



Distance learning via radio for rural communities in Somalia

Overcoming COVID-19 restrictions through adaptive measures that facilitate access to agricultural and nutrition knowledge

Context

Somalia has experienced years of conflict and fragility resulting in chronic poverty and vulnerability, displacement, poor economic capacity and food and nutrition insecurity. Half of Somalia's population lives in rural areas, and agriculture – i.e. crops, livestock and fisheries – is the main source of economic activity, employment and exports. In 2020, up to 1.3 million people across Somalia were expected to face food consumption gaps or depletion of assets indicative of crisis – Integrated Food Security Classification - IPC phase 3 (IPC, 2020).

Somalia's high food insecurity in 2020 was the result of climatic shocks that have been recurrent since 2016, including six seasons of drought conditions and two seasons of severe flooding that led to loss of crops, agricultural labour, and income, as well as atypical livestock migration. In addition, almost 850 000 children under the age of five were acutely malnourished, including over 143 000 likely to be severely malnourished (FSNAU, 2021).

To respond to this looming crisis, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations, promoted activities aimed at:

- **enhancing food security and resilience, through integrated cash and livelihood assistance for crop, livestock and fisheries; and**
- **tackling underlying causes of malnutrition, through nutrition awareness raising, food hygiene, conservation and storage.**

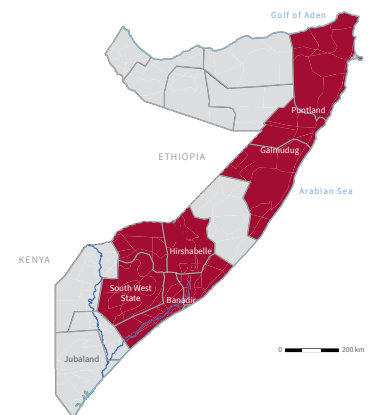
This fact sheet documents a **distance learning initiative through radio** launched in 2020 by FAO as a response to threats posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, supporting cash+ activities and replacing face-to-face beneficiary trainings. Through this initiative, FAO sought to continue enhancing rural communities' capacities to mitigate shocks, especially those compounded by the COVID-19 crisis, and disseminate context-specific behaviour change messages on nutrition and healthy diets. In 2021, the scope of the training was expanded to include long-term agriculture development programmes and social protection activities through village savings and loans associations.

Key facts



Geographic coverage

Puntland, Galmudug and southern Regions of Somalia (Hirshabelle, South West State and Banadir).



Conforms to UN Somalia map, December 2011



Technologies

Due to COVID-19-induced restrictions on face-to-face trainings, local radio stations were used to disseminate key information on good agricultural practices, nutrition, fisheries and livestock.



Target group

Radio programmes were available to all listeners, estimated between 750 000 and 900 000 people weekly. Direct beneficiaries of the emergency response in 2020 reached about 190 000 households* and were informed through local NGOs of the programme schedule.

**Data as per FAO Somalia Dashboard on delivery of Emergency response in 2020.*

How does distance learning via radio contribute to increasing the resilience of livelihoods in Somalia?

In emergencies and protracted crises, the availability of and access to knowledge and information are critical for the vulnerable segment of the population. Travel restrictions and health risks imposed by the COVID-19 crisis limited FAO's ability to travel to the field and non-governmental organization (NGO) partners from conducting beneficiary trainings. To replace in-person trainings and training of trainers, FAO implemented **distance learning radio modules to reach communities in rural areas**.

The COVID-19 pandemic showed the fundamental role played by access to inclusive rural communication services to anticipate risks, ensure preparedness for early action, as well as mitigate the effect of the crises and to foster the recovery of the affected populations.



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Methodological approach

In Somalia, the media landscape is characterized by a predominant role of oral culture. Radio is one of the main communication tools within the country, especially in remote areas. In 2020, FAO in Somalia launched radio activities for rural learning and knowledge sharing as an adaptation measure to the COVID-19 crisis.

