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Coping with natural disasters – radio programs to improve the stability of rural communities

Radio can help communities prevent and cope with weather-related disasters. In recent years, natural disasters have increased in frequency and severity – almost two billion people were affected by disasters between 1990 and 1999. News reports and television appeals highlight the disabling effects of floods, hurricanes, fires and earthquakes in North America. Yet, the impact of these disasters is often more severe in developing countries, where over 90% of disaster-related deaths occur.

Natural disasters can have long-term consequences when they strike countries with limited resources. In these areas, poverty often causes a natural phenomenon, such as a flood, to have devastating outcomes.

For example, in Central America, Hurricane Mitch caused more than 13,000 deaths and affected 6.4 million people. Much of the damage was related to existing farming practices. Poverty and limited access to productive land has led to intensive, inappropriate farming practices. This, in turn has caused deforestation and loss of vegetative cover, thus reducing the ability of soil to absorb heavy rainfall, and making erosion and landslides more likely. In this case, a fragile natural environment heightened the damage of the hurricane and crippled the ability of local people to protect their communities against future disasters.

In contrast, in parts of Honduras soil conservation practices (such as vegetation contours, rock walls and tree fallows) helped people weather the storm with less loss.

There are practical strategies that can reduce people's vulnerability to natural disasters. For instance, a farmer can help protect her harvest by planting storm-resistant crops, diversifying cropping systems and using windbreaks or shelter belts. Our radio partners can help farmers share this information.

Our next radio series, scheduled for distribution this summer, will include information needed to address the growing problem of natural disasters, such as:

- community development as key to local disaster recovery;
- how to protect livestock in the event of a disaster;
- how to improve grain storage;
- how to practice water and soil conserving strategies.

Farmers in developing countries need information to prevent natural disasters and minimize loss, so they can support their families and strengthen their communities. At Developing Countries Farm Radio Network, we are helping radio broadcasters build awareness of disaster and emergency issues, and providing the tools necessary to reach rural people most in need.

Research + Radio = Results

Efforts of government to curb public sector spending have resulted in reduced investment in agriculture research. International research agencies, research stations in the field, and publicly funded universities are increasingly dependent on the private sector for financing.

This trend must be treated with caution.

It is possible that valuable research projects will be jeopardized, because they are not in the industry's interest. For example, it might be difficult to find private sector funding for a project that aims to increase yields and at the same time reduce the use of fertilizers and pesticides.

Similarly, relying on private sector funding to communicate research results to farmers is a risky proposition. Does it make sense to help farmers adopt methods that will reduce sales? Perhaps not – but helping farmers reduce costs, use of chemical fertilizers and the need for groundwater can save billions of dollars needed for emergency aid.

Research – and programs that help farmers apply research – is not an expense. It is an investment in sustainable development, with global impact.

We need public investment in research, to develop environmentally sustainable technologies that can be widely shared. And we need public support for communication programs that help poor, illiterate smallholder farmers share the benefits of agriculture research.

Partner Update: ViSCA receives the George Atkins Communication Award

The George Atkins Communication, established in 1991, recognizes the contributions Network partners make to sustainable farming and food security.

Adelina Carreno of ViSCA Radio DYAC in the Philippines is the 2001 award winner. Adelina joined the Network in 1990, and is the producer of ViSCA Radio's School on the Air (SOA), an education program for rural farmers.

The on-air school has conducted more than twenty sessions, focusing on topics related to small-scale farming and health and nutrition. Currently there are "classes" on raising goats and argi-entrepreneurship, with planned sessions on dairy cattle production. To teach these issues over the radio, the SOA program has adapted many Network scripts and broadcast ideas.

Twice a month Adelina visits the School on the Air farmers in their home villages. Close contact with participating communities helps Adelina understand issues affecting them, in order to deliver helpful, effective programs that are important to her listeners.

Adelina will receive \$250 for professional development to further her work in the field of communication. Thanks to the commitment and hard work of Network partners like Adelina, rural communities around the world benefit from your support.

Volunteer Profile – Seema Chandroga

Our office team is made up of a strong and committed group of volunteers, without whom our work would not be possible. They donate their time and talent to support long-term development in rural areas. **Seema Chandroga** is one of these volunteers. Seema has been involved with the Network for over two years, helping with mailing campaigns, and providing administrative support. She has even helped us in the reading of Network scripts, as part of our in-house editing process.

When asked why she enjoys volunteering at Farm Radio Network, Seema said, "Because I think our work is important. Farmers can improve their lives and their communities by communicating ideas and information through the Network. And I find it rewarding, knowing that my contribution makes a difference to others around the world."

Victoria Houston, Volunteer Coordinator, has worked with Seema since she started, and knows first hand the energy volunteers bring to the office. "It is always a pleasure to have Seema here. She's enthusiastic and always willing to help out – even on short notice! Her contributions over the last couple of years have been considerable – and certainly appreciated by all staff. I hope she remains with the Network for many years."

The impact of volunteer contributions at Farm Radio Network is enormous – and continues to grow. Thank you to all the dedicated and generous members of our volunteer team.

A special thank you

Developing Countries Farm Radio Network is a proud and grateful recipient of a grant from the **Citizen's Bank of Canada**.

As a stake-holder focused company, Citizen's Bank feels that their members are the voice of the communities they live in and should therefore direct the bank's community support. Through the shared interest fund, bank members nominate a charity for support.

This generous grant to the Network was made possible through a nomination from one or more of our loyal donors. By choosing to nominate us, you have continued to show your support for long-term, sustainable development.

Thank you to our donors who continue to find new ways to support our work, and to Citizen's Bank of Canada for their leading role as a caring corporation.

Will your employer match your gift to Developing Countries Farm Radio Network?

Many companies match a portion of the charitable gifts of their employees – in some cases you can double the amount of your gift. This means doubling the impact that your donation has in helping rural farmers and their families.

Perhaps your company is one with a matching program? Sometimes your gift is eligible for matching through a parent company or an affiliate. It's easy to find out – and it can make a huge difference to our work. Check with your Human Resources department or corporate donations officer, or for more information contact Victoria Houston at extension 30.

An easy way to give...

Do you have a vehicle you wish to dispose of? Each year 40,000 vehicles are taken off the road in Canada, and AADCO, a car-recycling company, is helping charities – and the environment – through their vehicle donation program.

Donated vehicles are picked up by AADCO and recycled for parts or sold at dealer auctions. The proceeds are sent to a charity of your choice, such as Farm Radio Network, and a tax receipt is issued for the donation. Last year AADCO disposed of over 12,000 vehicles – that's 23,000 tons of recycled metal and much needed revenue for Canadian charities!

If you have an unwanted vehicle, please consider donating it to AADCO on our behalf. Not only will you be supporting our work, but also by ensuring that your vehicle is properly recycled, you will be making an environmentally responsible choice.

For more information please contact Victoria Houston at extension 30 – or call AADCO directly at 416.385.8309 (toll free: 1.800.463.5681).
