

Guidelines for creating community listeners' clubs



A few basics for creating community listeners' clubs, presented in four stages, and the main success factors to be considered.



The success of the community listeners' clubs prompted the Dimitra project and its partners to analyse this experience from several angles so as to have a better idea of the process involved in establishing the clubs and factors likely to promote their success.

In systemising this process, the aim is to facilitate the future adaptation and implementation of this participatory means of information and communication in different settings. Factors considered important are presented in this section. However, this overview is not intended to be an exhaustive

guide to creating community listeners' clubs, nor the sole solution for their establishment and operation. There are infinite variations, which should be explored and adapted to each particular situation. An essential consideration is that the mechanism created can stimulate a process of dialogue and communication, through which the community defines itself, what it wants and how to obtain it.

In the experience of Dimitra and its partners, the process of creating community listeners' clubs revolves around four stages, as illustrated below:

1. BEFORE THE CREATION OF LISTENERS' CLUBS

- Preliminary contacts and baseline survey
- Participatory identification of problems
- Initial training
- Reporting and mobilisation

2. THE CREATION OF LISTENERS' CLUBS

- Vision/mission and goals of listeners' clubs
- Responsibilities and internal organization
- Privileged contacts with one/several radio station(s)
- Neutral meeting places
- Spirit of collaboration

3. LISTENERS' CLUBS IN ACTION

- Listening
- Discussions
- Decision-making
- Action

4. THE FOLLOW-UP OF THE PROCESS

- At the level of the rural community/ the listeners' clubs
- At the level of the community radio

1. Before the creation of listeners' clubs

Preliminary contacts and baseline survey

The experience of the clubs set up in Niger and the DRC shows the importance of basing the establishment of clubs on a sound network (or organization) that is already operating in the area. For example, in the case of Niger, the clubs were able to develop thanks to the partnership with ONG VIE, which is highly active in the two regions where

the project is operational and has the support of its network of literacy centres and facilitators.

In the DRC, the clubs are not built around such a highly structured network; the initiative developed thanks to communication channels between the facilitators from Samwaki and REFED-Katanga (Réseau Femme et Développement) who served as key focal points.

The body/organization wishing to support the creation of community listeners' clubs must be involved throughout the process. As well as an excellent knowledge of the local conditions and realities, it is essential that it has strong capacities for rallying interest in the project. Its first task will be to establish **preliminary contacts** in the community in order to:


- meet local authorities and talk to them about the proposed initiative;
- list local development initiatives and organizations working in this sector and review the impact of their activities on the community;
- identify and involve local social leaders, both men and women;
- draw an initial impression of the main development issues at local level.

A **baseline survey** is then carried out to improve understanding of the context in which the clubs will be created. This should include: a mapping of the stakeholders (men and women), the traditional and modern communication methods used (in terms of coverage, access, cost, programmes and efficacy) as regards the differing needs of the various community groups (men, women, youth), other development initiatives with a communication component operating in the region, an analysis of the situation in terms of gender and access to information, etc.⁴

Participatory identification of problems

Once the preliminary contacts have been established, the staff from the support organization will facilitate meetings at community level, with special focus on the participation of women, young people and groups that are generally less visible, as well as men and women considered to be leaders in their community. The idea is to get the participants to draw up a non-exhaustive list of the main development issues facing communities in the area.

From theory to practice



During a consultation meeting with representatives from different sectors of society in Kasika, in the territory of Mwenga (South Kivu), information was supplied on HIV/AIDS. A woman of about fifty said she wanted to break the silence about this disease in her own household, family and village. She used a popular Swahili saying: “Ukinyamazia mlozi, atakumaliza watoto”, “If you keep silent with a sorcerer, he will eat up all your children”. As a result of this meeting, the community started to understand the importance of having opportunities to dialogue and exchange information, such as those offered by the community listeners' clubs.

