

Farm Radio VOICES Quality Standards

A framework for effective rural development radio programming

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Goal and purpose

This document sets out Farm Radio's quality standard goal, principles, and criteria, specifically to support quality improvement processes in programming for rural populations. **It spotlights quality criteria for effective participatory radio program processes and provides for recognition of partners producing sustainable interactive quality radio programs that support rural development.**

Farm Radio aims to ensure that rural populations have access to sustained quality interactive programming that responds to their information and communication needs in a timely way so that they can make informed decisions for their families and communities.

Working with a variety of radio station partners, Farm Radio increases access to quality programming by enabling as many stations as possible to provide ongoing quality services and to have sufficient capacities to join Farm Radio projects as partners with established quality credentials. Stations who have engaged in quality improvement using this participatory framework will be ready to produce interactive programming with minimal intervention from Farm Radio as they are recognised as quality-assured stations.

The overall goal is to support continuous quality improvement in development radio programming for rural populations, with the understanding that quality programming produces tangible results for program audience.

The purpose of the quality standards is to support radio station's capacity for continuous quality improvement of programs and associated operations. There will be Farm Radio recognition for those radio stations meeting the standards.

What's in it?

What's in it for Farm Radio?

With the Farm Radio VOICES Quality Standards Framework, Farm Radio will

- have a clear definition of quality, which can be communicated clearly to different groups (radio stations, funders, stakeholders, other investors, etc.),
- have an easy, efficient and sustainable way of evaluating the quality of radio programs about local problems and solutions,
- help prove the assumption that *better programs = better livelihoods and health* (eg to funders),
- help prove the assumption that *better programs = increased audience and investment* (eg to radio stations),
- provide training, coaching and tools support to radio stations that wish to have their program quality evaluated and recognized.

What's in it for our audience?

Why would our audience want access to quality programming? By tuning in to quality programming audience will:

- have regular access to relevant, accurate, and practical content,
- have the opportunity to engage with the program,
- feel that their issues, experiences, solutions and lives are important and are being communicated,
- get support in achieving tangible development results,
- have an opportunity to share their ideas, opinions and needs.

In this document, “our” in “our audience” refers to the public target shared between Farm Radio and the radio stations. Farm Radio doesn't produce programs but supports the radio stations production process.

What's in it for radio stations?

Why would a station want to meet the Farm Radio VQS standards? With the implementation of the Farm Radio VQS framework, the station will:

- improve the quality of programs,
- offer sustained, participatory and regular quality programs to the communities being served,
- gain recognition as producing quality and interactive programming,
- use the recognition to attract sponsors, investors and funders in programs,
- increase audience, gain trust, and audience loyalty.

What's in it for social media influencers and instant messaging group managers?

Even if the C standards (Convenient and Consistent), the criteria and the indicators don't apply to influencers, the social media influencers and instant messaging group managers will:

- use the V standard (Value),
- use the O standard (Opportunity),
- use the I standard (Information),
- use the E standard (Engaging),
- use the S standard (Support).

What's in it for stakeholders?

Why would stakeholders benefit from high quality programs? With the Farm Radio VQS framework being met, stakeholders will:

- have the opportunity for collaboration,
- get detailed and local community experiences, contribute to solutions and points of view,
- share research information in an accessible way,
- connect with a wider audience,
- scale up the uptake of improved development practices,
- understand and serve rural populations more effectively,
- have a vehicle to help reach their organizational mission and/or their project objectives.

What kind of programs can be assessed using this framework?

This framework can be used to assess the quality of any radio program that seeks to facilitate positive change for our audience (i.e. development programs). These can be programs that focus on issues such as farming, health, gender equality and inclusion, youth, people with disabilities and vulnerabilities, education, sexual and reproductive health and rights, human rights, climate change, human-made security, etc. A quality program will be popular with our audience and have the potential for great impact.

A note about what we mean by “program”. The word program can be defined in different ways. It may be a one-time production or part of a periodically recurring series. A single program in a series is called an episode. In the context of this framework, we refer to “programs” as a series of recurring radio episodes that have a design including: a name, a purpose, a theme, a defined audience, and a predictable schedule.

The Farm Radio VQS Framework Overview

The **Farm Radio VOICES Quality Standards Framework**, Farm Radio’s foundational approach to quality, identifies the standards, criteria and indicators of what Farm Radio and its partners consider to be best practice in interactive participatory radio programs for sustainable, positive behaviour change amongst rural populations.

