



“Using podcasts as part of a collaborative learning approach to bring about social behaviour change within the farming communities of Karamoja - a pilot study”



Project Briefing Pack

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Introduction

From 1st April 2021 to 31st March 2022, AgriTechTalk International CIC, in partnership with AgriTechTalk Africa and Farm Radio International, implemented the “Using podcasts as part of a collaborative learning approach to bring about social behaviour change within the farming communities of Karamoja - a pilot study” project. This project was funded by USAID’s Implementer-Led Design, Evidence, Analysis and Learning (IDEAL) programme.

This document presents an overview of its findings, in order that both learning relating to the effectiveness of podcasts for social learning; as well as the training resources developed during the project, can be accessed and shared.

Project Background and Objectives

The “Using podcasts as part of a collaborative learning approach to bring about Social and Behaviour Change (SBC) within the farming communities of Karamoja” project piloted a social learning approach amongst smallholder farmers in Karamoja, in order to investigate its effectiveness in bringing about behaviour change. The targeted behaviour change was the practice of keeping simple paper-based farm records. A series of podcasts about how to keep farm records was developed. The podcasts were played to farmer groups during “listening-sessions”, allowing opportunity for demonstrations by the facilitator, as well as discussion and practice amongst the groups.

The social elements of the project were two-fold: a) the listening-sessions were held with groups and b) husbands and wives learned together.

Podcasts were identified as the SBC channel to be explored during this project, due to their versatility and the knowledge gap that exists with regard to their ability to impel SBC when used within a collaborative learning environment for food security projects. Podcasts are defined as pre-recorded audio content that can be accessed via the internet. Although the audio material developed by this project was as podcasts (mp3 files which were downloaded by the project officer), it is important to clarify that they were subsequently played to/shared with target communities as **pre-recorded audio files**, due to their poor internet access.

Farm recording was chosen as the means by which to test the approach, due to both AgriTechTalk International and AgriTechTalk Africa’s prior experience in this subject; as well as a current lack of resources that support farm record keeping by small-scale farmers with poor literacy levels. The project focused on simple enterprise-based financial records, that enable understanding of the year-on-year profitability of different farming activities. The process of keeping such farm records is considered crucial for understanding and analysing a farm’s income and outgoings, enabling better insight and planning by farmers of their livelihoods, thus strengthening the resilience of farming communities.

The project explored if, and to what extent, learning from podcast content via this social approach contributed to the targeted SBC of record keeping amongst the farmer groups. It explored changes in practice, attitudes and skills relating to farm recording, from the start to the end of the project. Differences relating to gender and, to a lesser extent, age were also investigated.

Key Project Activities

The project involved the development of four podcasts (in English and the local language of Karamojong) on farm recording, which were downloaded as audio files, and played to five farmer groups (in the Karamojong language) during fortnightly collaborative “listening-sessions”. These were facilitated by a project officer and supported by appropriate learning resources, including a trainer manual, hand-outs for learners, and simple farm-record book templates.

The sessions included the playing of the podcast recordings (paused as required, and repeated for reinforced learning), followed by step-by-step demonstrations of how to keep farm records by the facilitator, group discussions and farm-recording practice by the participants.

All the farmer groups were based in the Moroto District of Karamoja. Each group comprised husband and wife couples from 7 households (14 individuals), making a total of 35 couples, or 70 individuals. The original project proposal had been to work with groups of 20. This was scaled down at the request of IDEAL, in order to manage the risk of COVID-19 transmission.

Subsequent regular farm visits by the project officer ensured that all participants were supported in applying what they had learned during the listening sessions (namely farm record keeping) to their own farming activities. The implementation of a thorough process of evaluation over the duration of the project ensured that its impact, and learning from it, could be understood and measured effectively.

The specific activities conducted during the project are summarised below. Ongoing during all these activities were the farm visits undertaken by the project officer.

