

**COMMUNICATION FOR DEVELOPMENT  
CASE STUDY**

**18**

**Az Dekhon ba Dekhon  
(Farmer to Farmer):**

A participatory radio series  
for private farmers in Tajikistan



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Prepared by Armorer Wason

In collaboration with

**Extension, Education and Communication Service  
Research, Extension and Training Division  
Sustainable Development Department**

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### **About the author**

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# INTRODUCTION

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‘One of the most attractive features is that the farmer is the central character in the radio programme, and the entire programme is built around him.’ (*Focus group participant, Vose, April 2001*)

‘*Farmer to Farmer* informs us about agriculture in the republic, and in it we can talk about our problems.’ (*Focus group participant, Gissar, May 2001*)

Farmers in Tajikistan have only recently begun to farm with a measure of independence from the state and collective farms of the Soviet era. They face enormous challenges: breakdown of the rural Soviet infrastructure, lack of effective structures to support private farming, lack of finance, endemic corruption, poor rule of law, and during 2000 and 2001 very severe drought. Moreover, there has been almost no discussion in the media of the real problems they face. Farmers do not have reliable sources of information, even on the most basic, uncontroversial, technical aspects of farming.

The radio series *Farmer to Farmer* aims, despite the very considerable constraints, to respond to the concerns and questions of private farmers through interviews with farmers and a range of agricultural experts. It is broadcast once a week as part of Tajik Radio’s lunchtime programme for rural listeners, and then repeated in the evening. Initially, programmes were fifteen minutes in length, but programmes now run for twenty to twenty-five minutes.

With support from the Swiss Agency for Development and Co-operation (SDC), the local office of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) manages the production of the radio series. This is part of a larger project, based in Dushanbe, the capital of Tajikistan, which trains veterinarians, supports veterinary services, and distributes seeds. The Project Coordinator and national staff have close links with the Ministry of Agriculture, which supports the project.

The series is transmitted throughout the country by Tajik Radio. It is a significant departure for Tajik Radio, which has never broadcast an independently produced radio series before.

The target group of private farmers refers to ‘dekhon farmers’ — those that have a measure of leasehold security — and to small-scale and subsistence farmers who farm household plots, some of which were increased in size through the Presidential land programme. It was also intended that programmes would benefit a wider group of agricultural workers who rent land

from collective and state farms, some of which have been privatised, and those who continue to work within state farming. It was further conceived that occasional programme materials might be included on issues of importance to the rural population as a whole, such as health issues.

## **FARMING IN TAJIKISTAN**

The World Bank Poverty Assessment, locates Tajikistan at a very early stage of transition from the Soviet economic model, with much of the economy still controlled by the state and most farmland under a high degree of state influence. Between 1995 and 1999, 120 (out of 600) state controlled farms were privatised, mainly into lease farms, joint stock companies and some private peasant 'dekhon' farms.

A 'dekhon farm' is generally either a small to medium-size family farm (2-50 hectares), or a large 'collective dekhon farm' or 'dekhon association' (50 to 500 hectares). Dekhon farms are created with a lifelong inheritable dekhon lease. From June 1999 land privatisation was accelerated, with a target of a further 160 collective farms to be converted into private dekhon farms through the issue of land share certificates to collective farm employees. By November 1999 there were 13,000 dekhon farms.

The process of obtaining dekhon land rights is described in the World Bank Poverty Assessment as 'exclusive, complicated and expensive', relying as it does on access to information, insider contacts and resources. Most of the new dekhon farmers are apparently former collective farm administrators and specialists, local government officials, businessmen, or relatives of people in these elite categories.

The main priority for the Ministry of Agriculture is the revenue from the cotton crop, and it is almost entirely taken up with administering the production and delivery of cotton from large state farms through a modified form of central planning. Some of these farms have been nominally privatised, but in reality they are not free to make their own decisions: they must sell to the state at prices determined by the state.

The World Bank Poverty Assessment states that this 'involves an opaque entanglement of producer payments with government taxation, farm indebtedness and commercial and shadow interests'<sup>2</sup>. Cotton comprises 30 percent of exports and 30 percent of total state tax revenues, but the actual returns paid to producers, and the wages of much of the rural population working on the cotton-producing state farms, are close to zero.

In lieu of unpaid wages, farms commonly 'rent out' land to their workers on short-term informal leasing arrangements. These are sometimes organised on a sharecropping basis. The World Bank Poverty Assessment estimates that perhaps 20-25 percent of the 600,000 rural households have been involved in

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*2- World Bank Poverty Assessment, April 2000 (report 20285, Human Sector Development Unit, Europe and Central Asia Region).*

small-scale informal leasing without written agreements. Inevitably the lack of security prevents investment and leaves farm workers vulnerable.

