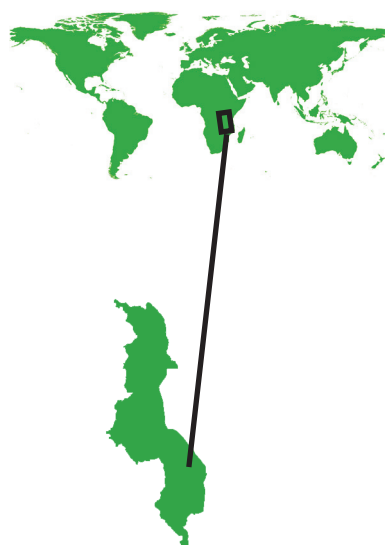




Malawi



Her Farm Radio: Building knowledge and developing the capacity of Malawi's female farmers on forest landscape restoration

As farmers, foresters and providers, women have a unique understanding of the ecosystems they live alongside. A pioneering radio programme in Malawi is tapping into this immense body of knowledge by creating a platform for women to engage in landscape restoration.

In 2016, the government of Malawi made an ambitious 4.5 million hectare restoration pledge to the Bonn Challenge: a global goal to bring 150 million hectares of degraded and deforested land into restoration by 2020 and 350 million hectares by 2030; and to the African Forest Landscape Restoration Initiative. The government of Malawi emphasised the importance of forest landscape restoration (FLR) in achieving Malawi's Vision 2020, a national long-term development strategy.

Operationalising the Bonn Challenge commitment

Malawi's Ministry of Natural Resources, Energy and Mining worked with IUCN and partners to conduct a National Forest Landscape Restoration Assessment (NFLRA) using the Restoration Opportunities Assessment Methodology (ROAM), developed by IUCN and the World Resources Institute. A framework for building an FLR programme from the ground-up, ROAM has proven effective in assessing and laying the groundwork for FLR with practical steps for diverse stakeholders to restore landscapes at any scale. Importantly, ROAM is gender-responsive and accounts for the unique role that women play in agriculture and forest landscape management, natural resource use and household food.

Malawi's government emphasised the importance of gender-responsive NFLRA to advance the country's goals on gender equity and women's empowerment. This was highlighted by the Deputy Director of the Department of Forestry during the NFLRA inception workshop who said, *"the important role women play in all landscapes, and that women must not be left at the periphery of the decision making and implementation processes."*

The NFLRA resulted in the development of a National Forest Landscape Restoration Strategy that continued to embed women firmly in the decision-making and implementation process, ensuring that FLR interventions responded to their needs and the benefits of FLR would be reaped equitably.

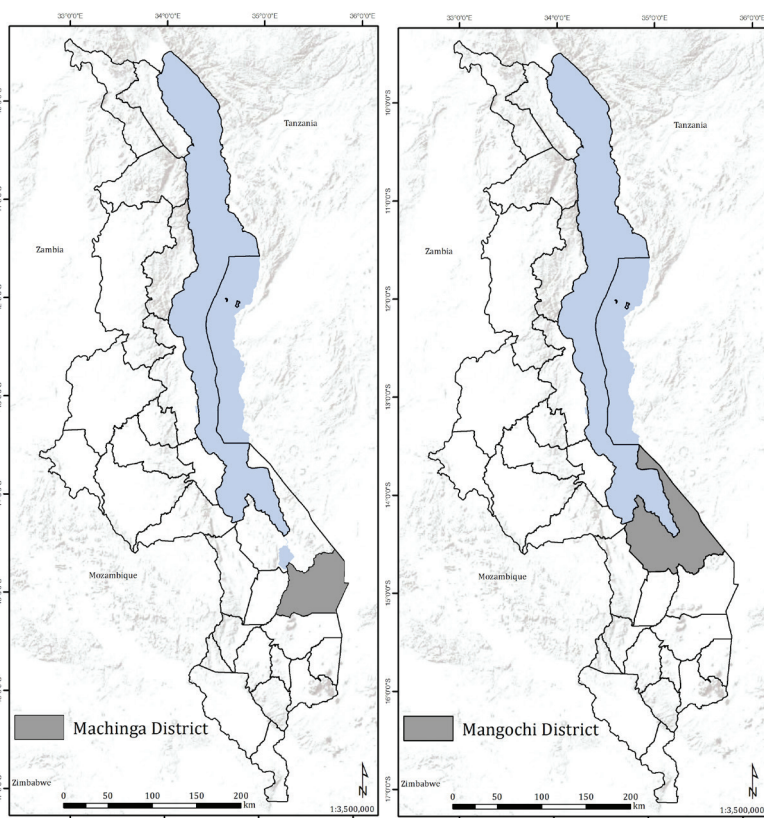
Ensuring women's involvement

These efforts received an impetus from the work of the Farm Radio Trust (FRT). A local Malawian NGO, FRT rolled out an innovative model called Her Farm Radio (HFR) that tapped into the power of radio, mobile technologies and other information communication technologies (ICTs) to raise awareness, promote informed decision-making and give a voice to smallholder farmers, specifically women, on FLR.