The Farm Radio VQS is organized into 6 broad standards that represent the aspects of radio production for rural populations that are valued by Farm Radio and then into specific areas of operational and broadcast programming performance.

As you go through this framework you will recognize that the standards and criteria reflect Farm Radio’s Statement of Values. This framework is a more in-depth and expanded version of the original VOICES Standards and how you can apply them to your work.

Standards	V – Our programs VALUE our audience (e.g. women, men, farmers, youth and children) who work in a variety of different conditions to achieve more prosperous, just, and vibrant lives for themselves and their communities. Their views guide our programs. We broadcast in their language. We work to win and maintain their trust.
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	<p>O – Our programs provide our audience with the OPPORTUNITY to speak and be heard, individually and in numbers, on matters of importance to them. Our programs feature the voices of our target audiences and communities, e.g. rural Africans, naming their concerns, discussing them, and organizing and acting on them. We aggregate their voices and, when necessary, share them with people in positions of responsibility who can help resolve those concerns.</p> <p>I – Our programs provide our audience with the INFORMATION they need in a clear way, from the best sources (farmers and other target audience members, experts, policymakers, etc.) and when they need it most. We gather useful, clear, accurate and balanced information and we broadcast it at the times of the year when our audience can best use it.</p> <p>C – Our programs are CONVENIENT AND CONSISTENT. We broadcast our programs when our audience is available to listen. Important programs are repeated to ensure that as many as possible interested our audience can hear them. Programs are broadcast regularly and reliably. After broadcast, important program material is made available through other media—for example, by phone, through social media, etc.</p> <p>E – Our programs are ENGAGING. We produce programs that present personalities, formats, content, and features that are fresh, entertaining, easy to remember, and enjoyable for our audience. There is no excuse for boring radio programs! We present instructional information in ways that help our audience remember it.</p> <p>S – Our programs SUPPORT our audience as they test and implement practices they consider beneficial for their families and communities. We understand that the world is changing and our target audience must also change to survive and thrive. We learn of beneficial practices that large numbers of our audience may want to apply. We produce programs that support our audience as they work through the challenges of trying something different and potentially better. We celebrate their successes.</p>
<p>Criteria</p>	<p>Within the six standards, there are individual criteria that provide definitions of what Farm Radio and its partners consider to be best practice in educational radio programs aimed at increasing knowledge and agency, and facilitating practice and behaviour change, and positive outcomes for our audience.</p>
<p>Indicators</p>	<p>Each criteria has a set of indicators that explain what the performance of this standard looks like in the planning and broadcasting of a radio program for rural development, and what the evidence for assessing this might be. Please note that each episode does not need to correspond to each criteria but rather how these indicators apply to the program overall.</p>

The Farm Radio “VOICES Quality Standards” Framework Details

V - Value

Our programs VALUE rural Africans: women, men, youth and children. This standard that prioritizes authenticity and resonance by ensuring content reflects the true lived experiences of the audience. This standard emphasizes being deeply rooted in the actual realities, challenges, and aspirations of our audience, as informed by their voices and participation, rather than relying on the station's assumptions or perceptions about their lives. By implementing these criteria, a station ensures that its programming genuinely reflects and respects its audience, fostering trust, relevance, and meaningful engagement.

	Criteria	Indicators
1	Guests featured are from diverse backgrounds reflecting the audience of the program.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Guests are both men and women and from a range of ages, ethnic groups, geographic locations, religions, etc. • Expertise of guests is determined based on experience, despite and/or in addition to formal education/training.
2	The radio station actively supports the program's ambitions toward gender equality and inclusion.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The station prioritizes development-oriented programming with resources; budget, staff time, airtime, training. • The station acknowledges and addresses the barriers faced by women, youth and other marginalized groups to access services.
3	Content is linked directly to the needs of the audience.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some form of formative or audience research is done with the intended audience to inform content, which is disaggregated by identity factors like gender and age, etc. • Representatives of the intended audience participate in the design of the programs. • Presenters link content back to consultations held with our audience. • The audience is regularly consulted to confirm the information is timely and relevant. • Programs mobilize a variety of stakeholder groups that help establish the content agenda.
4	The diversity of the audience is represented in the radio station staff.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The program team clearly reflects the diversity of the audience including gender, age, etc. to the greatest extent possible. • Decision-making about the program is made by women and men. • Working conditions, attitudes and facilities at the stations enable the participation of both women, men, and PWD.

