

Farmers' Listening Behaviour to Agricultural Radio Programmes in a Major Irrigation Scheme in Sri Lanka

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ABSTRACT. *The objective of this paper is to describe listening habits of farmers to the agricultural radio programmes in Sri Lanka. The survey technique was used to collect data from 240 farmers randomly chosen in four selected blocks of System "H" of the Mahaweli development project during mid 1988.*

The majority of farmers owned a radio set and almost all of them were aware that agricultural radio programmes were broadcasted. Of the agricultural radio programmes, those of "Rajarata" service were listened most by farmers in System "H". Although most of the farmers listened regularly to agricultural radio programmes, they could not listen to those programmes during busy periods such as harvesting. Farmers could recall the agricultural radio programmes mostly by the time of broadcasting. However, the popular programmes could be recalled by names. Farmers were generally satisfied with the duration of these programmes and the time of broadcast. They preferred two to four good agricultural radio programmes per week. Dramas and interviews were reported as the most satisfactory modes to disseminate agricultural information.

INTRODUCTION

This study was conducted in System "H" of the Mahaweli development programme. System "H" is the first settlement project of the Mahaweli development programme and represents the typical settlement scheme in modern Sri Lanka. It has the features of both modern as well as old settlement schemes in Sri Lanka.

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A total of 24,000 farmer families which include new settlers, re-settlers and evacuees were settled in this project (Mahaweli Economic Agency, 1990). The main crop cultivated in the 1 ha irrigable land in *Maha* is paddy while paddy and other field crops are cultivated in *Yala*. In the 0.2 ha high land, besides the homestead, permanent crops such as coconut, jak, mango and citrus are grown.

The farm broadcasting service of the Department of Agriculture with its regional stations provides an opportunity to utilize the radio as a useful means of reinforcing the efforts and activities of the extension workers. David (1991) pointed out, that in 1987 about 64 percent listened to the Mahaweli Community Radio because it provided agricultural information. Sri Lanka Broadcasting Corporation (1988 b) pointed out that Mahaweli Community Radio had become the second important source of information in the Mahaweli development areas. Various types of agricultural radio programmes are broadcasted over the regional as well as main stations of the Sri Lanka Broadcasting Corporation (SLBC). In 1988, ten agricultural radio programmes were broadcast over "*Rajarata*" "*Ruhunu*", and "*Mahanuwara*" regional stations and "*Welenda*" and "*Swedesia*" services of the main station of the SLBC. Most of the agricultural radio programmes were interviews with experts on various aspects of agriculture. "*Gam Medda*" was a drama mode programme containing relevant information for an agricultural issue. The Sri Lanka Broadcasting Corporation (1988 a) pointed out that the most popular mode of broadcasting was radio drama. *Saraboomi*, *Krushii Rata*, *Govi Gatalu* and *Sariketha* were informative programmes. As pointed out by Mahaweli Community Radio, rural life was approached as a whole and not on a piece meal basis by these programmes. Many subjects relevant to rural life were the themes of the programmes. Except young farmers club competitions which were a half an hour programme all the others were at fifteen minutes duration. All agricultural radio programmes were broadcast between 5.30 p.m. and 8.15 p.m.

The objective of this paper is to describe the listening habits of farmers to the agricultural radio programmes and their perceptions of the usefulness of these programmes in the Mahaweli settlement settlement scheme.

METHODOLOGY

The field survey technique was used to collect data. The questionnaire developed to collect data was based on the objective of the study and on the preliminary information gathered by the researcher while working in the area earlier.

The population consisted of all farm families living in System "H". Only four administrative blocks out of ten in two Resident Project Managers' divisions were selected for this study. Distance from the main reservoir was the main criterion used in selecting the blocks. The blocks were selected from the head end, and middle and tail ends of the main channel. Subsequently two units (a block consists of 8-10 units), the best and the worst in terms of production, adoption of new technology and other farming activities were chosen from each of the selected blocks. Finally a random sample of 30 farmers was chosen from each selected unit. The total sample, therefore, consisted of 240 farmers.