The HFR initiative was launched at the African First Ladies Summit in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania in July 2013. To date, it has reached more than two million women in Tanzania, Uganda, Ghana, Burkina Faso, Mali, Ethiopia and Malawi.¹ In Malawi, on the topic of FLR, Her Farm Radio targeted 200,000 farmers in two districts with a goal of featuring the voices of female farmers, their perspectives and concerns on FLR and providing them information on landscape restoration interventions that offered multiple benefits, including improving and stabilising local livelihoods.



The HFR initiative addressed an important issue – although both women and men must be involved in FLR, the direct participation of women is limited. Despite making up over 50% of the population, women's participation in decision-making and monitoring is under-represented, resulting in their needs and aspirations not being met. The NFLRA identified gender gaps showing that women play a key role in natural resource use and management, particularly in agriculture and forested landscape systems, and along value chains; and recommended actions that improve inclusive, equitable and participatory FLR implementation.



Thus to ensure participation, limiting factors needed to be addressed. For example, women have limited access to, control over, and ownership of agriculture-forest resources and capital such as land, credit, and income.

The numbers are staggering – women comprise 70% of Malawi's smallholder farmers, do 70% of the work in the sector, and produce 80% of food, but receive less than 15% of agricultural extension

Her Farm Radio forest landscape restoration target areas.

services and have smaller average land holding sizes. In addition, the NFLRA notes that women face more serious constraints in access to information and technologies for food production and marketing of their goods and services.²

Together with the USAID-funded Protecting Ecosystems and Restoring Forests in Malawi (PERFORM) project and the Department of Forestry, FRT worked with farmers and local stakeholders to introduce a 15 minute segment on FLR on two radio stations, namely Dzimwe Community Radio and Zodiak Broadcasting Station, which were listened to by community members in Machinga and Mangochi districts in radio listening groups known as Community ICT Hubs.

Radio and low-cost ICTs, such as mobile phones, can spread awareness and promote informed decision-making among poor rural communities. Unfortunately, even though women do most of the work on African farms and see the radio as a useful tool, they face barriers in accessing programmes and technologies, and contributing their voices.

In addition to women contributing knowledge to FLR, their participation is critical to ensuring the sustainability of FLR interventions. Turning a blind eye to gender issues in FLR also contributes to national gender inequity issues by placing women at a disadvantage compared to men in accessing economic opportunities and other benefits from the forest and agriculture sectors.

HFR seeks to change that by ensuring that radio serves the needs of all farmers, women and men. It highlights projects that place particular focus on the knowledge and needs of women. Studies conducted by Farm Radio International, show that women actively find ways to listen when they think a radio program is relevant to their lives. Through HFR, women are actively engaged in audience research to ensure that radio programmes meet their specific needs. They focus on interventions with specific benefits for women, mothers and children, share female voices and perspectives in each radio programme, engage female broadcasters and guests, include episodes that explore gender relations in the family and air programmes at times when

women are able to tune in. Women are empowered through the establishment of women-only community listening groups and the use of MP3 radios and mobile phones to enhance inter-activity.

Project approach

FRT integrated a number of components into the HFR project to ensure women were able to voice their concerns as well as access relevant information on FLR. A national stakeholder meeting was held, followed by audience research that identified the information needs of targeted communities with a special emphasis on understanding the needs of women. The results of the study were used to design the content strategy for the project.