Key Project Activities and Delivery Dates

	Activity	Delivered
1	Inception meeting for local Government and NGO officers	Apr 2021
2	Creation of 5 listening groups, with baseline surveys. Additional farm visits to explore record keeping practices in more detail	Apr - May 2021
3	Formative research review of existing knowledge, experiences and guidelines on the use of podcasts for social learning; circulation of survey on farm recording and radio/podcasts to agri’ officers in the sub-region; and development of a Podcast Development Guide, to support subsequent development of podcast material	Jun 2021

4	Bringing together all learning from above, for the development of a Learning Plan, which included an outline of the content and structure of the listening sessions; drafting of podcast scripts; planning of appropriate supporting materials; and the development of the delivery time-table	Jul 2021
5	Researching and meeting with local radio stations in order to identify the most appropriate partner for production of the podcasts, based on their existing outreach in the region; and relevant experience of broadcasting and recording content for local rural communities. Ateker FM was identified as the most suitable partner on this basis	Jun 2021
6	Preparation of draft podcast scripts	Jul 2021
7	Engaging with all partners for the finalisation of podcast content; and supporting learning materials for the listening-sessions	Aug 2021
8	Testing the Karamojong podcast content/listening-session format with a farmer focus group	Aug 2021
9	Translating of the podcast scripts into Karamojong by Ateker; and commencement of podcast recording in both English and Karamojong, using locally engaged actors	Aug - Sep 2021
10	Preparation of materials to support learning during listening-sessions and farm recording by the farming households (trainer manual; key information sheets; record books)	Aug - Sep 2021
11	Recording of podcasts in Karamojong	Sep - Oct 2021
12	Commencement of listening sessions with all 5 groups	2 held per group in Sep 2021
13	Mid-term listening sessions evaluation survey	Oct 2021
14	Delivery of remaining listening sessions	2 held per group in Oct 2021
15	Distribution of solar powered radios with memory card slots, as well as podcast recordings on memory cards, to all project households	Nov 2021
16	Post-listening session evaluation surveys (focusing on quality of podcasts and listening-session delivery)	Nov 2021
17	Agricultural officer surveys	Nov 2021
18	Recording of short farmer interviews with a sample of selected farmers, for inclusion in live radio broadcasts	Nov 2021
19	Individual household surveys	Nov - Dec 2021
20	End-line surveys, with whole groups and women only	Jan 2022
21	Final adjustments to podcast recordings	Feb 2022
22	Final scoring of record books	Feb 2022
23	The broadcast of live radio programmes about farm recording in Karamojong by Ateker FM, a leading local radio station that broadcasts throughout the sub-region. These included an introduction by the ATTA farm officers; the recorded farmer	Mar 2022

	interviews; the Karamojong podcasts; and a question-and-answer text/phone in	
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Key Project Outputs

The outputs of the project are summarised in the table below. These will be hosted on the AgriTechTalk International CIC website once final project closure and approval by donors has been achieved. Links to the outputs are provided in the right-hand column.

Output	Notes	Format	AgriTechTalk Website Link
Formative Research Report	Summary of research into the use of podcasts for collaborative (or social) learning, focusing on small-holder farming communities	PDF report	Project Reports
M&E Plan	Outlines specific timed activities for monitoring project activity delivery, including the development of all podcast and training materials; and evaluating its impact	PDF Plan	Project Reports
Baseline Report	Describes the results of baseline surveys conducted at the start of the project	PDF report	Project Reports
Podcast Development Guide	A practical guide for rural projects on how to develop podcasts	PDF Guide	Project Reports
Collaborative Learning Plan	Describes the approach and content of the project listening-sessions	PDF Plan	Project Reports
Dissemination Plan	Outlines the means and methods by which the project would disseminate its outputs, and related learning	PDF Plan	Project Reports
Trainer Manual	A trainer manual on how to conduct podcast-based listening-sessions on farm recording with farmer groups: Includes podcast scripts; ideas for follow-up discussions; and examples that can be used to illustrate the content of the podcasts, as well as practice	PDF manual	Farm Recording Resources
Podcast scripts	Word by word script of all 4 podcasts	PDF scripts in English and Karamojong	Farm Recording Resources Also available on Barzawire (Farm Radio International)
Key Information Sheets	Illustrated hand-out for learners, summarising key facts to remember when keeping farm records	PDF handouts in English and Karamojong	Farm Recording Resources
Record Books	Simple enterprise-based record book template	PDF templates in	Farm Recording Resources