Most of the rural population relies for its basic livelihood on self-production on household plots of land. According to the Tajikistan Living Standards Survey (TLSS), 92 percent of rural households have a household plot<sup>3</sup>. These provide 45 percent of the total consumption of rural households. Households implement a complex form of integrated agriculture and land productivity is high. Vegetables are grown for market and for the household's own consumption, and crop residues from the plots partially sustain small and large livestock. According to the TLSS, conducted before two years of drought, over half of all households own cattle and 34 percent own chickens. When asked about survival strategies, participants put their household plot and livestock at the top of their lists, ahead of migration, trade, humanitarian assistance, wages and pensions.

Between 1996 and 1998, 75,000 hectares in small lots were distributed by Presidential decree to supplement existing household plots. The World Bank Poverty Assessment notes that the impact on the livelihoods of those who received such extensions seems to have been highly positive. According to the report, the experience of household and Presidential plot farming in Tajikistan suggests that 'small-scale, labour-intensive farming in transitional economies can be scale and resource appropriate, economically viable, employment generating and independent of subsidy'.

## **MASS MEDIA IN TAJIKISTAN**

Upon independence from the former Soviet Union, Tajikistan descended into a civil war that claimed some 60,000 lives out of a population of 6.7 million. A power-sharing agreement concluded between the warring parties in 1997 established an uneasy peace. Although civil unrest had subsided by the time the project commenced, the political atmosphere was (and still is) fragile.

The short period of relative openness subsequent to independence from the Soviet Union is popularly believed to have been a major contributing factor in the outbreak of the civil war. The Minister of Agriculture expressed the opinion that giving information to farmers was a very dangerous thing to do, and that freedom of information was one of the causes of the war. Oleg Panfilov, a Moscow-based Tajik writer, has described how the media are viewed by the political establishment as a dangerous weapon, rather than as a public space for debate or information<sup>4</sup>.

This perception, that openness is dangerous, is not the only constraining factor for broadcast journalists. It is estimated that at least fifty, and perhaps as many as eighty, journalists and senior media figures were killed during the civil war and continuing civil unrest, often subsequently to reporting on sensitive issues or making allegations of illegality against political groups. The power-sharing agreement that ended the war did not make substantial changes to the political

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<sup>3</sup> - *Tajikistan Living Standards Survey, UNDP, May 1999*

<sup>4</sup> - *Report on the Media Situation in Tajikistan, Cimera, Geneva, Oct 2000*



establishment, and there have been no official attempts to establish responsibility for the violence against journalists.

At present, there are no independent national television or radio stations in Tajikistan. There have been several attempts to gain licences for independent broadcasting projects, but no licences have been granted to transmit nationally. This is not surprising as the right to award licences rests with the monopoly broadcaster of the Soviet era, the State Committee for TV and Radio. Although freedom of speech is guaranteed by the Constitution, one clause prevents the broadcasting or publishing of any information that defames the President or the country.

Tajik Radio is essentially an arm of the state, with no public service responsibility. There is no commitment to programmes that honestly reflect the preoccupations or concerns of audiences. The role of programme managers is to control programme content, while programme quality, especially in terms of relevance to audience concerns, is not considered important.

In this kind of atmosphere, censorship does not have to be systematically organised. Journalists exercise significant self-censorship, as indeed they did in the Soviet era. They know that they take a very considerable personal risk if they broadcast sensitive information or take a critical position on government policy.

Self-censorship is so effective that the people of Tajikistan survive with almost no detailed information beyond what government wants them to know. The impact of this is very deep: this is a society that does not have a dialogue with itself. As in Soviet times, the very act of asking questions becomes uncomfortable, even on the most uncontroversial themes. Problem areas are avoided or sanitised. A small example of this is that the civil war is never described as such, but referred to as 'the events'.

Journalists and programme producers are fearful of, and isolated from, good journalistic practice. With no solid journalistic tradition prior to independence, there has been very little exposure to democratic concepts of journalism. Radio producers in such conditions have little understanding of the need for programme research, no real experience of establishing facts or analysing issues objectively, and have not been trained to write effectively for radio audiences.

## **PROJECT BASIS**

The concept for the radio series built on an agricultural strategy and planning project supported by the European Union Technical Assistance to the Commonwealth of Independent States (EU TACIS) programme. This provided Tajik Radio with uncut radio materials for broadcast. From the project materials, a fifteen-minute programme was broadcast once a week with a repeat as part of Tajik Radio's daily hour-long programme for rural audiences.

The brief for the programmes was that they should contain: 'relevant legal information, relevant Presidential and Government decrees with appropriate commentary; information on the work of agencies supporting the development

of agriculture; advice on farming techniques and environmental issues, information on livestock epidemics, pests, etc.

Most of the materials provided to Tajik Radio were in the form of interviews with consultants from international agencies and speeches given by agricultural specialists at seminars. An attempt was made in one or two programmes to involve farmers more directly, with experts answering questions on aspects of managing a small farm. The programme also transmitted price fluctuations in four regional markets and ran advertisements for farmers seeking an outlet for their produce.

