

Participatory Radio Dramas

— Andreas Ernst

Earlier this year, I called my good friend Jean-Luc in DRC to say hi and ask how his family was doing. We had met at a media convention a while back, and last year he invited me to hold a participatory radio drama workshop in DRC. We chatted about the good times we spent together in his village during the workshop last year. “By the way,” he said, “the Minister of Health of the Democratic Republic of Congo was here at our station. He heard our radio drama, and came by personally to buy the rights to broadcast it across the whole country!” I could not believe what I was hearing.



One of the radio dramas we had developed during the workshop addressed the issue of the Ebola virus. As we developed the theme and storyline from the first-hand experiences and testimonies of the participants, mostly radio staff from eight different stations in the region, one thing became very clear: Our radio drama needed to highlight the underlying attitudes and fears which lead to attacks on health workers, causing even more spread of the virus. As we incorporated the first-hand experiences of the participants into a story and message, attributing roles to each participant, the resulting improvisation became so authentic, and the message so powerful, that the Minister of Health himself decided it needed to be broadcast in the whole country. Not a single word was scripted for this drama. Rather, by using a purely oral process, all participants freely shared their testimonies, took part in developing the message, and ultimately expressed their emotions and views by assuming roles representing local

Participatory radio drama is about creating radio drama together with local participants to address local issues in a way that highlights local realities and promotes local solutions.

attitudes and behavior they are all too familiar with.

This is just one example of the impact of participatory radio drama. However, after having done several workshops on this method in different countries in Africa, it continues to fascinate me how effective this method is for facilitating liberating, emotionally stirring dialogue with participants on issues they rarely have the chance to talk openly and



honestly about. As a result, both participants and listeners are able to gain deep insights into a given issue, including understanding opposing views, and strongly identify with the local solutions and role models that can bring about positive change.

[Here is a short video](#) of participants and end-users telling how and why this method works. I have written [a paper](#) that explains how this method can be used for Scripture Engagement. If you are interested in sending staff to receive training in this method or in organizing a local participatory radio drama workshop, I would love to [hear from you](#).

To read more about Andreas' work using Participatory Audio Dramas, [download his paper](#).

Andreas Ernst is an SIL scripture engagement and media consultant based in Cameroon. He coordinates media training in francophone Africa and is passionate about local media capacity building and entertainment-education formats that bring God's Word into daily life.