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Radio station management and the entire team is aware of and behaves in a way that does not discriminate based on gender, age, physical ability, ethnic group, religion, etc. ● There is a public notice of non-discriminatory recruitment and employment practices being followed. ● The program is co-hosted by a woman and a man to the greatest extent possible.
5	Gender and diversity are presented and portrayed as an integral part of the issues being covered as well as in the design and delivery of programs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The programs demonstrate a commitment to gender equality and inclusion. ● Gender and diversity are considered in how both problems and solutions are researched, addressed in program design and presented on air. ● Gender equality and inclusion and diversity, equity, and inclusion are included as specific topics in programs on a regular basis. ● Care is taken to broadcast or re-broadcast programs at times when both men, women and youth are able to listen. ● Consideration is given to marginalized groups in the audience and steps taken to address their specific needs.
6	Radio stations have a variety of policy statements that reflect social objectives.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● There are policy statements on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Gender equality and inclusion ○ Code of conduct for staff ○ HR & staff development ○ Safeguarding/Protection from Sexual Misconduct, harassment, exploitation and abuse ○ Grievance procedure ○ Recruitment ○ Staff development ○ Editorial ○ Environmental Policy

O - Opportunity

Our programs provide rural Africans with the OPPORTUNITY to speak and be heard, individually and in numbers, on matters of importance to them. This standard ensures that individuals have meaningful opportunities to engage in the design, implementation, and evaluation of programs. It emphasizes inclusivity and collaboration at every stage of the project life cycle, from initial concept to execution and reflection, fostering shared ownership and relevance. By embedding opportunity as a standard, the program becomes a true reflection of collective effort, ensuring its relevance, sustainability, and impact.

	Criteria	Indicators
1	There are clearly understood processes for the regular evaluation of programs involving relevant audience representatives and stakeholder groups.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Intended audience are regularly surveyed for their feedback and satisfaction with the programs. ● Program partners and other stakeholders are surveyed for their feedback and satisfaction with the programs. ● Findings of the review and suggestions from stakeholders and the audience are taken into account for future programming.
2	Intended audiences participate in the program design and development.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Mechanisms/structures are in place to ensure input from the intended audiences in the community. ● Decision-making about the program schedule and budgets is transparent and can be questioned by the program team. ● The program design is available to internal and external stakeholders. ● The intended audience, in all its diversity, is involved in the design of program content.
3	Our audience has easily accessible opportunities to provide feedback about the episode/program.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Phone numbers/email addresses are given for feedback/questions. ● Producers clearly seek, read and consider feedback. ● Episodes integrate surveys to get feedback from the audience. ● There have been opportunities for our audience to share views and these views have clearly been taken into account in upcoming episodes or the overall program. ● Stations help to establish CLGs (Community Listening Groups) and connect them to the management and production teams for regular feedback. ● Programs offer equitable opportunities for women and men to provide feedback.
4	The voices and opinions of rural women, men, youth and other marginalized groups are represented on air equally and fairly.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Episodes feature a balance of opinions from women, men, youth and other marginalized groups. ● Stereotypes are avoided. ● Women, men, youth and other marginalized groups are interviewed in the program as professionals and experts and from a range of ages, ethnic groups, geographic locations, religions, etc. and is determined based on experience, despite and/or in addition to formal education/training. ● Interviews contain questions that will help bring out how different topics affect people differently based on a range of intersecting characteristics like gender, age, physical ability, ethnic group, geographical location or financial situation, religion, etc.

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The specific needs of women, men and people from marginalized groups are taken into account in the content in terms of problems addressed and solutions proposed during the radio programs.
5	<p>Programs provide significant opportunities for audience to interact on and off the air with program teams, programs guests, other audience members and content.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The episode invites responses from the audience : phone, Uliza, SMS, Instant Messaging (WhatsApp, Telegram, Messenger, etc.), Social Media (Facebook, TikTok, Instagram, etc.), ... ● Formats are used to ensure community voices are heard : phone-in, Instant Messaging vocal messages, vox pops etc. ● Programs allow the community’s questions to be answered by a resource person, e.g. resource people/guests are hosted live in the studio or through a phone out to give responses on issues raised live from an informed point of view instantly. ● Programs allow members of the intended audience to share their successes and innovations on the air. ● Programs acknowledge and make linkages with community listening groups. ● Program content is linked to social media posts and discussions. ● Episodes feature a balance of interaction from women and men.