National and District Stakeholder Meetings

HFR Project Activities

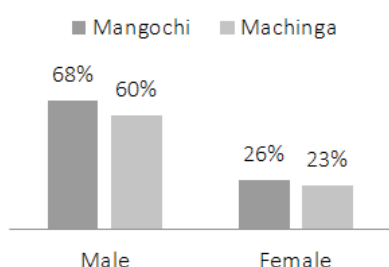
- National stakeholders consultative meeting;
- Audience formative research and message design workshop on FLR issues conducted in both districts;
- 40 radio listening groups formed and given recording MP3 radios and mobile phones to record and submit women farmers' FLR stories;
- A suite of low cost ICT applications such as "Beep 2 vote" system and "WhatsApp" groups established to gather the views of females and males on a variety of questions related to gender and FLR; and
- 2 radio stations engaged to produce and air at least 80 weekly episodes/slots of radio programmes reaching at least 200,000 farmers that feature FLR voices on opportunities and interventions of women farmers.

Stakeholder meetings were held at the national and district levels in September 2016 in order to map out stakeholders implementing forestry and other relevant projects. The meetings also allowed stakeholders to input on the HFR project and identify opportunities for collaboration.

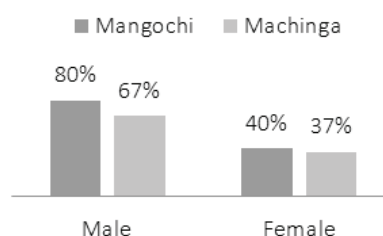
Audience Formative Research

An audience formative research study was conducted in the two districts to identify FLR information needs and preferences of women farmers. The study aimed to prepare recommendations on local needs and feasibility for using radio and ICTs to deliver information on FLR in the two districts. The exercise was done in one Extension Planning Area (EPA) per district and involved a total of 198 respondents in both districts. Interestingly, 64.1% out of the sampled respondents (n=198) were female with only 35.9% of the respondents male. The social fabric of the area greatly influenced the sample. Mangochi and Machinga are predominantly comprised of women, as most of the men migrate to the Republic of South Africa in search of employment.

Radio Ownership by Gender



Mobile Phone Ownership by Gender





The results of the audience research indicated a higher ownership of radios by men as compared to women, as well as a higher male listenership across both districts. It was noted that while men indicated that they listen to radio daily, the majority of women indicated that they usually listen to radio twice a week. Mobile phone ownership was also skewed toward men although it was generally low across all districts.

Results from the audience research and previous baseline FLR studies carried out by PERFORM, showed that farmers preferred to learn about and discuss alternative options to forest-based livelihoods, such as agriculture and off-farm businesses. Women were interested in learning how to contribute to forest conservation and using energy saving technologies. They were also interested in learning about conservation agriculture, crop diversification, small livestock rearing and the use of maturing varieties. The respondents were also asked to select two radio stations that would air a radio programme on FLR. Respondents chose Dzimwe Community Radio Station which is located in Mangochi and Zodiak Radio Station, which is a national radio station and can be heard both in Mangochi and Machinga districts.

The results for the research were presented and approved by members of the District Executive Committee in Machinga and Mangochi districts. The committee is a forum that comprises both the local government representatives and the non-government organisations that are implementing various projects in the district. Based on this, a message design workshop was convened where key messages on FLR were developed for the radio show.

Community ICT Hubs

Through the agricultural offices at the EPA level and the PERFORM project officers, 40 community ICT hubs were identified in both districts. They tapped into an existing network of agricultural clubs in the communities that were involved in the promotion of energy saving technologies; production of drought resistant crops and early maturing maize varieties; planting and caring for trees; village savings and loans; mushroom farming; and women empowerment activities. These hubs were each given a radio set and an android mobile phone. The radio set would allow villagers to tune into the programme, and the mobile phone was intended to document women's responses using WhatsApp and the Beep 2 Vote system (flash calls). In addition to WhatsApp and SMS, they used flash calls as a form of voting. This entails dialing a number and hanging up before the answer, so there is no cost associated. It allows for voting on a certain topic, and SMS is used for feedback. Their responses would later be broadcast during the radio programme and would also be discussed on the WhatsApp group created for all 40 hubs.

Why choose WhatsApp?

WhatsApp is widely used by urban women in different fora where they discuss and promote 'women agendas', however, it is not the same in the rural areas where women have no opportunities to own or access a low-end smart phone with internet facilities. Bearing in mind that some women may have seen a smartphone and may have heard about WhatsApp, FRT was optimistic that the innovation would be attractive for them to adopt and use. Based on previous experiences, it was envisioned that using WhatsApp groups would enable FRT to create virtual learning communities that connected women and men from different areas and enabled them to share experiences and tips on farming practices and viewpoints on social issues.