The initiative has quickly become an integral part of FAO Somalia cash+ livelihood assistance and e-platform for mobile money. The radio programmes were aired simultaneously with the provision of cash+ assistance and episodes were aligned with the seasonal priorities of target groups as well as other emergency response activities.

Leveraging local expertise and knowledge

The FAO team in Somalia and the FAO communication for development Team (ComDev) developed a series of trainings via radio for rural communities. Between October 2020 and February 2021, **29 radio episodes** in the two main spoken languages in Somalia (*Maaxa Tiri* and *Maay*) were produced and disseminated for more than **100 hours of broadcast**. The programmes were divided into **four thematic series, each composed of 20-minute episodes**:

- **good agricultural practices** (12 episodes);
- **nutrition** (9 episodes);
- **fisheries** (3 episodes); and
- **livestock** (5 episodes).

The initiative was implemented directly by FAO through **local radio stations**. FAO radio training programmes were aired **during prime time in local languages** to improve information and learning opportunities for rural communities. **Experts** from local NGOs, engaged in the delivery of the emergency response, were interviewed as guests during the radio shows, creating local ownership and building trust in the episode content. They shared their technical knowledge on good agricultural practices, livestock and fisheries as well as nutrition, health and dietary choices applicable within the Somali context.

Ensuring participation

Local NGOs played a crucial role raising awareness among cash+ beneficiaries of the radio schedule and FM radio frequencies. The broadcast of the radio learning modules was organized not only in line with seasonal priorities of the different productive sectors (agriculture, fisheries and livestock) but also adopting a communication for development approach that considers audience needs and socio-cultural characteristics.

In southern Regions (Hirshabelle, South West State and Banadir), the distance-learning programmes included episodes on **good agricultural practices** followed by weekly episodes on **nutrition**. The overall duration of the programme was 21 weeks, aired in line with *Deyr* crop season (*Deyr* and *Gu* are Somalia's rainy seasons).

In northern Regions (Puntland and Galmudug), the programme included **livestock and fisheries** educational features followed by weekly cross-cutting features on **nutrition**. The total duration of the training plan was 17 weeks.

Audience



Results from the global audience show that the demographic disaggregation of listeners by gender averages to 60 percent male and 40 percent female across all regions. The disaggregation by age of the listenership shows that on average 78 percent of listeners were between 26 and 50 years old, 19 percent 16-25 years old, and only four percent between 51 and 65 years of age. The geographical analysis of the age groups by region shows that youths are more active in northern Somalia than in southern Somalia (FAO, 2021).



Focusing on gender, youth and nutrition

The modules were designed to be gender and youth-sensitive and reflective of the Somali cultural context. Nutrition and food safety education messages were delivered in various episodes, including the following themes:

- Good nutrition for livestock;
- Good nutrition for humans;
- Nutrition in the life cycle;
- Feeding the sick;
- Tracing the milk and the meat path;
- Fish for good nutrition;
- Menu planning;
- Food preparation and storage;
- Personal and household hygiene; and
- Keeping the environment clean.

Women in Somalia are twice as likely to suffer from malnutrition. Radio programmes allow women to gain knowledge and information for improved health and nutrition for themselves and their families, with gender-sensitive modules that respond to the needs of the Somali women based on their household and agricultural roles. Women can listen to thematic episodes without leaving their duties for too long.

The episodes on milk, meat, fish and healthy diets focused on a farm-to-fork approach. They emphasized how to ensure that the nutrition and quality of food is maintained and that no food loss or wastage takes place. The nutrition training also advocated for the production and consumption of seed packages provided by FAO by sharing nutritional benefits and simple cooking methods. The Nutrition episodes were developed from the nutrition and food safety education training materials produced by FAO with the support of the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) Movement in Somalia and representatives from Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Livestock and Ministry of Fisheries.

Gender-sensitive rural communication

Despite the significant contribution of women to food and agricultural production, many women remain the most affected by poverty, social exclusion, human rights violations and malnutrition. This “gender gap” limits rural women’s ability to take advantage of new opportunities undermining the achievement of multidimensional and inclusive rural development as envisaged by the 2030 Development Agenda.

