selling part of their crop illegally and were sorry they had done so. We did a public service announcement on this topic: ‘If you sell your cotton illegally, you don’t get the CMDT price, you make your neighbours pay your debts, and you cause arguments in the village association.’ ”

Giving women a voice

“We particularly appreciate how women’s programmes are made,” says a representative from a women’s group in Kolondieba. “They reflect our problems very well. Even our bone-headed husbands can understand what they are saying.”

Oumar Sangare, coordinator of the radio project, says that the women of Koutiala are not satisfied with the weak position they have on the radio’s board of directors. “They plan to come out in force when the committee is reappointed to make sure the radio gives their problems higher priority,” he says.

A laboratory for local democracy

Only a year after they began, these four community radio stations had become a true laboratory for local democracy in Mali.

It has not always been an easy task. The various partners’ interests sometimes diverge; they may even contradict one another. The stations have to avoid being controlled by political interests, maintain a balance in the programming among listeners’ various demands, give airtime to each of the partner agencies, encourage expression by young people and women, mediate conflicts, and find programme formats that suit the way local people express themselves.

Day by day, southern Mali’s community radio stations are constructing democracy.

BOX 4**Mali's radio-development scheme**

Mali has undergone massive changes in the past decade: the government is now democratically elected, authority has been decentralized, the State is disengaging from productive enterprises, and farmers' organizations have emerged.

The media have also changed. The voice of the people, long kept on a short leash, was freed in 1991 when the authoritarian regime fell and laws were passed to regulate the press and broadcast media. Since then, there has been a veritable explosion in media, especially in radio – a mode of communication that Malians hold in high regard.

More than one hundred local radio stations of all kinds – cooperative, community, commercial, religious – have been born throughout the country, in urban and rural areas. A ferment of activity, but in a regulatory vacuum.

The government wanted to take advantage of these initiatives, and ensure that stations promote democracy and serve the public good. It also wanted to spread radio services to the whole of Mali. So it designed a radio-development scheme to guide the industry for the period 1995–2014.

The scheme is based on the wish to serve as much of Mali as possible and reach the largest numbers of people. It also takes into account the broadcasting frequencies that could be allocated. It aims at the gradual establishment of about 40 community radio stations. These will provide programming that meets listeners' needs for information, education and entertainment; they will use the languages spoken in each area, and reflect local cultural values.

The national radio broadcasting service does not have the resources to take on this task. So the government has decided to delegate this public service to local stations: those run by community groups or on commercial lines, existing stations or ones that are planned. Stations affiliated to the scheme are obliged to broadcast on general-interest topics and reflect the range of opinions in the community.

In return, the affiliates are allowed to install more powerful transmitters. They can get assistance in purchasing and maintaining equipment and broadcasting networks, and they qualify for staff training and programme exchanges.

The four radio stations in southern Mali have signed up to the scheme, forming the nucleus of what may one day be a nationwide network of community radio stations.

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Radio and television

Citizenship information for rural people: Putting culture at the heart of development



Jacques Sultan

The Jamana adventure

Hamidou Konaté, director of the Jamana cooperative, remembers how it began. It was way back in 1983.

“We were a group of academics, researchers, specialists in oral traditions, artists, craftsmen. We realized that development agencies neglected or ignored the cultural dimension of development: they concentrated on spreading packages of technical formation aimed at improving the productivity of agriculture, livestock or fishing.

“But culture is the main force keeping rural communities together. The feeling of belonging to a country, to a region, to the soil, is a powerful influence on agricultural production, on the protection of natural resources, community organization, and citizens’ participation in national development.

“Our objective was to promote Malian and African culture, to give the people the chance to read and write in their mother tongues, and to know their rights and their duties.”

The group founded the Jamana cooperative in order to put culture back at the heart of development activities. They launched a series of initiatives to preserve, develop and mobilize the cultures of Mali, and to enable its citizens to take part in debates on national issues.

Jamana gradually created a set of information, communication and extension tools to meet the needs of different parts of Malian society – whether they be French-speaking townfolk or rural people in the country’s various cultural and linguistic zones.

Start in the cities

Jamana first aimed at the urban, French-speaking public, because back then in the early 1980s few Malians could read and write in their own languages.