I - Information

Our programs provide rural Africans with the INFORMATION they need in a clear way, from the best sources (farmers, experts, etc.) and at the time of the year when they need it most. This standard emphasizes the importance of delivering information that is accurate, timely, relevant, and accessible to all audiences. It ensures that information shared is not only factually correct but also culturally-appropriate, contextually-meaningful, and aligned with the needs and experiences of the intended audience. By maintaining information as a quality standard, programs build trust, empower audience with knowledge, and facilitate informed decision-making.

	Criteria	Indicators
1	Key information (e.g. promoting a specific practice or behaviour change) of episodes are clear and relevant.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The intended primary and secondary audiences for the program are clear. ● Each episode shares 2-3 pieces of key information and the objective of the episode is clear. ● Key recommendations reflect advice that is tested and proven). ● The episode focuses on actions that are realistic and 'doable.' ● The advantages and disadvantages are discussed. ● Existing factors that make it easier or harder to implement the actions are discussed (i.e. taboos, community programs, organizations, laws, traditions, access, social norms, etc). ● Broadcasters use Farm Radio resources as source material for content.
2	Programs are well researched.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Information provided in the program is accurate and evidence-based. ● Broadcasters have access to internet facilities to do research. ● The information comes from a variety of trusted sources, including people with direct experience, Farm Radio and Just communication resources, articles, newsletters, networks, etc.
3	Information shared in programs are both technical and experience-based.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Storytelling is used as a strategy to share information and to illustrate the benefits and consequences of different practices and behaviours. ● Technical information is shared by credible subject matter specialists that can speak to local context. ● Credible resource people represent the diversity of the communities (i.e. gender parity, ethnicity, age, etc.). ● Both local and traditional knowledge, as well as scientific knowledge, is valued and shared.
4	Episodes are well-planned and reflect the program design.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The program has a content plan (design document, agenda, blueprint, etc.). ● The program's production team has regular (for example: weekly) planning meetings. ● Each episode has a runsheet. ● Regular promos are aired to announce upcoming episodes (generic and specific)..

C - Convenient and consistent

Our programs are CONVENIENT AND CONSISTENT. We broadcast our programs when our audience is available to listen. Programs are broadcast regularly and reliably. This standard ensures that programs and services are designed to be easily accessible and reliable for the audience, fostering trust and sustained engagement. Convenience emphasizes user-friendly access to content and opportunities, while consistency ensures a dependable quality and experience over time. By adhering to this standard, programs demonstrate respect for audience' time and preferences, fostering stronger connections and long-term loyalty.

	Criteria	Indicators
1	The station budget supports the program to achieve its goals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The station seeks advertising and sponsorship opportunities for the program. • There is a budget allocation for the successful production of the program in the station's annual plan. • Staff are allocated to the program and adequately compensated. • Budget provision is made for equipment maintenance and upgrading. • The station has fit-for-purpose studio/production facilities. • Funds and equipment for field travel to communities are available. • Funds are available to facilitate interviews with guests that represent the diversity of the communities (i.e. gender parity, ethnicity, age, etc.). • There is active work being done to get sponsors and other partners. • The program has advertorials (sponsorship).
2	Episodes are broadcast consistently at a time when target audience is available and prefers to listen	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Audience research is carried out and the program broadcasts at a time that the audience prefers to listen (keep in mind gender, age, geography and other criteria that might influence their preferences) • Episodes are broadcast weekly at the same time and are rarely interrupted by other programming. • The presenter promotes the next episode(s). • Episodes are rebroadcast at an alternate, but consistent time.
3	The program has an annual or bi-annual plan which reflects the direction and spirit of the program goals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is a program purpose statement that defines the goals. • Written annual or bi-annual plan that is updated regularly. • The annual plan is audience-focused and incorporates input from the community. • There are periodic plan review meetings.
4	There is regular professional	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Both men and women staff have equal access to training, mentoring and capacity building activities.

	development opportunities for program staff and an operational career plan that contributes to the stability of the personnel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is a staff training plan linked to their career plan. • There is an allocated budget for capacity building. • Program staff have access to and take part in professional networks (ie. Just Communication's network).
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E - Engaging

Our programs are ENGAGING. We produce programs that present personalities, formats, content, and features that are fresh, entertaining, easy to remember, and enjoyable for our audience. This standard prioritizes creating content and experiences that capture attention, stimulate interest, and encourage active participation. Engaging programming fosters emotional connections and intellectual curiosity, ensuring that audience feel motivated, valued, and involved. By making engagement a quality standard, programs can build strong, lasting relationships with audience, encouraging ongoing interaction and loyalty.