Men and women in rural food-producing communities in Somalia have different access to communication channels and may have diverse needs, interests, knowledge and expectations according to their cultural roles and responsibilities. A gender-inclusive communication terminology is important in all media outputs. The long-distance learning initiative has adopted a gender-based communication perspective that considers context-based constraints excluding women from communication processes.



Impacts

Following the implementation of the pilot phase, FAO Somalia Emergency programme gathered listeners' feedback and a Monitoring and Evaluation report was compiled capturing the main outcomes of the pilot initiative. The results showed that the majority of **audiences appreciated capacity development via radio and requested that the radio educational features continue, mentioning their contribution to changing lives.**

Another important source of information showcasing evidence of the productive results of Somalia's radio-based learning modules is the "Deyr 2020 crop yield and livelihood support impact assessment", conducted by FAO in collaboration with Savana Consultancy Firm. Thirty-six percent of the beneficiaries targeted by FAO's emergency response in Somalia listened to the radio episodes on good agricultural practices and nutrition, which were the most popular topics (FAO, 2020a).

From the beneficiaries who tuned in to radio programmes:

- **96 percent good agricultural practices training recipients applied knowledge received to their farming activities**, for example, better land preparation, crop production, post-harvesting, pesticide use and cultivation methods (using mono cropping and mixed cropping systems);
- **all trainees found the knowledge gained to be useful**; and
- **92 percent were able to share skills and knowledge gained with other people**, resulting in horizontal knowledge transfer. **Of those trained, 91 percent applied the good agricultural practices training and observed changes especially in the health of crops and increased productivity.**

The most cited outcomes of the nutrition trainings by beneficiaries were **improved health and steady recovery of sick household members.** As with good agricultural practices, increased training frequency and follow-ups were recommended to boost the impact of the trainings.

FAO was able to reach more people than the registered beneficiaries of the emergency support: repeated airing of the radio episodes increased the chances of retention of the knowledge and information shared. In addition, in disseminating nutrition behaviour change messages to the whole country, FAO advocated for the inclusion of men in conversations and decisions around nutrition and health needs in the household.

Testimonies

The following testimonies have been gathered through the qualitative Monitoring and Evaluation mechanism set up at the beginning of the initiative and captured in the M&E final report (May 2021). A questionnaire prepared by FAO was distributed to the local broadcasting stations, allowing quantitative and qualitative data collection. Feedback from listeners was collected in local languages/dialects and translated into English. Feedback from a total of 420 representative listeners was received and analyzed.



“We call this radio programme ‘teacher programme.’” - *Listener from Radio Hiranweyn, Hiraan (Beletweyne, Buloburto & Jalalaqsi Districts)*

“We gained unexpected [knowledge on] ways to fight pests using available resources.” - *Listener from Warsan Radio, Bay and Baykool*

“This programme is very important to the farmers. I am a student pursuing Agronomy.” - *Listener from Radio Risaala, Lower & Middle Shabelle*

“Radio Gaalkacyo was contacted by about 50 people on a single episode about fishery safety. Listeners contacted us through telephone calls. There were 12 fishermen in Mudug region who appreciated the programme, they asked to continue such programmes since it educates them on how to fish safely.” - *Journalist from Radio Gaalkacyo, Gaalkacyo and Mudug area*

“Since Somalis mostly depend on livestock, it is important to protect the animals from malnourishment and look for them a good pasture. FAO focus on livestock and pastoralists can change a lot of a nomadic life.” - *Listener from Radio Codkamudug, Gaalkacyo and Mudug region*

Sustainability

Rural areas are the main pillars in developing Somalia’s economy. Sharing knowledge and information among farmers and pastoralist and fishing communities through efficient and well-targeted rural communication services is essential to for enhancing the resilience of rural communities.