- The monthly cultural magazine *Jamana*, launched in 1983, was the cooperative’s first venture. It provides a forum for opinions and debate on culture and development;

- The daily newspaper *Les Echos*, first appeared in 1989 and has become the newspaper of record in Mali;
- *Grin-Grin* is a monthly magazine aimed at teenagers;
- *Yeko* is a monthly community magazine, published at Ségou.

In addition, Jamana has established an enviable set of media production and educational facilities: a publishing house, desktop-publishing shop and printing unit; a bookshop which specializes in works written in local languages and books about Africa; a resource centre with information on Malian and African history, economics, sociology and culture; and a visual arts workshop and art gallery for young Malian artists.

Not just agricultural information

Mali is a country with strong traditions. Its rich cultural inheritance is to be found mainly among its rural people – more than 80 percent of the population.

Jamana has expanded its activities in rural areas. It uses the major local languages, supports literacy programmes in these languages, and responds to rural people's needs for information, expression and dialogue. Jamana's approach is based on three strategic assumptions:

- Farmers do not only want technical information on farming, livestock or fishing; their practical information needs also include health, education, nutrition and natural resource management;
- Rural people prize their knowledge and traditions; they value their cultural, musical and craft heritage;
- Rural communities want to take part in political debates; they have a strong demand for information on citizenship and on social issues such as decentralization and public affairs.

Jamana uses a combination of printed and audio media to respond to these demands. This combination supports efforts to spread literacy skills in local languages (some 70 percent of the population is illiterate). The cooperative designs the materials especially for rural people, and ensures that they are technically appropriate and cheap enough for people to afford.

A nightingale on cassette

Sorofe means "nightingale" in Bambara. It is also the title of an audio newspaper, on cassettes in several local languages, published by Jamana. This original idea is especially appropriate for people who cannot read and write.

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Lively and informative, *Sorofe* includes interviews, success stories, games and debates. It discusses all the big issues that interest rural people: farming and herding, environment, health, culture, sustainable development, citizenship. Topics include women's issues such as female excision and the right to land; cultural themes such as the origin of musical instruments, the story of griots (traditional storytellers), the significance of first names, and the music and stories of districts in Mali; and citizenship and political issues such as decentralization, elections, citizens' rights and duties, and democracy.

For each topic, the *Sorofe* team tries to collect material that reflects all points of view. Each *Sorofe* cassette represents a lively, pluralistic support for village-level debates. The cassettes also make it possible to popularize in local languages basic information on decentralization, the platforms of political parties, and the constitution.

Listeners accepted *Sorofe* very quickly. Initially a quarterly, it now appears every month, and the number of copies has tripled from 500 to 1500. The number is probably much larger than this if the large number of pirated copies is taken into account.

Jamana is currently studying the possibility of linking *Sorofe* with the community radio stations that exist all over Mali.

“We want to know other things”

Jekabaara is a newspaper especially for people who have learned to read and write in the Bambara language. It is produced by Jamana in collaboration with several major institutions, in particular the cotton parastatal body, CMDT, and the Office du Niger (a parastatal dealing with rice).

Jekabaara is published once a month, with a print run of 16,000 copies. Of these, 11,000 are distributed by CMDT.

When it was launched, *Jekabaara* was intended mainly as a way to spread technical messages on cotton and rice farming. But the readers saw it otherwise:

“Why does *Jekabaara* only tell us how to use this or that cultivation method? Do you think that we live only for such things? We want to know other things. We live in a democracy; we want to learn what is happening in the country and to take part in the debate.”

An issue of *Jekabaara*, a Bambara language newspaper



That is what *Jekabaara's* readers said in 1991, when Mali was released from the previous dictatorial regime. They were not satisfied with the paper: it focused too much on agricultural extension. Even if they found the technical information useful, the readers did not want to be seen as mere producers, but as citizens able to take part in politics. As soon as the wind of democracy blew through the country, they began to demand a broader range of information.

So the paper's contents evolved. Today, some 70 percent is devoted to technical and organizational topics (manure, pesticides, new crop varieties, selling and marketing, group organization, village associations). The remaining 30 percent is devoted to general information, politics, opinion exchanges among readers, village descriptions, and so forth.