	Criteria	Indicators
1	Programs and episodes are accessible, entertaining, and educational.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Programs are available in languages most used by the intended audience. • The host summarises important or complex points that have been made in the episode to help our audience understand. • The host provides “signposts” that tell our audience where the episode is going. For example: the host mentions what the episode will contain at the beginning and then gives a reminder of what was done and what is still to come up later in the episode. • The episode uses learning/memory games (quizzes, poems, etc.) to help our audience remember key facts.
2	Radio formats are used that engage the audience, e.g. by appealing to their traditions, interests, emotions and situations, etc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Elements of local cultural formats are used, e.g. local drama or storytelling forms, traditional music, etc. • Episodes feature discussions, stories and real life experiences from their communities that our audience are able to relate to and which inspire emotional responses. • When on location, the sounds of people, animals, work, machinery, flowing water, etc. are heard.
3	Programs are produced to a	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The production team is trained and has ongoing training opportunities.

	high technical standard & the production team has solid knowledge of broadcasting equipment and practices.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are continuous checks and maintenance of equipment (including recorders, mobile phones, editing suites, etc.). • Broadcasters have access to the right equipment (recorder, microphone, computer, editing software, etc). • Mixing and transitions are smooth; sound editing and recording quality are good. • Voices are clear (not muffled or distorted). • Songs and music are well produced and have good sound quality. • Sound quality and levels are consistent throughout the episode. • Episodes are free of technical glitches that might distract the audience's attention.
4	Different program types are used throughout individual episodes and series of episodes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A variety of program types are used to make the program sound dynamic and lively and meet the expectations of the target listening audience. The quality will be evaluated using the Uliza Log and the GBB criteria.
5	The presentation is effective and entertaining.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presenters are dynamic, warm, and friendly. • Presenters have good interviewing skills that elicit useful information. • The presenter breaks up long interviews with questions and summaries. • The host provides signposting during the program. • The choice of hosts appropriately reflects the target audience for the program.
6	There is a culture of reflection and self-evaluation for quality improvement.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Program staff discuss episodes after airing and identify what worked well and any improvements to be made. • Identified improvements are incorporated into future episodes and program design. • The station maintains a program archive which is catalogued and is available to staff (including the documents used in the production process).

S - Support

Our programs SUPPORT rural Africans as they test, choose, and implement practices they consider beneficial for their families and communities. This standard ensures that individuals engaging with programs or services feel adequately supported, empowered, and valued. It emphasizes the importance of providing clear guidance, accessible resources, and timely responses to foster trust and enable meaningful participation. By embedding support as a quality standard, programs and services can create a nurturing environment where all participants feel equipped, respected, and empowered to engage fully.

	Criteria	Indicators
1	The episodes clearly illustrate the different perspectives that might help support the intended audience in making an informed decision to try and/or adopt a practice or change their behaviour or attitude.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Facilitating contexts are discussed. ● The benefits of the proposed practice and behaviour are clearly explained and illustrated through discussions about personal experiences as well as expert opinion/advice. ● Harmful behaviours are identified, including consequences, and advice is provided to avoid them. ● Barriers to the adoption of proposed practices or behaviours that exist within communities are discussed and options are given to overcome those challenges. ● More complex issues are discussed over several weeks of programming and cover a number of different angles. ● GL programs include several weeks of Digging deep segments on the same farming issue.
2	Programs provide supporting information and linkages that enable our audience to follow through on their own	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Our audience is given the location and availability of services related to program content in their communities. ● Program content is made available on other platforms like IVR, social media, etc. ● The programs are designed, researched and produced in concert with other organizations that are able to support our audience to follow through in their decisions on the practice or behaviour.
3	The radio station is actively pursuing opportunities to learn from other experiences in development programming.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Staff have the opportunity to attend and participate in different networking activities. ● Opportunities for partnerships and funding are sought out through these networks. ● The station's vision and mission reflect a desire to serve the local community and discuss issues that positively contribute to development. ● Be more audience centered and proactive in terms of GEI