



FREEDOM FONE

Area of Focus: Agricultural information dissemination and collection

How it works: Freedom Fone is an open source, interactive voice-based communications platform that enables users to engage with their audiences across literacy, language, and connectivity barriers. Interactive voice menus can be programmed to provide localized and multi-language agricultural information on demand. Callers can navigate via keypad or voice, and Freedom Fone also has a voicemail feature for providing quick audience feedback for future evaluation and/or playback. The software does not require the caller or user to have internet access.

The platform provides a measure of security with role-based access control. Automated callback capability enables content providers to reach populations that are reluctant to call-in due to cost barriers. Freedom Fone can be deployed in an environment with irregular power supply as a stand-alone system with battery backup, and where internet access is available it can be connected to voice over internet protocol (VoIP) services such as Skype.

Technology used: Interactive voice response, voice enabled GSM gateways, dedicated computers, [FreeSWITCH](#)

Implementer/Funder: Freedom Fone is a project conceived and made possible by the Kubatana Trust of Zimbabwe, a civil society non-governmental organization (NGO). It received a 2008 Knight Foundation grant to support platform development and additional support from Internews Europe and Hivos.

Fees: Standard phone rates apply, and vary greatly. Some advanced dialer features are based on outgoing call volume.

Primary Markets: Freedom Fone was developed in Zimbabwe, but has been deployed nearly 100 times to date, with confirmed usage by 23 projects in 15 countries. Check www.freedomfone.org/users for deployment updates.

Users: Agricultural service providers, health service providers, community radio stations, NGOs, farmers, rural and urban populations with limited internet access, youth, crisis-affected communities

Business Model: Freedom Fone follows a “freemium” model, where basic functions are free and open source, while users pay for advanced dialer features, technical support, and cloud hosting. The potential for advertising revenue is also being explored.

Impact: While impact is anecdotal, Freedom Fone was used by Farm Radio International to improve two-way communication with listeners at nine different radio stations in 4 countries. Interactive Voice Response (IVR) was used to make short voice menus on market prices, weather forecasts and agricultural practices. In addition to IVR, the Freedom Fone platform provided an outlet for listeners to call in and record voicemail messages.

For more information visit: www.freedomfone.org

Source: Interview with Bren Burrell of Freedom Fone, August 15, 2012. Update: Bart Sullivan of Farm Radio Intl, May 20, 2013.

DISCLAIMER

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