The rationale for establishing community ICT hubs was twofold. First, women who had difficulty listening to the radio regularly at home were able to listen and respond to the radio programmes by attending the clubs. To encourage female participation in the clubs, FRT scheduled radio programming in the afternoon, which most women and men identified as the time of day that they were typically available. Second, since the clubs are comprised both men and women, they provided a good forum for inclusive discussions about gender issues and FLR.

Two women were selected from each hub and trained by FRT on the use of the mobile phone and the radio set. The application was pre-installed on the phones that were to be handed over to the groups. The women underwent a one day training which included the basic use and handling of Android smart phones, recording audio, capturing photos and videos as well as conducting interviews. They were also oriented on basic use of WhatsApp and how it would be used in the project. These women in turn trained their fellow group members to use the equipment.

Radio programming

A variety of radio programme formats emphasised the role of both women and men in FLR. Community discussions and field recordings served to capture listener perspectives, panel discussions offered expert opinions, and stories were used to present relatable scenarios about FLR options in Machinga and Mangochi districts. At times the gender focus was explicit, like when a broadcast aimed to answer questions such as *“how are women being affected by deforestation, and why?”* Other times broadcasts addressed gender dynamics implicitly through a focus on conservation agriculture or livestock production, and thus highlighted the roles of both men and women in implementing FLR options. In every episode, regardless of topic, FRT strived to mainstream gender issues by consciously including the perspectives of both men and women in all discussions.

“This programme has empowered women with skills on how to protect forests. We only have five extension workers in our EPA, this radio programme has assisted in disseminating information in hard to reach areas.”

Locally relevant and targeted radio programme topics included:

- The role of communities in afforestation;
- Promotion of natural forest regeneration;
- Nursery management, pitting and planting;
- Conservation agriculture;
- Irrigation: where it can be done, how it is done, who can do it;
- Rainwater harvesting: importance of rainwater harvesting, rainwater harvesting technologies;
- Income generating activities: bee keeping, mushroom production, energy saving stoves;
- Post harvest management: roles of men and women in post-harvest management, roles of the family in post-harvest management;
- Marketing: how to find markets, the importance of cooperatives;
- Energy saving technologies: what are energy saving technologies, how are they used; and
- Women empowerment: how Village Saving Loans (VSLs) help women; relationship between VSLs and FLR.

Feedback and interactivity

Two WhatsApp groups were created (one for Machinga and another for Mangochi) and all the hubs were added to these groups. Questions and topics for debate were developed in line with the radio programmes and, at the end of each episode, a question or topic was sent to community ICT hub members to discuss on the WhatsApp group. The question or topic formed the basis for the radio programme to be aired the following week. They were allowed to either record their voices or type out their views, depending on the literacy levels of the groups. The broadcasters and FRT staff were also added to the group so they could moderate and transcribe the discussions. The recordings and transcriptions were later read out on air and an expert was invited to comment on the perspectives of the community members.

In addition to WhatsApp, the second low-cost ICT application was a dedicated mobile phone line to allow people to SMS and flash call for free. Thus, listeners and the general public could provide feedback using their mobile phones via SMS and flash calls. Flash calls were preferred by listeners due to the fact that there was no cost associated with this method. While flash calls are limited in their capacity to provide qualitative feedback, SMS messages allowed listeners to share their perspectives on gender issues and request topics.

Amplifying women's voices

Farm Radio worked with 40 community listening groups as direct beneficiaries of the radio programmes on both ZBS and Dzimwe Community Radio. A total of 600 farmers (440 female, 160 male) gathered and listened to the programme on weekly basis in both Machinga and Mangochi. The hub members gathered every broadcast day to listen to the programme as a group, where discussed and shared feedback with broadcasters through WhatsApp group chats that were solely created for purposes of engagement and interaction.

Topic: Deforestation

Questions for discussion:

1. What are the challenges that women face due to deforestation?
2. How has the population boom impacted households and forests?

Responses from women:

- “The population boom has heavily impacted our families because we are unable to fend for them and are reliant on forest products such as charcoal burning.”
- “We have bigger families and this requires us to have more farming land which results in forests being destroyed.”
- “Even though lots of trees have been lost through deforestation, women are very hopeful that forests can still be restored. We should use energy saving stoves and have personal woodlots where we can collect firewood from instead of the forest.”



Reflections from the project

The following lessons were learned during implementation of the HFR project. They detail both successful strategies and areas that could be improved upon in future projects that must address gender-related ICT barriers. They also include lessons derived from the women's issues in FLR.