Apart from the question-and-answer programmes on farm management, there was little emphasis on making the programmes relevant and accessible to farmers. No attempt was made to report on the position of farmers through the stories and experience of farmers themselves. This is not surprising given that journalists in Tajikistan have not been trained or expected to produce materials substantially different to those they produced before the break-up of the Soviet Union.

As a result of serious security problems all EC international consultants were withdrawn from Tajikistan, one week after the programmes commenced, including those who might have helped develop these skills.

## **RADIO CHANNELS**

Tajik Radio transmits on three channels. Channel One broadcasts throughout the country via seven transmitters on medium, long, and short wave and on FM. Sadoi Dushanbe, the third channel, transmits within a sixty-kilometre radius of Dushanbe on FM, and via two transmitters to the area surrounding the two regional centres of Leninabad and Khatlon.

The programme for rural listeners, transmitted on each weekday at 2 p.m. and repeated at 8 p.m., mainly contains light entertainment and music. It has a rural focus, but according to Tajik radio managers, they do not have the resources to record reports outside the capital, or to research themes in any depth.

Data from the Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Survey on Media Use in Tajikistan, conducted in 2000, was provided to FAO by *Intermedia*. A breakdown of the survey data showed that significant numbers of farmers and women farmers listen to Tajik Radio channels. Twenty-three percent of all farmers and 29 percent of women farmers listen to Tajik Radio channels on a daily basis. Most listening, however, takes place in the morning from 6 to 7 a.m. Twenty per cent of all farmers listen to Tajik Radio channels at 6 a.m.

The audiences for Tajik radio channels at the times that the programme for rural listeners is transmitted are smaller, but they are distinctly larger than for other daytime programmes transmitted. About 8 percent of all farmers tune in at 2 p.m. and about 12 percent at 8 p.m.. Fewer women farmers listen at these times.

As listeners in Dushanbe region can also listen to Sadoi Dushanbe, it is likely that audiences to Channel One in this area are smaller. The preferred radio station of the farmers who participated in a pilot focus group drawn from the Dushanbe area is Sadoi Dushanbe.

## **PROJECT STRATEGY**

The FAO project required attention to four areas in order to be effective: a workable degree of control over production, participatory audience research, journalism training for the radio producers, and, at a later stage, a campaign to promote the series.

A consultant was recruited for an initial two-week mission to Dushanbe in August 2000 to set up the project, after which it was agreed that there would be a second, longer, mission in December 2000, with a subsequent seven days of support via e-mail to allow the consultant to review radio scripts and feed back suggestions to the producers. It was important to the success of the project to develop mechanisms that would allow programmes to be produced and audience research carried out without the support of an external consultant.

## **EDITORIAL CONTROL**

It was essential both to recognise the very real limits on the editorial independence of the radio programmes and to attempt to ensure that the project had as much influence as possible over the production of programmes. Given the circumstances, a significant degree of programme control was negotiated.

It was agreed that the radio producers recruited to the project would plan, record and script materials under the supervision of the FAO Project Coordinator, and then edit and mix the final programme at Tajik Radio. An Editorial Committee, chaired by the Project Coordinator and comprising representatives of Tajik Radio, the Ministry of Agriculture and the Swiss Development Agency, would oversee the programme production process. Inevitably, Tajik Radio managers would have an ultimate veto over programme content.

## **PARTICIPATORY AUDIENCE RESEARCH**

To meet the information needs of the target audience, to ensure the credibility and reputation of the programmes among farmers, and to stimulate and encourage farmers to work together to find solutions to their problems, it was essential to build the project on a solid basis of effective, participatory, audience research.

Radio programmes work best when they are authentic and relevant to their listeners' lives, and when the real concerns and issues of the audience are at the heart of the programmes. If participatory audience research is implemented successfully, it ensures that the information needs of the intended audience determine programme content .

Radio is a very powerful medium, both in providing the vital information that farmers need to do their work effectively and in stimulating communities to be proactive about the wider problems they face. It is potentially a very strong force in breaking through the isolation that many rural communities experience. In Tajikistan, however, it was clear from the outset that compromises would have to be made in order to protect both the programme producers and the project.

It was decided that radio programmes should initially concentrate on non-controversial technical questions, and that gradually the programme producers would feel their way towards covering more difficult areas. Audiences which have grown up in Soviet and post-communist societies are often skilled at navigating the maze of self-censorship and are able to decipher carefully worded materials. They would be likely to notice and appreciate that their issues are being reflected subtly, even if this is not done explicitly.

A classic means for learning the perceptions and concerns of communities is through focus groups. A pilot focus group was held during the consultant's initial mission and a series of groups organised subsequently.

Apart from informing and mediating the agenda for the programmes, the groups were intended to fulfil two other invaluable functions. Firstly, they were planned to provide an objective process for evaluating the success of the programmes - an opportunity to test the extent to which farmers understood, liked and made use of the material. Feedback from focus groups is a very useful tool for participatory development. As the results come directly from the intended national audience, it is much harder to dismiss them than the advice of a foreign consultant.