Jamana is negotiating an agreement with the Office du Niger to publish an edition specifically for the rice-growing zone. That could increase circulation to 30,000 or 40,000 copies. Inserts in Fulfuldé, Soninké and other languages could tackle questions such as pasture management and relationships between Peul herders and Soninké farmers. The newspaper could come to play an important role in resolving conflicts between these two communities.

So *Jekabaara* is in expansion mode. It is attempting to supply an ever-rising demand from neo-literates starved of other reading materials.

Distribution is the main obstacle. Relying on individual newsagents is risky because it is hard to make sure that the papers reach their destination, and harder to recover the income from sales. Jamana is studying several alternatives to this dilemma. One is to contract NGOs to distribute the paper in the areas where they operate, in return for services provided by other branches of Jamana. Another is to strengthen specific distribution points with the help of Jamana's field correspondents and community radios (see Box 5).

A platform for popular expression

Radio is still the best means of communicating information to rural people, and the Malians are very fond of it. When the airwaves were opened up in 1991, Jamana, which had been one of the founders of Radio Bamakan, the first independent station in Mali, established a series of local radio stations to extend and decentralize its field activities. It now has 10 community stations throughout the country, all run by young, unemployed local people. Each station's average operating range is a radius of 70 km.

Jamana's stations offer listeners a place where they can get information, express themselves, and engage in dialogue, especially on women's and children's rights. They report on development work by partner agencies, and they reinforce Jamana's efforts to generate appreciation for Mali's cultural heritage.

More than 80 percent of the broadcasts are in local languages, and 40 percent are on agriculture and rural development. Other major topics are health, hygiene, citizenship, environment, music, history and sustainable development. A generous amount of time is reserved for

BOX 5

Distribution is the biggest problem

Jamana's newspapers are not the only local-language papers in Mali. Several others emerged as a result of the spectacular rise in literacy in local languages, which began in the 1970s and was supported by Unesco. CMDT and other firms supported them through their mass literacy campaigns in the cotton zone.

The main local-language newspapers are published by AMAP (Agence malienne de presse et de publicité). The oldest is Kibaru, founded in 1972. Its 16,000 copies are distributed throughout the Bambara-speaking areas of the country. Two other newspapers began later: Kabaaru, printed in Fulfuldé, and Xibaare, in Soninké, each with a circulation of 2000.

All the papers face the same problem: how to get copies to their readers.

The readers are scattered, and traditional distribution methods such as the mail are seldom possible and are very expensive: the cost of mailing may be higher than the price of the paper itself.

In areas served by a firm such as CMDT, the firm can take care of distribution. CMDT distributes 10,000 copies of Kibaru and a similar number of copies of Jekabaara.

In other areas, the newspapers rely on individual newsagents who obtain their copies in various ways (mail, travelling merchants, trucking companies, and so on). These newsagents distribute the paper within their neighbourhoods in return for a percentage of the sales.

The number of papers that can be handled in this way is small: there may be only 20 regular readers in a village. And since the newsagents cannot pay for the papers in advance, transferring the small amounts of money involved is a problem.

All the rural newspapers try to overcome this hurdle by striking deals with organizations with field-level networks: firms such as CMDT and the Office du Niger, NGOs, farmers' organizations, development projects, literacy centres, public libraries. Or like Jamana, they establish their own networks based on distribution centres.

But the demand is enormous. If they can solve their distribution problems, Mali's local-language newspapers should easily be able to double or triple their circulation figures.



Top right: An issue of Kabaaru, a Fulfuldé language newspaper
Bottom right: Copies of Xibaare rolling off the AMAP press in Bamako
(Photo: Jacques Sultan)



women and development organizations. The stations organize debates with local experts and provide listeners with all kinds of useful advice.

Each station has partnership agreements with development organizations working in their districts. For example, Radio Kujakan, based in Koutiala, has agreed with CMDT to co-produce programmes not only on cotton, but also on health, literacy, drinking water, soil erosion, poultry raising, and so on. It also has agreements with SYCOV (a farmers' organization), public service agencies, national and international NGOs, development projects, women's associations and private firms.