Women must have a voice in dealing with FLR issues that affect their lives

The HFR project validated that if women are given a chance to voice their issues concerning development challenges, they are willing and able to do so. One key success factor for HFR was the creation of women groups where they felt comfortable discussing socio-economic and environmental challenges.

Women's issues in the context of FLR are beyond the realm of 'specialised women only' forums

There is a need for open discussion of women's issues among different stakeholders. These stakeholders include but are not limited to men, traditional leaders, church elders, civil society and even policy makers. For instance, it was evident that a lack of family planning was one of the major drivers of overpopulation, thus resulting in forest clearing for settlement, agriculture and income. However, the hindrances associated with family planning had different dimensions that require multifaceted solutions that cannot be addressed by one agency or one sector. In this regard, a women's group that is discussing FLR issues needs to engage other stakeholders beyond the FLR 'walls' since FLR issues are multi-faceted. Thus, there is need for concerted strategies by a wide range of stakeholders.

Both men and women are perpetrators and victims of deforestation

We noted during our audience research that both men and women shared the same aspiration: to escape the poverty trap. In doing so, both put pressure on the forest. The audience research results also revealed that FLR strategies could be responsive to suit both men and women. In the context of this project, it was learned from the start that agricultural-based options would be the most practicable FLR options for the region.

Capacity development in ICT skills critical for women's use of ICTs

In order to make a positive link between rural women's livelihoods and ICTs, capacity development must be rooted in project design and linked to outcomes for all project stakeholders, especially women who are often disadvantaged. Projects can change women's ability to use ICTs through practical and participatory training in skills that help them on how to use the ICT gadgets so that their voices are amplified.





Experiences from the field feeding into ROAM

During the implementation of the project, a few lessons were gathered and documented to feed into the ROAM being implemented in Malawi.

1. The centrality of agriculture as an FLR option that could assist men and women to generate income.
2. The effects of climate change on agriculture; further putting pressure on the forest. This amplified the need for climate smart agricultural techniques such as irrigation farming and conservation agriculture. The technologies were, however, not as friendly to women and thus extension workers were called to provide guidance on alternative practices and technologies that could allow women to reap the benefits and better practice irrigation and conservation agriculture.
3. It was also noted that there was still a need to scale-up forest protection and enable communities to explore other income generating activities to improve their livelihoods. Village savings schemes, livestock production and loans and small businesses were three of the strategies that seemed to be working, especially for women in both districts.
4. There were strong cultural norms that exacerbated large family sizes and thus exponential growth of population sizes. Women felt disadvantaged in as far as their freedom to access family planning services was concerned. As a result, in their view an increasing population was one of the major drivers of deforestation through increased pressure on natural resources.

An outcome evaluation was conducted at the end of the project in order to assess the changes in knowledge, attitude and practices related to gender issues and FLR among the listeners. In Mangochi district, 74% of the respondents indicated that they were able to recall gender issues that were discussed on the radio programmes. Out of this percentage, 65% of them said that they listened to issues concerning women and men working together. This included men taking on activities traditionally allocated to women and vice versa, and men playing an equal role in agriculture.

In Machinga district, 46% indicated that they recalled gender issues being discussed on the radio. Out of this percentage, 44% indicated the messages were centred on giving equal treatment to both men and women. In this way, women were given the platform to express themselves regarding FLR issues that concerned them.

The respondents further indicated that their knowledge on gender issues had improved because they had now become aware of the importance of working together to protect forests. Men further testified that previously, the *chitetezo mbaula* (energy saving stove) was only meant to be used by women, but through the radio programmes men had come to understand that *chitetezo mbaula* was a very important technology that was meant to curb charcoal burning – a malpractice that is mostly associated with men. They had also indicated that they were more aware of the gender issues that affect FLR such as population pressure on natural resources, low crop yields, and lack of environmentally friendly income generating activities.

Increasing access to information on FLR

During the outcome evaluation, 200 respondents were interviewed to assess what they had learned on the radio programmes. Out of the 200 respondents, an average of 64% indicated that they have planted trees, whilst 63% and 42% indicated that they have started to use energy saving technologies as a result of the radio programmes.





Footnotes

1. FRI (2014). Brief – Her Farm Radio <http://farmradio.wpengine.netdna-cdn.com/wp-content/uploads/Her-Farm-Radio-General-Brief-FINAL-July-7-2014.pdf>
2. Ministry of Natural Resources, Energy and Mining (MNREM) (2017). Forest Landscape Restoration Opportunities Assessment. (NFLRA), IUCN, WRI. xv + 126pp.

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Further reading

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