Terms of reference of listening clubs for community protection resilience

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Objective of listening clubs

Listening clubs constitute a space that allows a group of people to listen to a radio programme together, discuss the programme, ask questions in order to clarify what it was about, and even create their own radio programmes.

Generally speaking, community listening clubs aim to improve access to information for rural populations, particularly women, and to strengthen their power to take action. A listening club is a group of men and women who wish to actively and systematically listen to radio broadcasts with a view to debating their content and, in particular, putting into practice the lessons learnt from these programmes. Listening clubs also aim to conceive and lead their own radio programmes on specific issues, chosen during their discussions, in order to clarify any questions they may have.

Their objective also forms part of Oxfam’s protection mandate (the fight against violence, coercion and deliberate deprivation) and its strategic objectives related to the fight against poverty and to gender equality in terms of access to resources, goods and services and involvement in decision-making. A tendency towards equality and parity between women and men is an important condition of the viability and sustainability of communities’ social development.

The clubs’ approach incorporates a strong focus on gender in all their activities, and aims to boost the visibility and decision-making power of women. This approach is therefore centred not on women, but on relations between men and women, also boosting the involvement of men and the expression of the respective needs of each group. Women and men participate actively and on an equal footing in the life of community listening clubs.

What do people talk about in the clubs?

The clubs must talk about issues relating to the different problems encountered in the communities and possible solutions. They must listen to programmes, debates or songs relating to their own protection problems and focusing on women’s problems. These problems may include women’s access to inheritance, land, water, information, education, local decision-making bodies, democracy and governance, the cultivation of peace, and sensitisation concerning sexual and conjugal violence, early marriage of girls and human rights.
How they work

Whether they are female, male or mixed, listening clubs encourage their members to express needs or expectations related to their daily lives. The radio acts as a resource that provides elements of response, whether through the intervention of an expert or by fostering debates within the clubs. Thus, in the context of the protection project implemented by Oxfam, the role of the listening clubs will be to listen to broadcasts made by activity leaders1 from CEPROSSAN (Oxfam’s partner organisation) via community radio stations, and to organise community debates in order to provide clarification.

In this context, community or rural radio is a medium that is run by and for the local population. The objective of listening clubs is not to provide access to some unique knowledge “issued” by a certain medium or institution and aimed at the population, but to help knowledge emerge out of exchange between participants and debates led by the community itself. We therefore have to draw a distinction between community listening clubs and groups of listeners organised into “radio clubs”, where the presence of men is often predominant and there is no interaction with the radio other than to create a “fan club”. Listening clubs also differ from radio clubs in that listening clubs actually create radio programmes, in order to spread key messages about their chosen topics.

Thanks to the active participation of their members, the clubs will thus become citizens’ groups where men and women share their concerns and needs in terms of protection, obtain otherwise inaccessible information and undertake actions together.

The way in which they work may vary depending on the context, but it broadly corresponds to the following mechanism:

1. Identification of a topic/theme

The listening club members discuss their own development priorities and choose themes to examine in more depth through the community protection structures (CPSs). The process and debates are run by leaders. The themes are identified in relation to the protection problems observed and the action plans put in place. Initially, it is the partners’ activity leaders who run these sessions aimed at identifying themes. However, the members of CPSs and listening clubs, or even community leaders, gradually take over. In any case, we encourage the sessions being led by women, who should be identified in advance and trained for this role.

2. Production of the broadcast

Once the theme has been chosen, the clubs, with the support of CPSs, Oxfam and its partners:

• Select a journalist who can host a programme and inform the radio station of the programme they wish to broadcast;
• Provide the radio station with a programme created by the communities and led by community or CPS members (the radio station takes care of the editing and broadcasting);
• Organise repeat broadcast sessions in their localities;
• Create a timetable for broadcasts and share it with their communities.

With the support of other specialist actors, the radio stations may also receive specific training in order to fulfil their role as an intermediary of debate and respond to the process initiated in the best way possible. They may discuss the topic in order to be able to respond to the request made.

