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May 2001 – Network News

Workshop to support broadcasters in Africa

"Can you imagine that this is the first time I've worked with researchers from our national service in Uganda – at a workshop halfway across Africa, invited by an organization in Canada!"

That was the reaction of David Okidi, a producer/broadcaster in the Farm & Environment section of Radio Uganda, to a workshop we held in March in Accra, Ghana. His comments were echoed by the other broadcasters – representing small community stations and national public broadcasters from Ghana, Mali, Cameroon and Uganda.

The workshop was the first stage of a joint project with University of Guelph and the International Service for National Agriculture Research (based in the Netherlands). The project, supported by CIDA, will develop a training program that will give broadcasters and agriculture scientists the skills they need to work together for the benefit of farmers in their regions.

Linking these two groups is important for farmers and other people in their communities. The potential benefits of improved technologies generated by research institutions are not often realized by small-scale farmers and others involved in food production and processing. Sometimes this is because improved practices are unavailable or irrelevant to their circumstances.

Even when the knowledge and technologies are relevant, poor communication limits their impact on food security and poverty reduction. Radio broadcasters who work directly with researchers have an important role to play in the sharing of local indigenous knowledge and technologies, sometimes improved by science. And well-trained, credible radio broadcasters can provide the means to empower farmers to make demands on agricultural service providers, thus ensuring that research will be focused on farmers.

Farm radio can bridge the digital divide

Recognizing the potential of rural radio stations in Africa, Asia and Latin America to serve as gateways to the worldwide web, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) held its first international workshop in farm radio broadcasting at their headquarters in Rome in February. Participants, who work directly in radio or in organizations that support rural radio, came from Canada, the United States, Europe and Africa to find ways to converge radio and the internet for the benefit of farmers and rural communities.

Nancy Bennett, Executive Director of Developing Countries Farm Radio Network, provided an overview of how networks are key to development. The Farm Radio Network's project in Russia is an example of how broadcasters can meet their peers, access relevant information (especially technical information that has been adapted especially for radio), consult agriculture experts and share broadcasting tips and audio files – all on the Internet.

Operated by the Network's Russian partner, the Russian website has strengthened the network and opened up a world of information to farmers who have radios, not computers. As radio broadcasters in Africa gain access to the Internet, this project will serve as a model for a sustainable communication strategy that will open up opportunities for farmers across the continent.

Volunteer Reflections

The people who volunteer at the Network are an important part of our success. Not only do they help keep our administrative costs low, they bring to our work a diversity of experience, expertise and enthusiasm.

To celebrate International Year of Volunteers, we have asked those involved in our work to reflect on their volunteer experience. The response has been overwhelming. Many identified that volunteering has contributed to their personal growth. Others expressed a desire to bring about change and a commitment to our mission. Two volunteers recently shared their thoughts:

I really enjoyed my experience volunteering for Farm Radio Network. [I am] impressed with how organized and sophisticated Farm Radio Network is, given the small staff...I am very impressed with the job they do – responding to a tremendous need around the world – and even with such a short acquaintance I am fully committed to their goals and objectives.

Bonnie Thorn, Volunteer Office Assistant

Volunteering is very helpful to me. I've learned how the organization works, made new friends, broadened my view of international issues and, most importantly, I found the chance to contribute in the community – to help other people. I am very proud to say that I am a volunteer!

Jill Yan Zhou, Volunteer Mailing Assistant

A special thank you to the many volunteers dedicated to helping us support radio broadcasters and rural farmers and their families.

Partner Update: Radio Sonora Radio Fides, Costa Rica.

Radio partners around the world are key to the success of the Network. Their work and dedication help get information to the areas most in need. To acknowledge these achievements, the George Atkins Communications award was established in 1991. This award is given annually to a Network partner who demonstrates excellence in farm radio broadcasting.

This year's recipient, Beltrán Meza Quiros, of Radio Sonora Radio Fides in Costa Rica, joined the Farm Radio Network in December 1992. In a recent letter he describes his daily radio program, "Dialogo Agropecuario" (Farmers' Dialogues) which has been on the air for over ten years!

It is broadcast by a radio station that has a good audience, especially families in rural areas. In Costa Rica, at 5 am (the time the program is broadcast) most farmers start to get ready to go to the fields, thus they listen to the program and your good advice while eating breakfast.

In regards to the program preparation, we do this during the day with visits to different institutions in the agricultural, business and industrial sector. We also touch political aspects that are very important to support the day to day struggles of our listeners. We record many interviews and the people participate as main characters in a form of role playing.

Thanks to your advice and teaching materials, we are helping our farmers to strengthen their families and the rural areas of our country.

As winner of the 2000 George Atkins Communication Award, Beltrán will receive US\$250 to support his professional development and further enhance his radio programs. Thanks to the work of partners like Beltrán, the practical, useful information in our educational scripts can continue to reach increasing numbers of rural people!

Fundraising Campaign Update

Our annual fundraising campaign is well underway and we are pleased to report that by March 31 we were already at 10% of our goal, with gifts from 20% of our donors. If you have not yet renewed, or if you would like to make an additional 2001 donation, please use the enclosed coupon and postage-paid envelope or phone our office to make a credit card pledge.

Your gift is important in helping us reach this year's fundraising goal of \$200,000. And reaching this goal enables us to continue to provide educational material to our radio partners who are working to alleviate poverty and hunger around the world. Please consider a gift today for the future of rural farmers.

Special Donations

A special thank you for a special gift from Lewis Melville, who has produced and recorded a CD entitled *Work Songs*. Some of the proceeds from the sale of the album have been generously donated to Farm Radio Network!

Work Songs is the fourth in a series of theme compilations and features 59 songs about work by 59 different artists.

For more information on the CD, please contact lmelville@uoguelph.ca or DROG, P.O. Box 24062 Bullfrog, Guelph, Ontario, N1E 6V9. Thank you, Lewis, and everyone who supported this album!

We also want to make special note of John Core and Ontario Dairy Farmers, Region Nine. At a recent event held to commemorate John Core's twenty years of service to dairy farmers, the organizing committee collected donations from the many people present.

Mr. Core asked that the proceeds be donated to the Farm Radio Network. Our thanks go out to everyone who contributed to this generous gift, and especially to Mr. Core, who has been a loyal supporter of farmers around the world for many years.