The data were collected by personal interviews in 1988/89. During this period, every effort was made to establish rapport with the farmers as well as with Mahaweli Economic Agency officers to ensure their continued co-operation in the investigation. While conducting the interviews, wherever possible and necessary, information was cross checked in order to detect possible inaccuracies. The data collected through interviews were supplemented with information collected by observations. The data were transferred from the questionnaire to a code sheet. The information was coded in ordinal and interval scales. The data were then entered in a computer for analysis. The Lotus 123 package was used to enter and analyze the data.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Personal and situational characteristics of respondents

The age of farmers ranged from 20-70 years with 42.9 percent falling in the 36-50 years category. As for educational level 5.8 percent of farmers did not have any formal education. Eight farmers, however, successfully completed grade 12.

Seventy two percent of the farmers had 11 – 40 years experience in farming. Majority (70.8%) were engaged in both crop husbandry and animal husbandry. However, 25 percent of farmers were engaged in crop husbandry only. Milking cows or neat cattle management was the major animal husbandry activity in the study area. The average annual gross income of farmers computed by considering both farm and off-farm earnings was Rs. 20,575.00 in 1988/89 with 30 percent earning less than the poverty level (Rs. 8400.00).

Radio listening behaviour

Eighty two percent of farmers owned a radio set which was functioning. But 98 percent were aware that agricultural radio programmes were broadcast. In two-thirds of the cases farmers themselves listened to agricultural radio programmes most.

Table 1 shows that the programmes of "*Rajarata*" service and "*Saraboomi*" of the Sinhala commercial *Welanala* service were popular among farmers as well as the other family members. The highest proportion of farmers (28.7%) as well as other family members listened to "*Gammedda*".

The recorded low percentage of listenership to the different programmes was mainly due to the following reasons:

1. Respondents could not recall the programme by their names as the nine programmes were broadcast weekly. The programmes of "*Ruhunu*" service are not included in Table 1 as their reception was very poor.
2. Although the farmers were regular listeners they were not in a position to listen to the agricultural radio programmes during very busy periods such as harvesting when they were engaged in farming activities even at night.
3. However, "*Gam Medda*" and "*Krushi Rata*" of *Rajarata* Service were listened by more farmers because they were popular programmes.

Table 1. Distribution of farm family members by their listening habits to agricultural radio programmes during the Previous week.

| Service | Programme | Farmer | | Wife | | Children | |
|------------|------------------------|--------|------|------|------|----------|------|
| | | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % |
| Rajarata | Gammedda | 69 | 28.7 | 31 | 12.9 | 22 | 9.1 |
| | Krushi Rata Y.F.C.* | 59 | 24.6 | 19 | 7.9 | 21 | 8.7 |
| | Competition | 37 | 15.4 | 16 | 6.6 | 24 | 10.0 |
| Welenda | Saraboomi Y.F.C.* | 26 | 10.8 | 13 | 5.4 | 14 | 5.8 |
| | Competition | 8 | 3.3 | 4 | 1.6 | 7 | 2.9 |
| Swedesia | Govigatalu | 15 | 6.3 | 4 | 1.6 | 5 | 2.0 |
| | Saruketha | 7 | 2.9 | 2 | 0.8 | 4 | 1.6 |
| Mahanuwara | Govibima | 5 | 2.0 | 2 | 0.8 | 2 | 0.8 |
| | Govigedera | 5 | 2.0 | 1 | 0.4 | 2 | 0.8 |

Young Farmers Club

Ranking of agricultural radio programmes

To determine how farmers perceived the usefulness of various agricultural radio programmes as sources of agricultural information they were asked to select and rank three sources which were considered by them to be most useful. A score of "three" was given if the programme was ranked one, "two" if it was ranked two, and "one" if it was ranked three within the three most useful programmes.