Meeting the challenge

Jamana's communication efforts cover all of Mali, in its major languages. They address in an interactive way the main themes that interest Mali's people. They pay particular attention to questions of citizenship, cultural heritage and issues that concern women and young people.

The government's decentralization process will bring new demands and opportunities for information and communication. Jamana is taking up this challenge through a range of new projects:

- Resource centres will be established around the community radio stations. These will serve as places for education and discussions on the changes taking place in Malian society. They will act as distribution points for Jamana's newspapers and other media. They should also make it possible to feed back information to improve the contents of these various types of media;
- The audio newspaper *Sorofe* and the community radios will collaborate more closely. *Sorofe*'s productions will be broadcast by the radio stations, whose programmes will in turn enrich the audio newspaper;
- The radio stations will function as a network. They will be gradually equipped with computers so that they can communicate with each other and with the central office. Later, they will synchronize some of their programmes with Radio Bamakan in Bamako. This network will also be used for the production of local news bulletins;
- The newspaper production will be improved by increasing the number of local correspondents;



Radio Kené in Sikasso, Mali
(Photo: Jacques Sultan)

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- Collaboration agreements are being negotiated with the Office du Niger and the government department in charge of natural resources. Such agreements promise to improve both the production and distribution of the local-language newspapers;
- More and more local newsletters will be produced, taking advantage of the radio stations' facilities, the resource centres and Jamana's local correspondents.



Radio programmes recorded in villages are crowd pullers in Mali. Here, people queue to express their opinions about local issues
(Photo: Jacques Sultan)

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Radio and television

Networking local radio stations: Local radio meeting rural people's needs



Jacques Sultan

“The radio helped us to solve a serious problem in this village,” says a resident of Seriwala, a village in Mali. “When someone dies, it used to be almost impossible to inform all the relatives so they could come to the funeral: they might live up to 30 or 40 kilometres away. We would have to hire a bicycle or horse to spread the news. If for some reason we weren’t able to let the relatives know on time, there would be serious consequences for the relationship between the villages. Sometimes even a rift between two families. Now, with the radio, all we have to do is pay 500 francs (€0.76) and everyone gets the news. Nobody has grudges any more, thank God.”

“The radio has made a real change in our everyday lives,” says a listener in Kodialanida, another village. “It helped us understand the importance of functional literacy in our work. That encouraged us women to devote more effort to learning to read and write. At first, we learned by ourselves. After listening to the radio, we came up with the idea of getting together as an association; we heard that other women had done so elsewhere, and had succeeded by listening to advice on the radio.”

Since the mid-1980s, local rural radio stations have been playing an invaluable role in Africa. They have given isolated villages, many of which were not served by the public broadcasting system, a tool for local communication, education, dialogue, extension and popular expression. They have also made it possible to gather and promote the communities’ spoken and musical legacy: the village history, its music, stories and oral traditions.

Easy and cheap to set up, radio stations have become a familiar feature in rural areas – one that is highly appreciated by development agencies such as local authorities, farmers’ associations, women’s and youth groups, NGOs and the private sector.

Communicative but cut off

The development of radio has not been without difficulties, though. Among the problems are a lack of transport (making it hard to do outside broadcasts), a shortage of portable equipment, and funding difficulties. Maintaining and repairing equipment can be a headache: if a transmitter breaks down, a station may have to wait several months for a spare part to arrive from Europe or Asia.

Different local stations deal with the same topics, use similar approaches, and often work in the same languages. But they have had little opportunity to exchange ideas. That is a pity, as such exchanges could bring many benefits: they could learn from each other, swap programmes, or co-produce broadcasts and split the costs.

CIERRO's digital audio centre in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso
(Photo: Jacques Sultan)



Meetings, training courses and conferences to help break this isolation are organized by the Agence de la Francophonie, CIERRO (the rural radio centre in Ouagadougou), CTA, FAO, the Panos Institute and others. But these meetings are expensive and infrequent, and they are not always followed up adequately.

Digital technology to the rescue

The Agence de la Francophonie, one of the main backers of rural radio, has recognized this problem. Its response has been to establish a network of African local radio stations. This network is based on information and communication technologies: the Internet, a centre to produce programmes and provide training in digital audio, and a bank of programmes. For the radio stations, this network means radical changes and a new dimension to their work.

