Community Radio 2.0

THE CONCEPT

Extend the Web 2.0 paradigm to the use of Community Radio for the acquisition and dissemination of agricultural related information and education. The basic concept is to provide "user generated content" (UCG) mechanisms to enhance the use of community radio as a social network. The establishment of new community radio stations and enhancement of existing stations such that small holder farmers will be able to:

- Send a request using a mobile phone for specific program topics for broadcast
- Vote on a list of programs to select specific topics of interest
- Rate broadcasted programs using simple SMS messages (ala American Idol voting)
- Provide real time feedback or questions regarding broadcasts through the use of interactive voice response (IVR) or a conference call number
- Upload agriculture information via IVR that can be processed and turned into future radio broadcasts and transformed to text (with images) on a web site

The new community radio stations would be set up such that audio feeds could be streamed off a local web site. Content that is currently only available as text can be transformed to audio with text-to-speech tools (i.e. TextAloud). The audio content would be tagged such that it could be harvested from other community radio sites. Community Radio stations would be staffed by extension workers, interns from a "new agriculture university", and local community members after sufficient training.

This solution scenario integrates well with Radio Agriculture Education scenario.

RATIONALE AND EVIDENCE THE PROJECT CAN BE SUCCESSFUL

In the many rural sub Saharan African communities, the community radio is still the most reliable means to disseminate information. For the most part, radio has always been a "push" technology, such that the listener can not guide what is broadcasted, nor can they comment effectively on broadcasts. Additionally, the station can only broadcast what they have available and rarely is it obtained from the local community, thus it may not as relevant as it could be to the local community. Technology, language, literacy, and gender barriers exist which can limit access and sharing of digitized agricultural information. This solution directly addresses those barriers.

Web sites which provide user generated content make up six (YouTube, MySpace, Facebook, Wikipedia, Orkut, hi5) of the 10 most popular websites in the world today. Clearly participatory web has been a significant success.

EXPECTED BENEFITS OF THE PROJECT INCLUDING COMMENTS ON SUSTAINABILITY AND SCALE

User generated content media, whether it's a web site, or delivered through radio broadcasts is somewhat self sustaining. Radio or audio device delivery of content offers great economies of scale in bringing the program to new populations. Instruction in English or other base language will make it much easier to scale up this effort in multiple countries. As each community radio station would be configured similarly, and use the same set of tools, scaling the project to many stations would not be an impediment.

HOW THE PROJECT WILL TARGET THE NEEDS AND BE OF SPECIFIC BENEFIT TO WOMEN SMALLHOLDERS

- Current smallholder farmers will receive high quality information using existing communications technologies (radio) thus overcoming the internet infrastructure barriers that still exist in many rural areas. Feedback systems incorporated into project will allow farmers and their families (regardless of gender) to access specific information for their individual needs.

PROJECTED COSTS OF THE PROJECT

Costs will depend on initial size of project and projected scaling to new populations, countries, and language groups. Major costing categories are:

Station staff training materials
Radio/MP3 Transmission Costs
Support Staff

MEASURES OF SUCCESS

Productivity: The end goal of any agriculture extension system is ultimately increased economic production for the farmer (note that this does not necessarily equal farm productivity, as oversupply can result in lower prices, with little economic benefit to the farmer).

Adoption: Productivity is difficult to measure in the short-term. One proxy for productivity is adoption of new practices by farming households, based on the premise that if good practices are being adopted, they will lead to greater productivity.

Capacity: One of the proximal aims is to build the capacities of farmers to improve the sustainability of their livelihoods. At the same time, we can measure the capacities of local organizations to produce and disseminate content. This solution provides a platform for organizations to share the triumphs and the pitfalls of their experiences. As farmers are motivated to adopt a better farming practice by observing the experiences of their peers, organizations can see that reaching the last-mile is possible through the system.

Localization of content: Another metric for success is the degree to which localized content is generated. Since the most effective content is intensively localized to

geography and language, the more the overall extension ecosystem can produce localized content, the better.

RISKS