From theory to practice



A preliminary meeting prior to the creation of a listeners' club enabled inhabitants of the village of Kahimuzi, in Walungu territory (South Kivu) to learn that at least two out of three widows in their village had been victims of land grabbing by their eldest son following the death of their husband. Villagers identified the problem of inheritance as a major cause of the lack of access to land for women.


Initial training

Initial training is organized for women and men leaders previously identified in the communities, journalists and community radio facilitators working in the region and staff from the supporting body/organization. The aim of this first meeting is twofold: to bring all the stakeholders together under the umbrella of a common project to explain the functioning and establishment of community listeners' clubs and to strengthen the capacities of participants in terms of gender and participatory communication and on more technical aspects.

Regarding the selection of women and men leaders for this training, initial contacts and the baseline survey will already have helped to identify and approach the most charismatic and committed individuals. However, it is also essential that the leaders are chosen in a participatory manner by the community. In many cases, community members choose women and men leaders on the basis of criteria such as patience and wisdom, and because these individuals are particularly popular and respected within the community. Account should also be taken of representation of social groups. Identifying community leaders is crucial given the importance of the role that they will be called upon to play to stimulate the clubs and make them work.

In choosing themes to be dealt with during these training sessions, reference will be made to issues closely linked to the project: participatory communication, gender issues, community listeners' clubs, etc., as well as priority problems and needs identified during the previous stage.

From theory to practice



In Niger, training and awareness-raising activities targeted the following groups:

- **Women and men community leaders:** on the listeners' club approach, their goals and how they function; roles and responsibilities of leaders in managing a listeners' club; gender issues; participatory communication features such as facilitation, mobilisation and group management; use of radio receivers and telephones; summary of discussions.
- **Community radio stations:** on participatory communication, gender and communication, and capacity building to produce radio programmes using this approach.
- **Staff from the support organization:** on managing listeners' clubs and facilitating discussions; understanding the approach; supporting clubs in carrying out their activities; the process of identifying and developing themes and group management; the importance of gender issues; organizing radio contributions; mobilising resource people.
- **Administrative, religious, municipal and traditional authorities/communities:** activities to disseminate information and raise awareness on the listeners' club approach, the stages involved in setting up these clubs and the participation of men and women in development.

Targeted training sessions may be organized, for example, for community leaders, journalists/ community radio staff or resource people from the support organization. However, it is important that all these groups of stakeholders are brought together in joint meetings so as to strengthen links and exchanges between them.

Feed back and mobilisation

Participants in the training sessions will subsequently be called upon to raise awareness in the community about the “listeners’ club approach”. It is important to highlight concrete short-term potential achievements of the mechanism, especially improvement in knowledge of different subjects of interest to most people, changes brought about by members of the community, etc. The awareness-raising sessions seek to arouse the interest of both women and men and to encourage more people to join the listeners’ clubs. Individuals who are interested will later take part in a first meeting organized by community leaders with the help of the support organization. This stage marks the beginning of the setting up of the listeners’ club, during which responsibilities may be assigned. Regarding participants from the radio stations and the support organization, feed back sessions will be organized so as to raise awareness among colleagues.

2. The creation of listeners’ clubs

A community listeners’ club is not a simple ‘club of listeners’ or a ‘fan club’, linked to a radio programme or station. A listeners’ club is driven by common values and goals. The project is not centred on the radio, but on the **community**. These clubs are citizens’ groups that enable members to share their concerns and needs, to obtain certain information that would otherwise be inaccessible and undertake constructive initiatives together.

Vision/mission and goals of listeners’ clubs

Ideally, the listeners’ club should have a **vision** and a **mission**. The vision is how the club wants to develop in the long term. All members must be able to feel involved in the vision. The vision enables members to feel part of something quite important. The vision is formulated succinctly and is easy to remember; it is often reflected in the club’s name. The **mission** is a precise description of what the listeners’ club does. It describes the club’s activities and expresses its purpose. In the DRC, the mission and vision feature in the club’s statutes (together with texts that describe how the club works and how it is managed).