In order to institutionalize the distance learning initiative approach and build on the results and lessons learned during its implementation, FAO Somalia drafted a communication for development strategic plan embedded within the biannual Country Programme Framework between FAO and the Government of Somalia. It is intended to strengthen the institutional capacity and decision support for Somalia’s natural resource management and agriculture, livestock, forestry and fisheries sectors and to increase the productive and nutritional capacity of vulnerable households. Beyond supporting rural institutions and farmer organizations, the plan focuses on the delivery of youth and gender-sensitive communication interventions and on the identification of innovative communication and information and communication technologies (ICT) applications.

Replicability and upscaling

The pilot initiative was already scaled up in terms of:

- **communication channels**, including mobile telephony directly targeting beneficiaries through blending the use of radio with bulk sms and voice messages;
- **new thematic series** on climate smart agriculture, financial literacy contents and village savings and loans associations as well as on the value chain. There were 110 episodes released in 2021/2022 compared with 58 in 2020/2021;
- **variety of formats**, through the inclusion of public service announcements to accompany radio learning modules, in particular on protection against sexual abuse and exploitation (PSEA), gender-based violence (GBV) and accountability to affected populations (AAP); and
- **number of broadcasting radio stations**, from eight in the pilot initiative to 21 in the new season, including the Public Service Broadcast in Somaliland.

The variety of listeners reached merits reflection on the diversity of available formats that can be used for tailored communication outputs. **Looking forward, it is crucial to adopt key recommendations from the audience and expand learning modules to other topics in line with FAO programmes and national institutions in Somalia.**

FAO Somalia has upscaled the radio programme initiative by linking the distance learning with new features combined with e-platforms for mobile money and livelihood assistance in Somalia. Digital support to producer groups through e-platform enablers, for instance the development of e-wallet apps, can be coupled with the development of learning programmes aired on radio, incorporating innovative and participatory segments such as interactive radio sessions, question and answer (Q&A) sessions and expand the reach of online applications through another media. Furthermore, public service announcements broadcasted through local antennas, can reinforce the launch of digital initiatives fostering the participation of stakeholders and facilitating accountability to affected populations as well as monitoring and evaluation mechanisms.





Key learning

- Evidence shows that **communication is a key element of agricultural and rural development**. Making knowledge and information available to the most vulnerable segment of the population, while involving them in key decision and collective action, plays a fundamental role in emergencies and protracted crises.
- The COVID-19 pandemic showed **the importance of accessing information and communication services to ensure preparedness for early action**, mitigate the effect of crises and foster the recovery of affected rural populations. This initiative, developed as an adaptive measure to the COVID-19 pandemic, has quickly become an integral part of FAO's e-platform for mobile money and livelihood assistance in Somalia thanks to the communication for development principle of the multimedia mix. Planning for the combined use of radio with mobile phones may be more cost-effective and have the greatest chance for positive impact.
- The feedback analysis confirmed that the selection of radio as a communication channel was successful. However, to increase the impact, coverage and sustainability of the initiative, further steps will be necessary, including the **adoption of a communication for development approach, inclusive rural communication services and capacity development of national institutions**.
- A **multimedia approach, including diversified communication formats according to the audiences' needs and characteristics, can orient the development of tailored educational content**. The promising use of social media in Puntland and Galmudug shows how additional online communication tools can be explored to share educational messages while encouraging the participation of women and youth.

Partners

Technical partners

- NGOs
- Scaling Up Nutrition Movement in Somalia
- Ministry of Agriculture
- Ministry of Health
- Ministry of Education
- Ministry of Livestock
- Ministry of Fisheries

Resource partners

All donors contributing to the Emergency Response in 2020 supported the radio initiative. Among them:

- European Union
- Germany
- France
- The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA)
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- United States of America.

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Contact

FAO Representation in Somalia

FAO-SO@fao.org

Nairobi, Kenya

Partnerships and UN Collaboration
Division – Partnerships and Outreach

[fao.org/communication-for-development/
comdev@fao.org](http://fao.org/communication-for-development/comdev@fao.org)

Rome, Italy

Office of Emergency and Resilience

fao.org/in-action/kore/

KORE@fao.org

Rome, Italy

**Food and Agriculture Organization
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