Secondly, the focus groups were intended as a powerful force to re-orientate the radio producers to a new view of their role. Programme producers in the former Soviet Union did not solicit the needs and concerns of their audiences and were not expected to take them into account. Their key function was not to ask questions but to give their audiences an officially sanctioned view. A focus group approach was seen as a tool that could be used to break down the traditional, authoritarian mode of radio programme production.

A local firm, *Sharq Centre*, with previous experience in conducting participatory research, was commissioned to run a pilot focus group session. This session was skilfully moderated and the analysis provided by the firm was of a high quality. Sharq Centre was subsequently commissioned to conduct a series of focus groups to underpin the production of programmes.

## **FOCUS GROUP METHODOLOGY**

Eleven male farmers were invited from four areas in the vicinity of Dushanbe to the pilot focus group. These were 'dekhon' farmers — farmers who rented land and farmers of household plots. Four interviewers used snowball sampling and the advice of farmers to find participants, and a standard questionnaire to filter out inappropriate candidates. Eleven participants were invited on the assumption that some would not attend. After some discussion of confidentiality issues, it was decided that the two radio producers could observe the focus group, but were seated in a separate area of the room used for the group. They were introduced as radio producers who wanted to learn how to prepare radio programmes that would be useful for farmers.

A discussion guide was prepared for the group covering the form and quality of farmers' sources of information, the issues that farmers would like information on, their media habits, and their response to a number of possible titles for the programme and different music options to develop a brand for the series.

The design of the first phase of the focus group research proposed two groups in the south of Tajikistan and a group for women farmers to be held in the Regions of Republican Subordination (RRS), not far from Dushanbe, to complement the pilot group. A second phase of two pairs of two groups was planned for two other diverse regions of the country, once the success of the first phase had been analysed and discussed. The groups were to be recruited similarly to the pilot group, with help from the regional farmers' associations.

The group for women farmers was planned to follow a similar protocol to the pilot group, with particular emphasis on the need to ensure adequate reflection in the programmes of the issues of women farmers. A development worker with appropriate skills in gender issues and group-work was identified and it was agreed that Sharq Centre would provide training.

All groups would seek to understand the media use of participants and their concerns and information needs. They would also test completed radio packages produced by the radio producers to obtain feedback on how well participants understood and liked the information and the extent to which they found it useful.

## **STAFF CAPACITY AND TRAINING**

A senior radio producer from Tajik Radio was recruited to work with the project, along with a former TV journalist with English language ability. With very limited experience of journalism outside the former Soviet Union, it was clear that they both needed training to produce attractive, clear materials that would meet reasonable journalistic standards.

Much of the work during the consultant's second mission focused on the details of programme production. Extensive production guidelines and notes on planning and producing radio packages were drawn up with the radio producers. These set an expectation of the radio programmes that could be monitored by the Project Co-ordinator.

Tajikistan is a traditional society, but in the Soviet era women had a sometimes token, but nevertheless distinct presence in public life. With two male radio producers, recruited from an all-male short-list, concerns arose about the inclusion of women farmers in the programmes and ensuring that their needs were also at the heart of the programmes.

Women's development organisations in Dushanbe substantiated that there are significant numbers of female-headed households since the war, often subsisting with some difficulty on their household plots. Furthermore, in other households women sometimes take significant responsibility for the farm while male family members spend large parts of the year working as migrant labourers in Russia. These women are an important target group for the programmes.

It was clear that the radio project was a valuable opportunity to support the general development of good journalism practice in Tajikistan, in a relatively uncontroversial subject area. It was also felt that there was a level of risk involved in relying on just two programme producers, and that it would be

valuable to extend the skill base of the project. An informal press meeting was set up to explain and promote the project, and to recruit interested parties to attend training seminars on journalistic research. This had the benefit of drawing two women reporters into the project, and a basis was established for them to contribute as researchers on a freelance basis.

## PROMOTION

As the audience for Tajik Radio's programme for rural listeners is very small, it was evident that some effort would be needed to promote the radio series once it had achieved an acceptable standard. The consultant advised that a campaign should be designed to implement this, exploiting both the media and the FAO project infrastructure, for instance through advertisements on seed packets or vehicles.

At project inception, it was requested that Tajik Radio run a brief advertisement for the programme at peak listening times but this was declined. Part of the purpose for the focus groups was to research participants' media use in order to find the most effective ways to promote the programmes.

**АЗ ДЕҲҚОН БА ДЕҲҚОН**

- ❖ Барномаи Ташкилоти Кишоварзӣ ва Озуқани Созмони Миллали Муттаҳид барон фермерон.
- ❖ Рӯзҳои чоршанбе дар шабакаи якуми Радиои Тоҷикистон.
- ❖ Аз соати 14<sup>30</sup> то 14<sup>50</sup> ва аз соати 20<sup>00</sup> то 20<sup>20</sup>.
- ❖ Дар мавҷҳои:  
1190,7 м – 252 кГц  
226,7 м – 1323 кГц  
42,7 м – 702 кГц  
65 м – 4635 кГц  
Маблағгузори барномаи радиои ФАО  
SDC – Оҷонсии Швейцария онд ба Инкишоф.