1 The activity leader is a member of staff of Oxfam or of the partner in charge of the project, or someone from the community who has been recruited to lead the project.
3. **Active listening**

The programme is broadcast, and active listening can commence. There are several ways to listen (collectively, individually, live, etc.). In the context of the protection project, material support to enable the listening of broadcasts and dissemination must be made available for the members of the listening clubs and CPSs. This means that the members of the protection structures and listening clubs will be able to listen again to the broadcasts and songs with protection messages. As many people as possible should be encouraged to listen.

4. **Dialogue and debate**

Debates are organised within the clubs and with other clubs or community members, with local authorities and all other stakeholders. The support of an external expert is sometimes necessary for specific themes. In the context of the protection project, CPS members are partnered with listening club members, and may give clarification about certain matters. They write questions for which there are no answers. During their appearances, activity leaders may provide clarification. The programmes and debates are recorded and broadcast.

5. **Decision-making**

The debates give rise to decisions on what action to take. Thus, the women and men in the listening clubs can get involved in the action plans of CPS members.

6. **Seeking means for action**

The listening club members seek means for action (particularly human resources, partnerships, etc.). They get involved in the different community action plans. They may interact with the CPSs and local civil society organisations.

7. **Actions**

The planned actions are realistic and may be periodically reviewed.

8. **Feedback on experiences**

The lived experience, results obtained, difficulties and successes are all documented and fed back to the communities. The activity leaders will play a crucial role in this process.

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**Example composition of a listening club**

**Context:** a village with four districts, with each district comprising 200 households.

**Activity:** creation of four listening clubs for the four districts.

Purchase of four solar-powered radios. Support in terms of purchase of batteries, pens, paper for documenting the questions, communication units. Training of listening club members. Distribution of broadcast timetables, even for those of other protection actors relating to different protection themes. Distribution of radios to the most vulnerable households, targeting women in particular (project yet to come).

A listening club may include up to 50 people. The criteria should be defined with community members via the CPSs. Encourage female community leaders to join these clubs.
Hoped-for results for the listening clubs

- Genuine space for expression and action and for spreading knowledge of protection themes.
- Space for accessing information for the most vulnerable.
- Vehicle for disseminating necessary knowledge (better knowledge of rights so as to better exercise them) and a point of reference in the community concerning protection issues.
- Place for sensitisation on different issues affecting the communities.
- Dialogue, information and knowledge-sharing have a direct impact on changes in practices and behaviour in the community. The clubs promote the exchange of knowledge, information and ways of doing things; they stimulate reflection – and therefore change – by involving all actors within the community in issues that relate to their own local development problems.
- Listening clubs open the rural community up to the outside world. With information and communication, villagers discover surrounding villages, local associations and leaders, etc. These encounters are the first steps towards local synergies and partnerships.

Benefits of listening clubs for the communities

- **Confidence in self and local leadership, especially for women.**
  Speaking in public enables women to increase their confidence and power. Their place in society changes. Furthermore, the entire community becomes aware of the value of participating in the development process.

- **Solidarity and dialogue**
  Differences can be resolved through dialogue and exchanging views, sometimes between people who never speak to each other or are involved in a dispute. Listening clubs are therefore also “understanding clubs” capable of stimulating collaboration and boosting dialogue and solidarity. People can speak freely about taboo subjects, such as issues related to sexual violence. Via the intermediary of the radio, a dialogue is started within communities, helping to combat disinformation, prejudices and harmful traditional beliefs.

- **Collaboration and social mobilisation**
  Community listening clubs foster collaboration and social mobilisation among social development actors. Listening club members become aware of their place as citizens with rights and duties within their community, and of the importance of organising and regrouping themselves so to as to better act together within their environment.

- **Organisational and listening skills**
  At the institutional level, villagers must ensure that the club is run democratically. This strengthens the need for consensus and for listening, as well as organisational skills. Listening club members strengthen their listening skills from the perspective of other actors, thanks to the search for common ground that facilitates action.

- **Pleasure of coming together**
  We often forget to mention this aspect, and yet the simple pleasure of coming together and listening to each other remains a crucial factor in the success of listening clubs.