		English and Karamojong	
Podcast recordings	Recordings of all 4 podcasts	mp3 recordings in English and Karamojong	Farm Recording Resources
Evaluation Report	Evaluates the outcomes of the project	PDF report	Project Reports
Final Project Report	Final project report	PDF report	Project Reports

Summary of Project Findings

The project findings indicated that both the men and women had enjoyed, and felt they had benefitted from, the different aspects of the project being investigated in this project – that is, the podcast recordings, the group learning environment, and learning as a couple. 3½ months after the end of project activities, enterprise-level financial farm records were being maintained for all the participating households, indicating that podcasts/podcast recordings played within a social learning environment can support sustained Social and Behavioural Change amongst rural communities within the region.

The key findings of the project are summarised below:

A. Farm Recording

1. No households were keeping enterprise-level financial farm records at the project outset. By the end of the project, all 35 households (100%) had enterprise-based records kept for their farms, including break-downs of inputs, outputs and values and, ultimately, gross margins. Records were kept for a wide variety of enterprises, mainly crop or livestock related, though also extending to brewing.
2. In the majority of cases (74%), these were kept by the households themselves. The 26% of households that needed help with record keeping (from friends or other family members) was due to limitations in their literacy and numeracy skills – for example, most of the households used a combination of writing, numbers and symbols.
3. It was mainly men who made the farm-record entries (only 20% of women wrote in the household record books), but the majority of the women regularly contributed information for their husbands to record. The lower activity of women in keeping farm records is largely attributable to their lack of education, resulting in lower literacy and numeracy abilities, than amongst the men.
4. The majority of participants were youth (younger than 35 years) and, although a structured comparison of farm-recording between youth and older age groups was not conducted, M&E activities indicated that younger age groups would be better equipped with the necessary numeracy/literacy skills to keep farm-records.

5. By the end of the project, all households reported that they were benefitting from the information they had collected in their record books (eg being able to compare earnings from maize and sorghum crops) and intended to continue farm-recording in future. Despite their lesser role in writing the farm records, all the women reported being happy with this arrangement and that they believe farm recording to be a worthwhile activity.

B. Podcasts

6. Although nearly all participants reported listening to the radio fairly regularly, few had listened to, or even heard of, podcasts before the project started. All reported that they had enjoyed the farm recording podcast content and found it interesting. They reported the advantages of learning from audio recordings compared to radio as:
 - Can listen any time (when it suits them);
 - Not interrupted by network problems;
 - Can be repeated, reinforcing learning;
 - Effective when played in social groups - can be repeated, encouraging discussion and reinforcing learning;
 - Can be shared;
 - Easier to reach a target group.

These positive reports were reinforced by five surveyed agricultural officers/parish chiefs who had attended project listening-sessions, who rated the recordings as a more effective training resource than live radio, and reported that podcast recordings could support the adoption of desired behaviour changes amongst the communities they work with.

7. The distribution of the podcast recordings in small solar-powered radios (with memory card slots) to each household allowed them to reinforce their learning at home between listening-sessions; and to listen to and share the content with other family/friends (by the end of the project, at least 17 participants from three of the groups had shared the podcasts, via Bluetooth, with 98 other people within their communities).
8. All participants were keen to learn from podcast recordings in the future, citing a range of topics they felt suitable.

C. The Social Learning Approach

9. The project adopted a two-pronged collaborative (social learning) approach:
 - 1) participants learning as couples within
 - 2) mixed farming groups.
10. Feedback on the participants' experience of learning as a couple was that they had enjoyed and benefitted from this approach. They reported that they learned better together, and could share information with each other on what to record during the sessions.