«FARMER TO FARMER» promotional flyer, announcing broadcasting dates and frequencies

# PROJECT OUTCOMES

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## EDITORIAL CONTROL

The arrangements for producing and transmitting programmes have been very successful. Programme scripts are finalised with the project coordinator before being edited at Tajik Radio. This has worked well, and there has been a steady improvement in both production values and journalism standards. Tajik Radio representatives welcomed the programmes and have appreciated the variety and new approaches they inject.

There has been valuable synergy in locating the series in an existing agricultural project. The agronomists and veterinarians have provided valuable background information, contacts and stories for the programme producers and they have welcomed the radio producers on trips to rural areas. They have been extremely supportive in the research process and sensitive to professional and editorial boundaries.

The lack of journalism training and a decision to concentrate on 'safe' technical themes ensured that the early programmes did not pose a challenge for Tajik Radio. Two programmes were recorded on more controversial areas: one on the problems farmers face in selling their produce and a second on water users' associations, but neither theme was developed in any great depth. One programme was recorded on anthrax, outbreaks of which were causing serious concern to veterinary staff of the FAO project. The Tajik Radio manager told the programme producers that this was too controversial to broadcast. In fact, the programme was of very poor quality and a very brief package giving minimal information on the disease was broadcast a few weeks later. As the series has become established it has gradually become more adventurous thematically, and the questions put to interviewees are more focused. Radio packages broadcast from May to December 2001 are presented in the Annex.

It had originally been hoped to include price information from regional markets in the programmes. This was included in the TACIS project programmes and was requested by focus group participants. However, in discussion with other international agencies operating in Tajikistan, it was decided that this was too politically sensitive to undertake at present.

The editorial committee met regularly at the beginning of the project, but meets less frequently, if at all, now that the project has become well established. This is probably an indication that all parties are satisfied with the way the project is being implemented.

## **PARTICIPATORY AUDIENCE RESEARCH**

The participatory audience research has been partially successful. It is clear from Russian language translations of the transcripts that the pilot focus group and one of the groups in the first phase of the audience research programme were of a high standard, but two subsequent groups were less well facilitated. In these groups, the moderator sometimes made inappropriate judgements about what was said, and at times admonished participants for not sticking to the point. The analysis of each group provided by the moderator was not always a completely faithful reflection of the discussion transcripts. At times, the moderator failed to draw out the 'diplomatic criticisms' of the programmes by the focus group participants. This points to the importance of well-facilitated focus groups in order to get valid results.

The groups have tended to be large, with about eleven participants in each one. This may be because all those invited made the effort to participate, and it is not appropriate in Tajikistan to turn people away. Such good attendance may indicate something about the motivation of private farmers. In general, group discussions are lively and animated, with moderately successful engagement of participants.

A decision was made not to hold a separate women-only focus group in the first phase. Although this had been previously agreed among all parties, the producers decided subsequently that it was not appropriate, and that mixed-gender groups would be more effective. Three women farmers participated in one focus group and just one woman in another. In two other groups, there were no women participants. Clearly, the issues and concerns of women farmers were not sufficiently researched and therefore are not likely to be adequately reflected in the programmes.

Efforts to represent different parts of the republic were more successful, with one focus group held in the far south (Shaartuz) and another in a northern Uzbek-speaking area (Vose). The pilot group was held in Dushanbe and the remaining group (Hissar) some 30 kilometres away from the capital.

The groups yielded valuable but not systematic information about the availability of electricity and participants' use of radio and other media. Some participants stated that they listened to *Farmer to Farmer* and Tajik Radio's programme for rural listeners, but this information is unreliable as an indicator of the reach of programmes as participants were given promotional leaflets at the point of their recruitment to the groups. The benefit of this is that some participants made a point of listening to the programmes on air before the groups assembled and did not confine their comments simply to the programmes played to them during the meetings.

The testing of the programmes was moderately successful. In one group the moderator asked appropriately open questions to establish what participants had understood of the radio programme played to them. In two other groups, however, the moderator simply asked 'did you understand it?' At times he missed shyly expressed comments that could usefully have been expanded, and he could perhaps have provided more reassurance to the groups of the value of honest, critical responses.



Nevertheless participants provided valuable feedback. All the groups commented favourably on the language used by contributors and journalists. They found the programmes clear and accessible, but one or two participants pointed out that in contrast to the tested materials, the programmes they had heard on air were overly complicated. Naturally, the radio producers had selected the programmes they were most pleased with to play to the groups, so this view should have sent an important message to them.

Participants generally felt that the programmes gave useful information, but that at times they lacked dynamism and did not always provide a rounded view of a subject. It was clear that the presenters and journalists needed to develop more pace in their delivery. Participants were understandably critical of a programme in which just one farmer gave a long description of how he looks after his cows. They felt the information was of good quality, but that it wasn't communicated in an interesting way.