According to Table 2 farmers considered "*Krushi Rata*" and "*Gammedda*" as the most useful programmes for agricultural information. However, Y.F.C. Competition of the "*Rajarata*" service, "*Saraboomi*" of "*Welenda*" service and "*Govigatalu*" of "*Swedesia*" service also seem to play a useful role in supplying agricultural information to farmers in System "H".

Table 2. Farmers Ranking of Agricultural Radio programmes in terms of Perceived Relative Usefulness to obtain Agricultural Information.

| Service | Programme | No. Listened | Rank 1 | | Rank 2 | | Rank 3 | | Perceived Usefulness | |
|-------------------|---------------------------------|--------------|--------|-------|--------|------|--------|------|----------------------|------|
| | | | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | Total | Mean |
| <u>Rajarata</u> | <u>Krusha Rata</u> | 190 | 90 | 47.3 | 76 | 40.0 | 24 | 12.6 | 446 | 1.85 |
| | <u>Gammedda</u> | 180 | 91 | 50.5 | 72 | 40.0 | 17 | 9.4 | 434 | 1.80 |
| | <u>Y.F.C. * Competition</u> | 81 | 16 | 19.7 | 19 | 23.4 | 46 | 56.7 | 132 | 0.55 |
| <u>Welenda</u> | <u>Saraboomi</u> | 46 | 10 | 21.7 | 12 | 26.0 | 24 | 52.2 | 78 | 0.32 |
| | <u>Y.F.C. * Competition</u> | 5 | 1 | 20.0 | 3 | 60.0 | 1 | 20.0 | 10 | 0.04 |
| <u>Swedesia</u> | <u>Govigatalu</u> | 51 | 8 | 15.6 | 11 | 21.5 | 32 | 62.7 | 68 | 0.28 |
| | <u>Saruketha</u> | 4 | 1 | 25.0 | 1 | 25.0 | 2 | 50.0 | 7 | 0.03 |
| <u>Mahanuwara</u> | <u>Govibima</u> | 8 | 8 | 100.0 | 0 | 0.0 | 0 | 0.0 | 24 | 0.10 |
| | <u>Govigedera</u> | 3 | 1 | 33.3 | 2 | 66.6 | 0 | 0.0 | 7 | 0.03 |

Suitable time for listening

Table 3 shows that only a narrow range of time was selected by most of the farmers as well as their wives to listen to the radio. About 80 percent of farmers preferred listening to agricultural radio programmes between 6.00 p.m. – 8.00 p.m. daily. This finding is similar to that of Sivayoganathan (1986) and Hewavitharana (1979).

Table 3. Distribution of respondents by their opinion of the most suitable time to listen to the agricultural radio programmes.

| Time | Farmer | | Wife | |
|------------------|--------|-------|------|-------|
| | No. | % | No. | % |
| Before 6.00 p.m. | 7 | 3.0 | 4 | 2.8 |
| 6.00 – 8.00 p.m. | 186 | 79.8 | 85 | 59.4 |
| After 8.00 p.m. | 40 | 17.2 | 54 | 37.8 |
| Total | 233 | 100.0 | 143 | 100.0 |

About 59 percent of those wives who responded indicated that the agricultural radio programmes should be broadcast between 6.00 p.m. – 8.00 p.m. while 37.8 percent preferred broadcasting after 8.00 p.m.

Programme length and number of programmes

It is important to know farmers views on the length of an agricultural radio programme and the total number of programmes per week because several agricultural radio programmes were broadcast with different lengths of time.

Table 4 presents data on the length of an agricultural radio programme as preferred by farmers. Seventy nine percent preferred to have 15–30 minutes programmes while the balance preferred programmes of longer duration.

Table 4. Frequency distribution of farmers by preferred length of programme.

| Length in minutes | No. | % |
|-------------------|-----|-------|
| < 15 | 0 | 0.0 |
| 15 - 30 | 189 | 79.4 |
| 31 - 45 | 19 | 8.0 |
| > 45 | 30 | 12.6 |
| Total | 238 | 100.0 |

It is worth noting that no one preferred programmes shorter than 15 minutes duration.

