

Village Voices for Development (VVD)



Working in partnership with its sister NGO, Andry Lalana Tohana, ALT has launched and helped to develop a new radio project for good governance in southern Madagascar.

Figure 1 gathering local opinions

Launched in February 2012, initially as a six-month feasibility study, Village Voices for Development (VVD) uses radio and mobile telephony to enable dialogue

between non-literate villagers and decision makers about local development issues and strategies. In doing so, the project aims to address communication gaps, give voice to local people and improve local governance.

The Challenge

In the south more than two thirds of the rural population are local producers living in poverty and facing annual food shortages due to extreme climate conditions and regular drought. They are isolated and marginalised by vast geographic distances, poor infrastructure, and low literacy rates. A national communications for empowerment study by UNDP¹ in 2008 demonstrated there were few mechanisms in place that afforded local people an opportunity to interact with policy/decision makers and almost none were available through the media.



Figure 2 Antandroy village S Madagascar

Why radio?



Figure 3 radios distributed by ALT Project
Radio

In Madagascar radio is still the most popular and the most readily available media. More than 70% of the population cites radio as their main source of information and 91% interviewed in the UNDP survey said they felt that media had the potential to change their lives. ALT has been working with rural radio for more than ten years as a means to provide access to information and non-formal education for village communities.

¹ UNDP Communications for Empowerment in Madagascar in 2008

From 1999-2009 ALT's **Project Radio** set up more than 3000 listening groups across the south of the island and broadcast more than 3400 educational programmes to over 800,000 listeners, with demonstrable impacts on the achievement of Millennium Development Goals².

ALT has been working to increase the voice of local people in its radio programming and via other media - in particular with the introduction of its **Oral Testimony** project (ALT / PANOS London 2007-2009).

VVD represents the next step in developing mechanisms for facilitating the voice of local people and uses radio and mobile telephony to offer groundbreaking opportunities for local citizens to engage in public debate and decision making.



Figure 4 participatory video /oral testimony in Androy

How Project VVD works



Figure 5 Focus group recording questions

The project works with Radio Listening Groups in rural communities and enables them to identify, prioritise and record their concerns, questions and aspirations. Once recorded their questions and concerns are played to local decision makers - the local authorities, regional service providers, and NGOs. The response of the decision maker is also recorded and the material edited together to produce a radio programme that broadcasts questions and answers as if in a live discussion - an exchange that would rarely take place in the highly hierarchical Malagasy social structure.

Monthly monitoring of the impacts of the programme content enables villagers to revisit key themes and ask more questions if they are not satisfied with the answers provided. Requests for information and or services are monitored and action or lack of action is tracked and addressed in subsequent programmes. This form of public accountability aims to increase transparency and the performance of local authorities, service providers and NGOs, to reduce corruption and reinforce the democratic process.



Figure 6 Director of Agricultural Services in Androy records answers to villager's questions

² The Contribution of Radio to the Achievement of Millenium Development Goals in Southern Madagascar, Metcalf, Harford, Myers 2007

Phase 1: Feasibility Study February 2012-July 2012



Figure 7 baseline survey

The ALT Mg team began work in February by identifying 10 of the most dynamic Radio Listening Groups in communities across the Androy Region of southern Madagascar and introduced them to the project. Each listening Group has approximately 12 members, comprised equally of men and women who are representative of the community.

The project team met with and explained the project to key decision makers in the region including the local authorities, the

service providers for health, education, hospital, environment, water and forest, land management, rural development, and the police force and also UNICEF and World Food Programme, and requested their participation in the project to respond to questions raised by the local community.

A baseline survey was carried out with villagers and decision makers to establish prior levels of human rights knowledge, ability to act on rights and mechanisms to engage with local decision makers.

At national level a number of funders, ministries and humanitarian agencies have been visited and approached for support. The UNDP and OHCHR were specifically asked for training and in response they sent a Human Rights trainer to the south in March 2012 to build the capacity of the project team. The team also engaged a local NGO in Ft Dauphin who has experience of working with communities on human rights issues to help adapt the training for southern communities.

Following the baseline survey, the team began training the villagers in their human rights and carrying out focus groups to help them determine their questions and concerns to pose to decision makers.



Figure 8 Msr Axel of UNDP trains the team



Figure 9 villagers participate in debate about human rights during training

Approximately 3 focus groups take place each month and 4 radio programmes are produced from the resulting villagers' questions and decision makers' answers.

For socially sensitive themes, such as land tenure, the team has developed community a mini radio drama to aid discussion.



Figure 10 villagers in the ALT studio with the editor to record a drama about land issues

The programmes are edited in the ALT studio in Ambovombe and produced on CD for distribution to the local radio stations.

Two local radio stations, Cactus and Rohondroho have been contracted to broadcast the project programmes in Androy.