A programme on the problems farmers face in marketing their produce struck a chord with participants and stimulated lively discussion. The participants were heartened by the authenticity of the programme, pointed out that the programme needed to be developed further and that it would be valuable if journalists put farmers' complaints to the authorities.

It is clear from the programme scripts that the radio producers have endeavoured to adjust their work to respond to these constructive criticisms. There is no doubt that the radio producers were very affected by the experience of observing focus groups, and that they worked hard to meet the needs they heard expressed.

Almost all farmers in all the groups expressed frustration at the lack of high-quality information. They felt that Tajik Radio's regular programme for rural audiences was not interesting and not trustworthy, and they did not listen to it. Participants in several groups stressed that they would make efforts to access information materials that were interesting, relevant and credible. One farmer said: 'I would find the means to get hold of such information no matter the obstacles, and whatever it cost.'

It was particularly clear from one group discussion that farmers are discerning about information: they do not automatically trust what they are told. One stipulated that programmes should be detailed, convincing and interesting. They complained about 'empty words' and items that 'just praise the bosses'.

Participants had seen a few good Russian television programmes for farmers and thought that radio programmes that were made well, featuring both experienced farmers and expert views, and that emphasised farming techniques, would be valuable. One farmer said: 'We don't know how to do things, how to run our farms, how to calculate costs, how to distribute profit. It's really important and we want to know about these things, this is what we want to listen to on the radio.'

Participants in the first focus group were asked about their knowledge of anthrax outbreaks. They said that they had heard rumours but knew very little about the disease. They felt it was essential to have a radio programme that would tell them how to avoid such diseases.

The groups stressed the need for ‘technical information on plant and animal diseases, and the need to be given warnings of particular disease outbreaks; how to find reliable seeds; the use of fertilisers and pesticides, and in particular whether it’s true that DDT is harmful; how to cope in conditions of drought; how to assess quality of livestock; how to look after animals in the absence of a veterinarian; water use and irrigation. They emphasised the need for seasonally and regionally appropriate information, particularly on plant cultivation. They were very interested in the personal experience of farmers who have experimented with new techniques and got good results.

Given the severe drought, it is not surprising that all the groups wanted to hear reliable long-range weather forecasts. There were also requests for information on the prices of produce, fuel, fertilisers, pesticides, and ideas for alternatives to increasingly costly pesticides, fertilisers and other inputs.

Broader subjects of concern included rights to land use and lack of legal regulation; relationships with the collective farms; finance and credit and the complex taxation system; lack of information to make marketing decisions and obstacles to selling produce; the role of farmers’ associations; the lack of good business ethics and dishonest business deals; indebtedness and the threat of bankruptcy; and the lack of infrastructure to support farmers.

There were very animated discussions in two of the three focus groups about the problems farmers face. In the analysis of one group, the facilitator noted that there was a real sense of how embattled relationships are with regard to land. Farmers feel a sense of ownership of the land and are in open conflict with the authorities. They are aware of how poorly organised they are, and that the local farmers’ associations do not work effectively.

All participants in one group were vociferous about what they perceive to be a ‘diklat’ from above, the limits on farmers’ choices of what to sow and whom to sell to, particularly with regard to cotton. ‘Up on high they say that we should sow cotton on 70-80 percent of our land. I’ve been given the use of the land for eternity. I should care for it as I would care for a child. And I’m an expert, I know what to sow, and I know about rotation of crops. But whatever you wish or do not wish, you have to sow cotton. I should be able to sign a contract with anyone I want, and to receive the income (from my crop)... but in today’s conditions I can’t do that.’

In another group, participants argued about whether ‘the state should do something’ or ‘we’ve got to do it ourselves’. Some of the farmers are unused to thinking of solutions for themselves. One individual stated: ‘You should just tell us, here’s the problem, and here’s the solution.’ But many of the farmers are enterprising and keen to find their own solutions. Perhaps a legacy of the Soviet period is the reverence expressed by some of the farmers for specialist knowledge. In two groups, farmers emphasised their desire to hear the views of agricultural experts. One said that he believed that farming techniques and conditions have changed so much that older farmers may not have appropriate knowledge.

## **USE OF FOCUS GROUP RESEARCH**

The agenda for the radio series clearly reflects most of the concerns of the focus group participants. Programmes have been made on all the technical

subjects requested by the farmers, with close attention paid to ensuring that they are seasonally and regionally appropriate. One omission has been effective weather forecasting. The project plans to begin a monthly or bi-monthly weather forecast specifically for farmers beginning in early 2002. There is an excellent programme on what farmers should do in drought conditions, but there is no reporting on the tremendous problems that farmers must have faced in these circumstances.

Increasingly, the programmes are covering the frustration and problems faced by farmers. A programme on taxation features the complex, opaque payment system whereby farmers often have to make frequent long journeys to pay different taxes. The presenter tackles this with the tax inspector but stops short of asking one focus group participant's question: 'We pay our taxes, but they don't pay old people's pensions. Where does the money go?'