11. The women also reported that learning about (and then supporting) farm recording as a couple had benefitted their role in household financial decision making, since they were more engaged in the process of financial information gathering, and thereby management. Most of the agricultural officers also observed that both men and women had generally enjoyed learning as a couple.
12. In terms of learning as a large group, the feedback was that this improved learning, because the participants could share knowledge during discussions, and so learn from each other.
13. Integral to the social learning of this project was that the listening-sessions did not just include the playing of the audio recordings to groups. Although the main tool for message delivery, it was the integration of the audio with step-by-step demonstrations; group discussions; and practice sessions, facilitated by the project officer, which combined to create the collaborative learning approach being explored in the project. The participants reported that it was the combination of all these aspects of the listening-sessions that contributed to their learning about farm recording.

Key Challenges

The main challenges/weaknesses of the project are summarised below:

1. **Small-scale pilot:** Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, this project was a small pilot, including only 70 learning participants. However, its findings that podcasts can effectively support learning in a social environment were very positive, and indicate that the small-scale of the project did not undermine the value of what could be learned from it in any way.
2. **Numeracy/literacy skill limitations:** Although the project used simple farm recording as its targeted behaviour change, the literacy and numeracy skills of some participants limited their ability to keep such records. This was especially apparent for many women, who generally reported much lower education levels than the male participants. These challenges were overcome by these households themselves by 1) integrating symbols into the recording system; 2) seeking help from friends and neighbours; and 3) for the women whose husbands were literate, sharing the information to be written down with their husbands verbally. These challenges do not detract from the key findings of the project however – namely that podcasts played in a social-learning environment can be highly effective in bringing about sustained behaviour change.
3. **Access to equipment (phones or radios with memory card slots):** Although a high proportion of participating households owned a mobile phone, and were therefore able to play/download/share podcast recordings on memory cards, many women reported that they did not own their own phone and had limited access to their husbands', who are away from home for much of the day. For this reason, the project provided small

radio sets (with memory card slots), to each household. This was made possible by the small number of participants, and the affordability of these devices in local markets. This improved the ability of households, especially women, to reinforce their learning at home; listen with friends; and even share the podcast material.

These challenges are no different to those for live radio.

It should be acknowledged that future podcast/audio recording focused projects would not necessarily have the budget to buy appropriate devices for stakeholders – but access for women could be ensured via other means, such as shared radio sets/mobile devices for group listening.

Another issue that needs considering is the limited battery life of mobile phones/radios. This project overcame this by purchasing solar powered radio-sets. Other projects would also need to consider participants' ability to recharge their phones/radios, via access to mains or solar rechargers.

4. **Finding time for record keeping:** Record keeping is a practice that works best when carried out regularly, normally at least a couple/few times a week, depending on the enterprise (which may be seasonal). For this reason, challenges of time were raised by the participants, though they unanimously agreed that, in balance, it was still worth this time. Record keeping systems need to be fine-tuned so that they are simple enough to be practical, but detailed enough for their outputs to be of value. Relating to this issue is that of light: Participants reported that the time that best suited them for record keeping was the evening, but that they could not necessarily do this without a light source. Future farm recording projects should consider this challenge, and how to address it, such as by providing solar powered lamps.
5. **Short duration of the project:** Greatest value from farm records is derived when they are built up over time, allowing comparisons between the outcomes of different farming decisions, made over successive seasons/years. Although this one-year project was long enough to indicate that learning from podcasts in a social-setting can be highly effective, its duration was too short to allow the farmers to build up sets of records over years, which would have demonstrated its value to them even more. Despite this, they overwhelmingly reported that farm recording was a beneficial practice that they intended to continue.
6. **Loss making by some farmers:** As the project progressed, many farmers realised that they made losses on several enterprises. Arguably, this perfectly demonstrates why farmers should keep farm records – that is, so that they can understand which enterprises are working for them, and which are not. However, it should be acknowledged that some farmers reported that they felt disheartened by what their records revealed to them – though this did not appear to deter them from intending to continue the practice in future.

Future Actions

This project has demonstrated the potential for pedagogical podcasts to support collaborative learning and bring about SBC in rural communities in Karamoja and beyond.

AgriTechTalk International CIC is currently exploring opportunities to scale-up this approach to a larger project. If your organisation is interested in becoming involved, or if you have any questions, please do get in touch: heather@aainternational.co.uk

Thank you.

Heather Pitcher, AgriTechTalk International CIC, April 2022