Table 5 shows that 41 percent wanted 3 programmes in a week while 22.8 percent and 16.5 percent preferred 2 and 4 programmes respectively. Ten percent, however, wished to have daily programmes.

Table 5. Distribution of farmers by their opinion on the number of agricultural radio programmes per week.

| No. of Programmes | No. | % |
|-------------------|-----|-------|
| 1 | 11 | 4.6 |
| 2 | 54 | 22.8 |
| 3 | 98 | 41.3 |
| 4 | 39 | 16.5 |
| 5 | 9 | 3.8 |
| 6 | 3 | 1.3 |
| 7 | 23 | 9.7 |
| Total | 237 | 100.0 |

Mean 4 Standard Deviation 4.66

About 44 percent of respondents wished to spend 1 – 2 hours per week listening to agricultural radio programmes while 27.8 percent wished to spend less than 1 hour (Table 6).

Table 6. Distribution of farmers by their opinion on total duration of listening to agricultural radio programmes per week

| Total Duration in Hours/Week | No. | % |
|------------------------------------|------------|--------------|
| < 1 | 66 | 27.8 |
| 1 - <2 | 103 | 43.5 |
| 2 - <3 | 36 | 15.2 |
| 3 - 4 | 22 | 9.3 |
| > 4 | 10 | 4.2 |
| Total | 237 | 100.0 |

To determine the modes of broadcast pattern acceptable to farmers they were asked to indicate their preference of the modes in which the agricultural radio programmes are being broadcast.

Table 7. Farmers ranking of modes in which agricultural information should be broadcast over the radio.

| Mode | Rank 1 | | Rank 2 | | Rank 3 | | Preference | |
|-------------|--------|------|--------|------|--------|------|----------------|---------------|
| | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | Total Score | Mean Score |
| Drama | 104 | 43.4 | 57 | 23.8 | 80 | 33.3 | 506 | 2.10 |
| Interview | 78 | 32.5 | 41 | 17.1 | 24 | 10.0 | 340 | 1.41 |
| Rural | | | | | | | | |
| Traditional | | | | | | | | |
| Talk | 35 | 14.6 | 79 | 32.9 | 57 | 23.8 | 320 | 1.33 |
| Competition | 14 | 5.8 | 37 | 15.4 | 30 | 12.5 | 146 | 0.60 |
| News | 8 | 3.3 | 15 | 6.3 | 37 | 15.4 | 91 | 0.37 |
| Songs/Poems | 1 | 0.4 | 11 | 4.5 | 12 | 5.0 | 37 | 0.15 |

Table 7 shows that "drama" is the most preferred mode to disseminate agricultural information over the radio. "Interview" and "Rural Traditional Talks" are also considered by farmers as satisfactory modes for disseminating agricultural information. This finding corresponds to the data presented in Table 2 regarding farmers ranking of agricultural radio programmes in terms of perceived relative usefulness to obtain agricultural information.

CONCLUSION

From the analysis of information obtained from 240 farmers in System "H" of the Mahaweli development programme, the following conclusions are drawn:

1. The majority of farmers are aware that agricultural programmes are being broadcast over the radio.
2. Although most of the farmers are regular listeners to agricultural radio programmes, they are not in a position to listen to these programmes during harvesting period. This is because farmers are engaged in farming activities even at night.
3. However, even during very busy periods, farmers tend to listen to agricultural radio programmes if they are popular.
4. Farmers could recall agricultural radio programmes only by the time of broadcast but not by name except for very popular programmes such as "Gammedda" of "Rajarata" service.
5. Farmers are generally satisfied with the duration of agricultural radio programmes (15 - 30 minutes) and the time of broadcast (6.00 p.m. to 8.00 p.m.) of these programmes. This is mainly because of the absence of cultivation activities during this period.
6. Drama, interview and rural traditional talks are preferred by farmers as modes by which agricultural information is broadcast over the radio; "Drama" is considered to be the most preferred mode.

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