From theory to practice

In Tchiota Nazamn  (Niger), Amadou Bello was immediately captivated by the idea of a listeners’ club. *“When they came to explain, I realised it was a strategy to give us a lot of information, to change things, and I found that interesting.”*

In South Kivu, the names of the nine federations of listeners’ club vary widely, but each one clearly reflects these clubs’ mission/vision. For example, those in Kabar  are called “Rhuyubak’Eka” (Build Our Village), the ones in Uvira: “Masikilizano” (Reconciliation), while those in Walungu and Idjwi are called respectively “Rhuhinduke” (Let’s Change Behaviour) and Rhudosanye” (Let’s Talk).

Generally, the **goals** of a listeners' club are the following:

- To generate information, promote local knowledge and encourage information sharing, especially to benefit communities with limited access to the media.
- To use radio to prompt community members, both women and men, to take part in development activities/projects at local level.
- To enable women and men in the community to express themselves freely on issues of community interest and to play an active and voluntary role in undertaking concerted initiatives as a response.

To these three goals, others may be added that are relevant to each particular listeners' club. If the goals vary according to circumstance, it is important that they are always sensitive to gender issues and respect local culture.

Responsibilities and internal organization


Methods for organizing community listeners' clubs may vary according to the situation and the way the support organization works. For example, the listeners' clubs set up in Niger have quite an informal structure. By contrast, in the DRC, the organization of the clubs is dictated by the election of members at a General Assembly, and of a man or woman chair and vice-chair, etc. At this stage, the tasks of each person are clarified (leaders, facilitators, secretary, members) and the internal regulations and/or dispute procedures are established.

Depending on the circumstances, the listeners' clubs may be made up entirely of women, of men, or they may be mixed. In this latter case, it is essential that the club's decision-making bodies have gender parity, to ensure that women can really play an active role in club proceedings.

Operational planning is useful for defining the place and time of meetings, discussion of themes, individual or group training sessions on the use of radio and telephones, interactions with community radio, other clubs, facilitators, etc.

Anyone who shows a real wish to contribute to the development of their area should be allowed to join a listeners' club. In the DRC, there is no limit on the number of members for each listeners' club. However, it should be borne in mind that group listening around a radio set becomes problematic if there are more than twenty people. Not all club members have to listen to radio programmes. Some may just take part in the discussions and debates held after the broadcast.

From theory to practice



Eliane Najros (Dimitra) recalls how the listeners' clubs are organized in South Kivu: *"The clubs are highly structured, but nevertheless there is a great deal of discussion. I realised that organization varied greatly, with one club meeting twice a week while another chose to meet once a fortnight. Others still work with the radio set in the fields. So the organization is not as rigid as it seemed at first. The statutes do not control the means of communication, but they offer a framework to work with."*

Privileged contact with one/several radio station(s)

A special partnership will be established on the basis of common interests between the listeners' clubs and at least one community radio station. The clubs allow the radio to be more effective in fulfilling its role as a participatory media, in tune with the community. The radio allows the clubs – and hence the community – not just to have access to information, but also to express its concerns and needs, as well as its knowledge. It is incontestably a win-win partnership and it is important that both parties see it in that light.

The nature of the partnership, including the terms of collaboration, must be established through dialogue between the radio and the listeners' club. It is important to set out these terms clearly in writing in order to ensure the commitment of the radio management and avoid any future misunderstandings.

The radio and listeners' clubs can start by exploring together areas of common ground between their respective missions. Essentially, the community radio's goals include contributing to local development and encouraging communities to participate in public life, which is also the case for listeners' clubs.

For example, the radio station can become involved in different ways: by producing a programme that gives a voice to the clubs and including it in its radio schedule; by facilitating exchanges or finding resource people to talk on various subjects; by organizing public broadcasts in a club's village, etc. As for the clubs, they can commit to playing an active role in the radio (making programmes, providing feedback, taking part in drawing up programme schedules, etc.), to listen to broadcasts and to share their opinions. There may be scope for working together in other ways too, for example by jointly organizing activities of general interest. The two parties may decide on a joint schedule so they can





coordinate their activities. It can also prove useful to appoint someone as a focal point at the radio to make contact easier.