A programme on finance gives an excellent overview of the deep frustration farmers feel over their efforts to raise loans. This programme is genuinely authentic. The presenter describes his own frustration: 'We went to Agroinvestbank but we couldn't get an answer from them, and we will be coming back to talk to them'. When he does eventually get an interview with a bank official, the radio producer is rather too easily satisfied by the answers given, but nevertheless the programme represents an enormous step forward in addressing a very sensitive issue.

Another useful programme covers the frustration experienced by farmers when attempting to register their farms. The programme explains exactly what a farmer needs to do to undertake registration, and pushes the Ministry official spokesman on the complexity of the process.

The focus group participants referred to corruption, but they did not focus on it in any depth. This may be because it is an extremely delicate topic, or perhaps because it is so intrinsic to the social fabric that all farmers are inevitably drawn into it. In one focus group, participants referred to the absence of the rule of law, and one participant described dishonest deals and the absence of an ethical approach to business as one of the most serious social problems in the country.

Corruption has not been featured directly in the programmes, but there have been several programmes on the rights of farmers and in later programmes there is an excellent, regular 'Questions and Answers' section that responds to farmers who feel that they have been mistreated. Clear, helpful answers have been given to farmers who feel that they have been asked to pay too much tax; who are not sure if they have the right to sow what they want to sow; who have been told that they cannot build on their land; and who have had their land allocation reassessed by the local authorities. This is a real step forward for Tajik journalism.

The programmes on the rights and responsibilities of farmers have been rather theoretical, but accessible. Unfortunately they do not, and perhaps at this stage cannot, cover how farmers' rights are abused in practice, or the real problems a farmer might face in attempting to defend his or her rights in a society with no developed practice of legal challenge.

Many farmers have been forced to take on the debts of the collective farms, and do not understand their legal position. One excellent, practical programme



informs farmers on the importance of drawing up contracts carefully. An articulate legal specialist encourages farmers to be proactive, and to negotiate and substitute unsatisfactory clauses.

It is very encouraging that the experience and voices of farmers themselves are at the heart of the programmes. It is perhaps not surprising that these tend to be male farmers, but the radio producers have made efforts to seek out women farmers. Although some interviews are tokenistic, women farmers have been drawn on for their expertise in some of the radio programmes.

*Radio producer interviewing farmers in the Kulyab province of Southern Tajikistan. (2001)*

## **CAPACITY AND TRAINING**

The radio producers have made significant progress in producing well-structured, clear, accessible materials and there has been considerable success in using new production ideas. The producers now have a far better grasp of the strengths and limitations of radio as a medium, and of how to ensure that listeners can take in the information that they seek to communicate. Whereas initially a presenter would simply read out a complex technical procedure, which was often quite incomprehensible, contributors to the programmes are now recorded as they carry out a technique: a farmer describes how he prunes a tree or a vet explains how he examines a cow's liver, complete with location sound and graphic detail. Some of the programmes are laborious and insufficiently lively, but the producers have learned the importance of a variety of voices and the need to cover different aspects of a problem.

The producers have also developed a very good understanding of their role. In the earlier programmes they found it hard to let their listeners make up their own minds. They would sometimes admonish contributors or instruct audi-

ences on the right course of action. In a programme on artificial insemination the producer/presenter reprimands farmers who rely on nature to take its course and whose cattle do not reproduce: 'see what their indifference leads to...' He signs off at the end of the programme: 'remember, you can always rely on the help of experts!' Such exhortations are not used in later programmes, and although there is more to learn, there has been a real improvement in interviewing skills.

One continuing problem is a lack of background facts. Partly this is because of the unreliability of state-collected statistics and the unavailability of information. It is also, partly, an issue of self-censorship. The programmes on animal diseases, for instance, do not state where disease outbreaks have taken place or how many livestock are affected. This is vital information for farmers who are trying to decide whether to pay for vaccinations, and the programmes are much poorer for its absence.

Similarly, it was clearly deemed too sensitive to refer in a programme to anecdotal evidence that farmers do not approach the banks for loans as they would have to pay, not just high interest rates, but also an 'unofficial payment' to the person responsible for arranging a loan. When the producer/presenter questions the state bank official about loans for farmers, he does not establish how many farmers approach banks for loans, the number of loans granted in a given period, or the rate of foreclosure. Such information would go a long way towards confirming or rebutting the widely held beliefs about banks, even if the discussion itself could not be explicit.

## **PROGRAMME REACH AND SUSTAINABILITY**

Veterinarians and agronomists working for the larger FAO project have actively promoted the radio series, distributing 1,500 promotional leaflets in rural areas in many parts of the country. Leaflets promoting the radio series were also sent to the international agencies operating in Tajikistan (cfr. p. 9). However there have been very few letters and telephone calls from farmers, and it is likely that audiences have remained fairly small in the absence of a structured mass media campaign to advertise the programmes.