The digital-audio centre has been operational since April 1999. Hosted by CIERRO in Ouagadougou, it is the heart of the network. It includes a website, a programme bank, a training centre for new technologies, and a central facility to purchase equipment and supplies.

The centre has three staff: a coordinator with the job of building and motivating a network of 48 local stations in 10 countries, a technician specialized in digital production and training, and a computer specialist who handles the website and programme bank, and provides training in computer technologies.

The centre's main aim is to help the local stations diversify their programmes. It organizes training for station managers and technicians in digital production and computer technologies. It encourages stations to co-produce programmes on topics of common interest. The purchasing service enables the stations to buy at attractive prices.

Programme bank

The programme bank provides a stockpile of high-quality broadcasts that the stations can use to enrich their transmissions. The bank is supplied with programmes from the member stations themselves. Programmes fall into various categories: agricultural techniques,

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environment, health, economics, education, society, culture, and so on. Most are in one of the three most important local languages in the region: Dioula, Pular and Malinké.

By the end of 1999, after only a few months of operation, the bank contained 150 programmes. A script in French accompanies each one so it can be translated into other languages. A programme catalogue has been sent to member stations and is available on the website.

The stations can get the programmes in three ways: by downloading them from the network's website (www.radios-rurales.net), via CD-ROM, or on audiocassette.

Downloading is still difficult for most of the network's member stations because they do not have Internet-capable computers. Efforts to provide them with the right equipment are under way. At least one station in each country now has such equipment, and it coordinates the work of the others.

Training centre for new technology

The training centre trains the staff of member stations how to use their equipment. The courses include an introduction to computers, electronic mail, Internet searches, programme downloading, and digital-audio production. They are held in the training centre in Ouagadougou, or in the station itself if it has the right equipment.

Co-productions

The centre encourages member stations to co-produce programmes by organizing seminars on themes such as oral tradition, citizenship education, relationships among ethnic groups, and rural law (see Box 6). The stations can also suggest topics, and the centre supports them to make the programme.

Radio Palabre, a local radio station in
Koudougou, Mali
(Photo: Jacques Sultan)



All the co-produced programmes are made available to other network members. They can also be used by the centre's other partners. These include APIC (Appui à l'instruction civique, an organization that produces educational broadcasts), and ARTO (Archivage de la tradition orale) and CELTHO (Centre d'études linguistiques et historiques par tradition orale), two centres that document and study oral tradition.

BOX 6

A workshop on rural law kindles radio campaigns

Law is a crucial topic for rural people. Key questions concern inheritance, women's rights to land, and relationships between crop-raisers and herders.

The network organized a co-production workshop on law in Senegal in August 1999. Also involved were communicators, lawyers and language specialists from six countries: Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Guinea, Mali and Senegal.

Various magazines and programme segments were produced during the workshop on identity cards, marriage and birth certificates, women's rights in marriage and to land, and so on.

These programmes were broadcast in several languages in the six countries. They were a considerable success, since listeners discovered that legal problems similar to their own also occurred in other countries.

The programmes aroused such interest that they formed the starting point in each country of a whole series of broadcasts on related issues: round-table discussions and magazines on marriage (especially forced marriages and child marriage), divorce, inheritance, women's land rights, access to justice, conflict regulation, and so on. Local human-rights organizations, NGOs and magistrates participated in these programmes.

Some stations have begun a question-and-answer service about legal issues. They collect villagers' questions during their visits to the communities, and ask lawyers to answer the questions on the air.

A new title, "The Law and Us", has appeared in the stations' broadcast timetables, and the programmes have been translated into other local languages. Of course, the stations can exchange these programmes via the network's programme bank.

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Central purchasing service

The network's central purchasing service helps member stations acquire equipment, supplies and spare parts. It maintains a stock of the most useful items, which it buys in bulk, allowing it to offer competitive prices. A rotating fund provides capital to renew the stocks. Stations that contribute regularly to the service's funds qualify for a 50 percent discount on the purchase price, and get free shipping.

Other services

The network offers its members other services: a list of member and partner addresses; a calendar of workshops, training courses, co-productions, meetings and other activities; a list of search engines and navigation tools to make Internet surfing easier; and online documents of general interest.