The support organization has an important role to play. Radio facilitators are often personalities recognised by the community, while club members may not be used at this stage to speaking out and defending their viewpoints. Building self-confidence is part of the listeners' club process. It is therefore important that the club does not leave it up to the radio alone to establish the procedures, the methods of collaboration or the topics to be addressed by the club.

Support for community radios should be offered as an incentive to encourage their whole-hearted involvement. Naturally, contributing to local development is an integral part of the community radios'

mandate, but this type of media often operates in difficult circumstances. Not to mention the fact that activities undertaken with listeners' clubs will involve mobilising staff and resources (especially for transport). It is therefore important to make sure that the radio station sees the partnership in a positive light.

It should also be noted that, in certain cases, listeners' clubs are located in areas where there is no community radio reception. Although such situations are not ideal due to the inevitable loss of impetus that this will involve, alternatives do exist. For example, a system for listening to and exchanging recorded radio programmes may be set up and staff from other radio stations, including ones further away, may be programmed.

Neutral meeting places

The club must be free of any political, religious, community or other leaning. Special attention must be paid to choosing a meeting place which should be as neutral as possible.

From theory to practice

In Fogou, close to Téra (Niger), the club of Mariama Hassane meets “next to the mosque, in a meeting place. Under the stars. The place is equidistant from all the homes.” In Doumba, a village in the same area, the women meet in a warehouse which is used by the literacy centre.

Spirit of collaboration

A key feature of a listeners’ club is the climate of collaboration and solidarity among its members. Dialogue within a club allows members to plan strategies together for resolving common problems. The facilitators and group leaders should use participatory techniques and tools for collaboration to promote this team spirit.

3. Listeners’ clubs in action

Listening

Each club decides how often and in what manner listening sessions should be held. These must be planned and organized. The listener, whether man or woman, should choose the subject to listen to and then find the best possible conditions (be undisturbed, in a quiet place and avoid doing other tasks while listening, etc.), and then choose the time and the place for the listening session. However, it is not easy to make time and cut oneself off for this listening session. Sometimes, listening sessions are held in the fields.

Listening is organized in two ways, which can sometimes be complementary: individual or group listening.

- **Individual listening:** This involves listening as an individual or household. The listener knows in advance what time the programme that interests him/her will be broadcast. Individual listening sessions are followed up by a report based on the programme content to be shared with other club members using a method agreed with the club (recording, written report, listening report form, etc.). The listener prepares the material needed to make the report.
- **Group listening:** For group listening, club members divide into groups which meet in a neutral location accessible to all to listen to programmes together and discuss them. Each participant can take notes to ensure lively participation in the discussion that follows. Group listening has proved more effective than individual listening in terms of absorbing programme content. The feedback of participants can be useful as a summary and record of the discussions; as the saying goes: “two heads are better than one”.

From theory to practice



Several methods of listening and sharing can be used together:

— **Special live programmes:** negotiation of air time to broadcast these programmes, often lasting between 1 and 1.5 hours and generally aired during the evening, between 8 and 10 pm.

— **Conference:** a discussion on a theme prepared by one or more clubs, facilitated by a member of the radio team who plays the role of focal point; there is no live radio broadcast. In Niger, club members listen to and take part in the discussions using mobile telephones (with loudspeaker if possible).

— **Reporting :** the radio broadcasts an item made by one or more clubs in the village (for example a sketch) and solicits the reaction of other clubs.

— **Participation in radio programmes:** these programmes are part of the radio's regular broadcast schedule; women in particular participate in these programmes by giving their feedback in an individual manner (for example by phone). It should be noted that this is not the same as group listening.

Discussions

This is a highly important moment, as the discussion should enable each member to take part so as to reach a better understanding of the problem. A successful discussion will enable the group to define the issue, analyse the causes, identify the consequences at both individual and community levels, and, above all, to propose concrete actions to solve the problem. It is not supposed to involve verbal sparring, with winners and losers.