Radio Cactus is a long standing partner of ALT and in June co-produced with VVD the first ever phone in radio programme in the Androy.

10 Listening groups were issued with mobile phone and credit to use them for the phone in programmes. The first phone in focused on **security issues** and hosted three of the senior police officers from Androy region to respond to callers questions which ranged from: how to handle misdemeanors when there was no easy evidence to bring about an arrest, to: why response to burglaries was slow even when the police were called by phone.



Figure 12 senior police officials from Androy participate in radio phone in programme at Radio Cactus



Figure 13 villagers issued with mobile phones

By mid July 21 radio programmes and one phone in debate had been produced and broadcast three times per week. Each month feedback sessions with villagers and decision makers enable the team to work with Radio Listening Groups and determine if the programmes have answered their questions and concerns. If there are remaining information and communication gaps, the team work with the villagers to prepare a new programme to deepen the discussion.

Initial Findings

The project has been warmly welcomed by the communities, the regional authorities and the local NGOs. The Office of The High Commission for Human Rights, the Minister of Communication and the Chef du region Androy have all written letters of support for the project and want to see it expanded and extended beyond this pilot phase.

Villagers have reported that the themes treated were very clear and they understood the content of the programmes which have been produced in local

dialect. Villagers are ready to pursue the answers they need and the decision makers also see benefits from the exchange as they provide new opportunities to reach and engage communities with information about their initiatives, services and policies.

The local people see the project to be necessary to *'open the spirit', 'change attitudes and behavior', and 'assist development'*

'Transparency and truth must rule in our society; the population must not hesitate to take criticism and learn lessons; if we are not together (in solidarity) there is no development and no positive change ;there must be a flow of communication.'
Antandroy villager

Participation has been vigorous and some important changes have already emerged.

Example 1:

Villagers complained that the local hospital was charging for services that are usually free. For rural populations who live on less than a dollar a day, hospital costs can be punitive and prevent health intervention even in life threatening circumstances.

The initial response of the hospital was to advise listeners to make a formal complaint if they felt they were being exploited. However, villagers said this was not practical as nothing would change. Instead they called for the prices to be made public and so the project has recorded all hospital charges and broadcast them publicly via the radio; additionally, a public notice has also been put up outside the hospital so that the information about charges is available to all. This action aims to support bottom up monitoring and prevent corruption and the exploitation of people with health problems.

Example 2



Villagers give feedback about VVD programmes

Another example is the case of "access to insecticides", a theme dealt with by the Regional Directorate for the Rural Development (DRDR).

Villagers wanted to know and understand about the rising costs of pesticides and the lack of availability of insecticide in the local area.

Villagers were not satisfied by the initial response which simply asked them to attend the local DRDR office in Ambovombe. Many farmers are remote from town and need immediate practical help to protect their crops that are already difficult to grow and harvest due to drought. They sought concrete solutions to their problems of access to insecticides.

With further demand from villagers via the radio, the DRDR developed a fact sheet on the manufacture of natural insecticide from existing plants in the region. The information contained in this fact sheet was then broadcast to the public in a VVD radio program. Again, the information fact sheet has been posted on the wall of the Office of the DRDR and in surrounding communes to ensure that information is always available and accessible to the target groups. With this approach, farmers are no longer required to purchase insecticides at an inaccessible price but can make their own natural insecticides. This information is vital for assisting food security in the region.

These examples demonstrate the importance of the information provided by the decision makers, how it can have a positive impact on local development and MDGs. The VVD exchange not only offers a means to improve the local way of life but also generates more transparent discourse and by doing so can impact positively on local governance.

A full evaluation will take place between August- September 2012 and findings will be shared with all stakeholders, at local, regional and national levels with a view to seeking an extension to the project and enabling it to scale up into other regions.

Our Partnership Pledge

ALT Mg manages and develops the project in the field and work in participation with local communities, local Authorities, NGOs and OCBs.

In line with our collaborative agreement with ALT MG, ALT UK has been helping to fundraise for this project, develop proposals and advise on the project design and development at every stage. ALT will continue to provide technical advice, mentoring and support to the team in Madagascar during this study, with further inputs from Nicola Harford /Media Support Partnership (MSP) and Antonie Kraemer, a PhD Anthropologist from SOAS.

VVD Feasibility study is funded by the **Adsum Foundation**, the **Swiss Embassy Mg** and **Media Support Partnership**. Additionally, **Vodafone's World of Difference** has sponsored some time inputs of the ALT Director, Yvonne Orengo, (during March - April 2012) who is providing ALT's advice and support to the project.

Be involved....

Friends of the Trust wishing to help or support this project can contact Yvonne at yorengo@andrewleestrust.org or on 07905 406 303.

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