Intriguing prospects

This network, along with the facilities offered by the digital-audio centre and programme bank, offers intriguing prospects for local radio stations in rural Africa.

Its services will soon be further enriched through ties with other networks, such as the audio banks maintained by the Anais women's network, CTA, the Panos Institute (see pp. 69–72) and Syfia. Forums to enable discussion and exchanges among the stations are also planned.

Co-productions offer a great deal of promise: they enable a topic to be dealt with in depth, and comparisons across countries to be made.

With these new tools, local radio stations will be able to come out of their isolation. They will be able to access far more programmes and find out what is happening elsewhere. They will be able to produce broadcasts that touch their audiences' lives and help them solve their daily problems. And they will have the opportunity to publicize their initiatives and their successes throughout Africa.

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Educational video: Video in service of development



Jacques Sultan

“How can we popularize agricultural credit?”

“That was the question which the managers of the national agricultural development bank of Mali (BNDA) asked us when they came to see us back in 1993,” says Cheikna Diarra, director of CESPA (Centre de services de production audiovisuelle) in Bamako, Mali.

“BNDA provides loans to rural people, but disputes are common because the farmers don’t understand the credit system. Recovering loans can be difficult, creating a climate of distrust and affecting agricultural production. BNDA called on us to help find a solution. CESPA already had a great deal of experience in audiovisual production and in training rural people. Together, we designed and ran an information and training campaign on agricultural credit.

“CESPA first conducted an in-depth investigation in the cotton-growing region to discover the cotton producers’ views of the bank, determine what they knew about the credit procedures, and study how they normally dealt with this subject.

“That was the basis for CESPA to produce a series of information and training modules consisting of videos and technical booklets.”

Speaking the same language

“The videos were based on real situations in the villages, with farmers and bankers depicting themselves,” says Cheikna Diarra. “They made it possible to highlight and analyse defects in the system, and to present a new vision of the relationship between the farmers and the bank. The technical booklets provided additional information and were used to support training courses for farmers on credit procedures and banking techniques, immediately after the videos were shown.”



Recording an interview with a farmer in Mali
(Photo: Jacques Sultan)

An evaluation study of the campaign continues the story: “The first campaign, conducted in the Bambara language in the cotton zone, was an immediate success. The farmers had integrated the role of the bank into their production activities, and they had learned to calculate the interest they were due. The farmers and the bank finally speak the same language.”

Profit is a sin?

Impressed, BNDA wanted to extend the campaign quickly to farmers growing rice for the Office du Niger (a parastatal involved in rice growing) and livestock herders in northern Mali.

“But they realized that it was necessary to adapt the campaign to the local circumstances, because the languages and traditions are not the same, and farmers do not necessarily pay attention to messages that are not specifically designed for them,” adds Cheikna Diarra. “For example, in Songhaï, a language spoken in the north and influenced by Arabic culture, the word “profit” does not exist: the idea is regarded as a sin.

“So we had to find other words to explain to people that they would earn money if they saved. CESPA was given the task of designing new versions of the information and training modules.”

Today, more than 2000 farmers are trained each year on credit procedures, and the bank has become a true partner for them.

Reinforcing change

CESPA was established because of the Malian government’s wish for an information-and-training capability to reinforce changes under way in the rural sector: in farming and livestock production; water management, environmental protection, desertification and natural disasters; human nutrition, hygiene and health; and population control, education, and the conservation of cultural resources.

The government wanted to transfer a big part of its responsibilities to rural producers. To do that, it needed an overall solution to its rural training needs. It needed innovative, effective information, communication and training tools. This became CESPA’s mandate.

Video as an educational tool

CESPA’s work is based around an audiovisual centre that produces videos and community-level media, and a team of generalist staff with backgrounds in audiovisual production, training and extension.

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A CESPAs cameraman on a village shoot
(Photo: Jacques Sultan)

These “audiovisual teachers” can contribute at any stage in the chain from design, through production, to distribution of training modules. They help diagnose problems, define the educational and communication strategies in collaboration with all the relevant actors, write scripts, produce videos, write materials to complement the videos, test the training approaches, and teach people how to use the training modules.