During the discussions it is important to use every means possible to encourage the most silent and marginalised individuals to speak out and express their opinion. That does not mean simply asking their viewpoint at a meeting. It means showing them that they have something to contribute, that their opinion is just as important as that of anyone else. It is only in the medium term that behaviour change will be seen. So patience is called for.

From theory to practice



"Women meet up and share their experiences, even talking about what goes on in their private lives. In the end they pour out everything. There are only about 20 people in a club, but in the village, everyone knows what is going on; nothing is secret."

Moctare, ONG VIE, NIGER



Decision-making

When a club decides to take action, it is advisable to respect the majority opinion. To do this, a listeners' club must establish and respect democratic rules. These rules are set out in the internal regulations and ensure good organizational management. However, it is important not to fall into the trap of 'majority dictatorship': it is good practice to listen to the arguments of each person and preferable to reach a position through consensus and general agreement.

Hurried discussion will result in unpopular decisions being taken which are often not implemented since most members do not feel any sense of ownership towards them.


Action

The listeners' clubs are an information and communication tool centred on action. Without action, there is no prospect for change. There is little point in members losing themselves in sterile debates

which do not lead to concrete, widely supported measures to change a certain situation, improve ways of doing things and a better quality of life for the community, both men and women.

This is an essential characteristic of the community listeners' clubs. Action must be central to the process. All members should assimilate this principle and be committed to the idea that the most important outcome is the implementation of concrete actions that benefit the community. Again, the support organization has a key role to play in this stage.

From theory to practice



In the village of Kapolowe-mission, in the DRC, after much discussion, the listeners' clubs reached the conclusion that it was essential to make the authorities aware of the links between corruption and sexual harassment, and that action must be taken to this effect. They took the opportunity of an official visit and a meeting with the traditional and administrative authorities, notably the Director of the Cabinet of the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development and the District Chief, to put on a sketch illustrating these links. The women asked the men to play the role of the men, but when they refused to play the "bad guys", the women decided to dress up as men and play the role themselves. The sketch explaining the situations in which women find themselves on a daily basis prompted much laughter from the audience, but it also made people more aware of the serious extent of corruption and sexual violence.



4. The follow-up of the process

The organization that provides support to the establishment and functioning of the community listeners' clubs must facilitate the monitoring of activities, at community and listeners' club level and at community radio level.

Follow-up at the level of the rural community/the listeners' clubs

This level essentially has two aspects:

- Providing information on the **achievements** of the listeners' clubs: feed back on the experiences through the radio will allow more community members to become involved in development activities. The range and nature of the changes incurred can be discussed within the group and by the media channels, especially community radio. Disseminating information about achievements is also a good way of stimulating more impetus in the clubs.
- Identifying **means of action/resources**: it is not sufficient to take decisions following discussions. It is essential to define ways to put the actions into practice, so that they have a visible impact on the lives of beneficiaries. Given the recurrent lack of available resources, the listeners' clubs must identify priority issues. If they are to be effective, they will opt for challenges that they can hope to meet and for which they can find local solutions with the human, material and financial resources available.

From theory to practice

In South Kivu, a radio programme enabled members of the Ruhinduke listeners' club in Mugogo to find out about a two-pronged initiative by women in Fizi. They had successfully set up a mutual aid fund for women and an activity to make corrugated tiles for the roofs of their kitchens.

Discussing the programme, members of the Mugogo listeners' club took up the idea of their peers in Fizi and decided to create their own savings and credit cooperative. On the basis of cautious calculations they estimated that rearing 20 rabbits could generate a revenue of US\$1,500 dollars in 12 months. To get started, they used their contributions to buy 20 rabbits which were distributed as revolving credit among the 20 club members – 15 women and 5 men. After nine months, the number of beneficiaries had reached 162. Each member now has at least three rabbits. With each rabbit fetching an average price of three dollars, this small livestock initiative has brought in some US\$1,558 dollars in one year.