A quantitative evaluation of the impact of the programmes was not part of the project design, and it is beyond the scope of the current project. Some impact may be estimated from contributors' feedback to the project. The radio producers report that after a programme on obtaining spare parts for equipment, more than twenty farmers approached the enterprise featured in the story. The Director of the Artificial Insemination Centre featured in another programme reported that since the programme their work has expanded significantly. One or two farmers approach the Centre each day from areas that the Centre did not previously serve, and two state farms have signed large contracts.

Tajik Radio is pleased with the project but like other governmental institutions in the country, they barely survive in economic terms. They have no resources to support the continuation of the project. Sustainability of the project inevitably derives from the availability of donor funding. If economic transition proceeds successfully it may be possible to achieve longer-term sustainability through private-enterprise sponsorship.

## **NEXT STEPS**

### **A thorough review of the audience research process is needed:**

The participation of women farmers in programme development needs to be carefully assessed, including review of the transcripts and analyses from the focus group work.

Little use was made of the two women freelance researchers who attended the training programme, or the woman focus group moderator. Ways should be sought to ensure the participation of women in audience research and programme production.

### **Further training for the radio producers:**

The producers need more support in conducting interviews and in particular, asking follow-up questions. The inclusion of basic facts in programmes needs to be improved. The producers also need help in sharpening the editing of recorded materials and creating a livelier 'feel' for the programmes.

### **Stimulus for farmers to work together to find solutions:**

The producers should make more efforts to seek stories of farmers taking 'can do' approaches to their problems: effective farmers' associations, good examples of co-operation, successful solutions to problems.

It might be worthwhile to encourage farmers to listen to the programme in groups. This might help with the cost of batteries for radio receivers and stimulate discussion and co-operation.

Encouraging farmers to share their experiences in the programmes should become more integral to the series. FAO Project outreach staff could ask for feedback to the programmes, and field vehicles could carry a 'Farmer to Farmer letterbox' for listeners' questions and views.



**A structured, well-researched promotional campaign for the programmes:**

The project now has significant information about farmers' media use patterns that could be used to design an appealing campaign to promote the programme. This could involve a television commercial (75 percent of the rural population, and 80 percent of women farmers watch Tajik TV once a week). Tajik Radio should be approached again about the possibility of promoting the programme during peak time listening.

**Back-up written materials:**

Communication efforts have far greater impact if they combine different channels. Leaflets or perhaps calendars for farmers could supplement the information given in the radio programmes, and each medium could promote the other.

Through 'Farmer to Farmer' great strides have been made to improve the responsiveness and relevance of radio to farmers' needs and problems. This is a good beginning, given the constraints of the wider political context. But for farm radio in Tajikistan to be genuinely farmer led, the new programme approach will need to be matched by political change concerning the role of journalists.

## **RADIO PACKAGES BROADCAST FROM MAY TO SEPTEMBER 2001**

### **Programme Contents**

- 1 How can you protect your apples against pests?
- 2 Brucellosis - what can you do to protect your livestock?
- 3 What rights do you have as a farmer?
- 4 Farm machinery - how do you get access to it?
- 5 What's the best way to keep your cattle-shed clean and free of germs?
- 6 Marketing cooperatives - we look at how they are organised in rural areas.
- 7 What crops are suitable for second sowing? A discussion with international experts.
- 8 The problems encountered on a farm that breeds deer.
- 9 Maize - second sowing.
- 10 Different ways of financing your farm – and the problems of ‘going it alone’
- 11 What are your legal responsibilities as a farmer?
- 12 Good ways to store fodder for cattle
- 13 Melons and gourds.
- 14 Obtaining fuel – we look at a continuing problem
- 15 Viticulture - how to process and store your grapes.
- 16 Farmers and Farmers' Associations.
- 17 What's the process for registering your farm? Just how complicated is it?
- 18 Different ways to get credit
- 19 Winter wheat – tips on preparing seeds and sowing.
- 20 Cereals - what should you plant in autumn?
- 21 Cleaning up after harvesting.
- 22 Tips on ploughing.
- 23 Good ways to look after vineyards and orchards
- 24 Legal agreements on land use – what does your agreement look like?
- 25 Tips on planting onions
- 26 How can you protect your cattle against parasitic worms?
- 27 The ‘ins and outs’ of acquiring land
- 28 What can you do about common cattle infections?
- 29 Poultry-keeping - how to get the most from your chickens.
- 30 Using ice to water plants.
- 31 How can you protect your calf against disease? And what should you do if your calf needs treatment?
- 32 Problems of taxation.



**For more information contact:**

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- Participatory Communication and Adult Learning for Rural Development, 2001 (Y2734E)

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- (tome 1) – La situation de la communication pour le développement au Burkina Faso, n.5, 2001 (Y0642F)
- (tome 2) – Document de la politique nationale de la communication pour le développement au Burkina Faso, n.5, 2001 (Y0643F)

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