Once a topic has been defined, the CESPAs team does a study of the communities involved, the relevant institutions, research organizations and resource centres. This study makes it possible to define the various aspects of the topic, ascertain existing knowledge and practices, and identify the cultural, economic and social characteristics of the target group.

The team then develops a “handbook” that summarizes what is known by the farmers and what is known by technical specialists. Juxtaposing these two lists makes it possible to formulate training objectives and to structure the contents in an appropriate way.

The video scripts are then written. The video footage is shot in a rural area, with farmers playing themselves.

When the programmes are complete, they are tested and modified as necessary.

Supporting roles

To support the videos, CESPAs designs and creates a set of complementary materials:

- Participants’ guides, which repeat and summarize the contents of the video, and provide illustrations and brief texts in local languages. These guides are given to participants after the training session. The learners can read them to remind themselves of the content, and can use them in echo-training sessions for people unable to attend the first course;
- Trainers’ guides, which list the training objectives, outline the principal stages to be followed, and guide the trainer in running the training session: an initial test, a video showing, followed by discussions, practical exercises, and final evaluation.

Other supporting materials produced by CESPA include:

- Audiocassettes that repeat the main ideas covered in the training. The cassettes are given to participants afterwards;
- A flipchart containing a series of drawings that summarize the main ideas. The flipchart can substitute for the video if no television is available;
- Posters and photo displays. These can also complement the flipchart.

CESPA tests this teaching package as a whole to make sure it is effective.

CESPA staff run training courses in the villages, following a schedule they negotiate with the community. Splitting the training into several sessions allows everyone interested – men, women and children – to take part. That can mean the training team must stay in the same village for several days. Before each course, a test enables the trainers to gauge the participants' existing knowledge.

The training proceeds in several phases, with videos alternating with group discussions and practical exercises to allow participants to use their new knowledge. A final test makes it possible to measure the impact of the training on participants' knowledge.



A training course for farmers on audiovisual production
(Photo: CESPA)

Diversified productions

CESPA has produced and tested a whole series of rural training packages on a wide variety of topics; these include water hygiene, rice growing, compost making, horticulture, establishing and maintaining orchards, fish rearing, soil erosion, seed production and conservation,

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dune-fixation methods, health, nutrition, AIDS prevention, savings and credit, banking techniques, and the electoral code, to name just a few.

CESPA produces these packages in collaboration with partners engaged in rural development. The packages are field-tested and then handed over to teams of trainers and extension agents. They, in turn, run the courses with the help of battery-powered video equipment.

Apart from its training packages, CESPA can also produce institutional videos, documentaries, commercials and drama on request. It also produces general-interest programmes in collaboration with the national television station.

A contract to serve the public

Since 1992, CESPA's partners have gradually reduced their technical and financial support, and CESPA has become a public enterprise with commercial characteristics. It has now been granted financial autonomy, and must generate its own operating resources.

But serving the public remains CESPA's top priority, and this is not always compatible with the need to be financially solvent. At the end of 1999, the Malian government concluded an agreement with CESPA specifying its role and functions. This gives it the special task of coordinating communication activities and educational audiovisual production for all public development agencies, particularly those involved in rural development, environment, health and education.

Partnerships with farmer organizations

The CESPA management is well aware that CESPA can succeed only if it manages to involve farmers directly in its work. The government's policy of decentralization provides a favourable environment for local initiatives managed by community groups, producers' organizations, district administrations and NGOs.

Television is still rare in rural areas, and villagers are very eager to see this novelty. The only programmes they can normally see are pornographic or kung-fu films shown by mobile video units.

To fight this phenomenon and to provide an alternative that is more sensitive to local customs, CESPA has started a project to establish community cultural and video centres. This is a joint project with farmers' associations and a savings-and-credit network. The community associations themselves are to manage the centres. The video equipment will be financed by loans from the credit institutions, and CESPA and other sources will provide the educational, cultural and entertainment programmes.

The local radio station could also help. It could broadcast programmes about the topic currently being covered in the community centre. And it could also organize village broadcasts to gather local people's reactions and suggestions about the topic.

In each village with a video centre, community organizers would be trained to manage the centre, plan its activities and facilitate educational meetings.

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