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January 2001 – Network News

Our partners help us set new directions

Last fall, a small group of Farm Radio Network partners traveled to Canada from Africa, Asia and Latin America to join Board, staff and volunteers in the final stages of a year-long program review and planning process.

Asking our partners to participate was a natural step. The Network's most valuable resource is the vast experience, insight and capacity of our overseas partners. Their contribution to our program – script adaptation and translation, studio time, on-air talent and broadcast facilities – is estimated at more than C\$10 million annually.

With financial support from the Canadian International Development Agency, we were also able to consult with development communication experts in Canada.

All participants in the review acknowledged the unique and important role of the Network in promoting the exchange of useful information amongst farmers. We have reaffirmed our focus on radio to strengthen rural communities in developing countries – and have also charted some new directions for this year and the future.

In addition to scripts on farming and the environment, we have plans for radio series on nutrition, health (including HIV/AIDS), rural income, and rural communities. For example, our series this spring focuses on the special needs of youth in rural areas: the importance of education; how to become young entrepreneurs; the misconceptions about city life; drug and alcohol abuse; AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases; how to ensure safe working conditions for children on farms; and more. Our programs deliver the messages that rural youth and young farmers need to hear.

Helping radio broadcasters get those messages out more effectively, and working with them to engage their audiences in discussions, is now also a part of our program. Our new mission statement, "We support broadcasters to strengthen small-scale farmers and rural life," signals our shift to provide more help to broadcasters so that they can do more for long-term development in their communities. We will assist with professional development and will support links that help broadcasters share their ideas and methods with one another, and make use of the resources of local community organizations and agriculture experts.

Our New Media project is an important part of our strategy. To be launched in April, this project will link radio with the Internet to bridge the digital divide in rural communities. Information access is the first step. Partners will have on-line access to our entire scripts inventory, and to our specialized resource centre of unique materials about sustainable rural development in the South. Later, the project will support on-line discussions and other interactive services to strengthen the network of farm radio broadcasters, and promote the best use of radio for rural development.

Our expanded program will require an increased investment in services to our partners. Our fundraising target for this year is \$350,000. (CIDA provides partnership funding on a 1:1 basis.) But we believe that, in the long-term, investing in the capacity of our partners is the most cost-effective way to build healthy rural communities, improve food security, and achieve sustainable development that will ensure a better world for future generations.

Partner profile: Cameroon Link

Our partners in the field are the key to our success. In Cameroon, a West African country about the size of California that is home to 15 million people, we are fortunate to work with Cameroon Link, a non-government organization (NGO) that runs the Radio Cameroon Farm Service.

Farming is important to Cameroonians. More than two-thirds work in agriculture, and the sector accounts for about 40% of the country's GDP. And radio is important to farmers. Approximately half the population is illiterate. In addition to the official languages of French and English, there are 24 African languages represented in the country. Radio – there are more than two million receivers in the country – is the medium of choice for Cameroon.

Cameroon Link links radio stations and local NGOs to serve farmers in four provinces. The Radio Cameroon Farm Service broadcasts daily in French, English, and 12 national languages on ten stations. A half-hour program, "Agriculture – Our Changing World," helps farmers adapt to change, while another half-hour program is devoted to environmental issues. In addition, the service provides programs about the education of youth, AIDS, and gender equity. The estimated audience for the Farm Service is 1.5 million people.

Cameroon Link was created in 1992, but its head, James Achanyi-Fontem, has been active in Developing Countries Farm Radio Network for more than twenty years, and received the George Atkins Award in 1996. We are pleased that Mr. Achanyi-Fontem will be joining other Network broadcasters for a week-long workshop in Ghana in March to help us develop training modules that will support them in their work.

The Ghana workshop is part of a CIDA-funded project in partnership with University of Guelph and the International Service for National Agricultural Research in the Netherlands.

New regulations for charities

Federal Bill C-6, which regulates the use of donor information collected by charities, came into effect on January 1 this year. As a charitable organization, we collect personal information about you, such as your donation history. We update our records regularly to ensure accuracy, and we are careful to disclose information only with your consent.

In addition, we strive to meet your needs for information about international development and how your support is making a difference through our program. We urge you

to let us know your preferences by completing the response form enclosed with this newsletter.

International Year of Volunteers

2001 is the International Year of Volunteers – a year celebrating the valuable contributions and achievements of volunteers around the world. Each year, Canadians spend more than a billion hours volunteering for worthwhile causes.

At the Farm Radio Network, this year is an opportunity to thank those people who support our work by offering their time and expertise, as well as to encourage further participation in voluntary activities.

Volunteers are a vital part of our organization. Many work in our Toronto office, preparing packages for distribution, processing donations, translating surveys and member correspondence, maintaining our website, and assisting in our library. In addition, we have an off-site committee of expert advisors who verify and provide input on the content of script packages.

To celebrate the International Year of Volunteers, we are asking our volunteers to share their thoughts and experiences on working with the Network. Marta Bonelli, our volunteer translator writes:

"I am truly enjoying this work, being in touch with some of the dedicated people out there determined to make a difference! I really admire the work Farm Radio is doing. I am happy to be able to help, I wish I could do more."

To all the volunteers of Farm Radio Network, and on behalf of staff and participants, thank you for your dedication and commitment!