Follow-up at the level of the community radio

Following up on the activities of the community radios must be carried out by the supporting organization and the listeners' clubs, paying particular attention to the following aspects:

- Ensuring **collaboration** with the community radio: it is important to maintain a good working relationship with the community radio in the long term, for the benefit of all. The community radio should be seen as a resource for supporting activities and local development projects as a whole.
- **Participating** in the life of the radio: participation (via listeners' clubs or not) is not just a question of taking part in a programme. Far from it! It also involves playing a role in making programmes (choosing subjects and making editorial choices, sound recording, production, editing, etc.). Generally, it means taking part in the life of the radio, for example by giving an opinion on the programme schedule and, ideally, helping to make it more in tune with the needs and interests of the community.
- Setting up **permanent communication channels** between the radio and the club: in order to promote the exchange of information and allow different actors – men and women – to take part in discussions on development, the listeners' club must set up communication systems based on regular exchanges between radio staff and club members. This interaction will help ensure that programme content is more appropriate.

All the monitoring activities mentioned should enable the evaluation of the experience. This will give a clearer understanding of its impact and will allow adjustments to improve the functioning of the listeners' clubs.





COMMUNITY LISTENERS' CLUBS: SUCCESS FACTORS

The experience of Dimitra and its partners has made it possible to identify a certain number of success factors for community listeners' clubs. These good practices should encourage clubs to become even more active and help avoid stumbling blocks. The list is not exhaustive, but it brings together success factors for the four main stages described in the guidelines: before the creation of listeners' clubs, the creation of listeners' clubs, listeners' clubs in action and the follow-up of the process.

Before the creation of listeners' clubs

- Support and assistance from a well organized body/ organization with a good knowledge of the local context and whose abilities and credibility are held in high esteem. This body must have a network of skilled resource people available, capable of following the process and engaging, convincing and motivating members.
- Identifying men and women leaders recognised by the community, able to give the listeners' club impetus.
- Awareness by the community and local authorities of how the clubs work and their involvement in the process.
- Real support from as many people as possible for the initiative and ownership by the community and club members, especially with regard to the principle that action is the key feature of the process. Without this support, clubs may be set up, but they will have little prospect of lasting in the long term.
- Training in techniques of facilitation and participatory communication for women and men leaders.

The creation of listeners' clubs

- Establishment and functioning based on the cultural, social, economic and political context.
- Creation of partnerships and alliances with community radio stations, local media and other development partners (NGOs, etc.).
- Preparation of clear regulatory documents (statutes including the club's vision and mission, agreements for collaboration with radio, internal regulations, etc.) on club organization and management that are accessible to all and respected by the members (the arrangements may vary according to the country and context).
- Training (and/or retraining) to assist women and men leaders and facilitators of the support organization and community radios on development themes and tools.
- Support to community radio partners who should benefit from capacity building initiatives (facilitation, technique, etc.).
- Setting up of effective collaboration between the support organizations, listeners' clubs and radio stations (mutual strategy).



Listeners' clubs in action

- Effective facilitation and mobilisation by men and women leaders.
- Focus on one or more themes and not on all the problems affecting the community.
- Clear understanding of the development problems identified by club members.
- Special care not to weigh down club meetings with purely organizational discussions.
- Regular exchanges with other listeners' clubs and development actors of both sexes as a source of inspiration to find solutions.
- Special efforts to give a voice to the most marginalised members of the community, especially women. It is important to open the debate to all, taking care that one or more individuals do not monopolise the discussions.

- Equal treatment for all club members, both women and men, and consideration for all opinions.
- Directing discussions towards realistic, concrete and relevant courses of action that can be implemented by the community, without turning to outside resources. Translating words into deeds is essential.
- Taking account of partnership and alliance opportunities with other development initiatives set up in the region.

Follow-up of the process

- Media coverage/dissemination of results and actions using various communication channels.
- Ensuring a long term relationship of trust, with frequent and regular contact, between the rural community and community radio.



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