



Developing
Countries
Farm Radio
Network

Network News

FEBRUARY 2004

Radio Programs for Women

Women have always been – and remain – the deciding influence on the quality of life and the well-being of their families and communities.

- Women and sustainable development, UNESCO, 2001

In developing countries, the majority of small-scale farmers are women. Women are responsible for half of the world's food production and between 60 and 80 percent of the food produced in most developing countries. Since its inception, the Farm Radio Network has addressed the needs of rural women by providing practical information that they can apply in their homes, gardens and fields.

Radio programs that are specifically developed for women listeners are especially important when addressing nutrition issues. Home gardens planted and tended by women for production of legumes and vegetables provide essential nutrients and are often the only food available during lean seasons or if the main harvest fails. Rural women also provide most of the labour for post-harvest activities — storage, handling, stocking, processing and marketing. And they are primarily responsible for meeting the nutritional needs of their families.

Other farm radio programs for women are equally important, as women assume an even more prominent role in agriculture. Armed conflict, rural-to-urban migration of men in search of paid employment, and rising mortalities due to HIV/AIDS have led to an increase in the number of female-headed households in the developing world. In sub-Saharan Africa, one-third of rural households are now headed by women. These women tend to be younger, less educated, have less land to work, less capital and less extra farm labour than their male counterparts. One direct result of this has been an increase in malnutrition in these households as women adjust cropping patterns and farming systems in response to shortages of inputs such as labour and capital. This often results in decreased crop production and cultivation of less nutritious crops.

This spring, we are producing a radio kit specially developed for women, primarily about nutrition. When women have access to appropriate information, they can make better choices that benefit their families and their communities. And radio is the best way to reach rural women – particularly since they account for two thirds of the world's billion illiterate.

Our radio kit will help broadcasters address food security issues that concern women in rural communities. For example, one script, "Women produce most of our food," helps women (and men) understand the importance and value of the work of women farmers. Another script in the package, "Nutrition – advice to an expectant mother," provides tips on healthy foods, breastfeeding and the benefits of kitchen gardens.

We're also providing broadcasters with practical strategies to make their radio programs more effective and useful to women listeners. For example, we encourage partners to:

- Research the listening patterns of women: when they listen, and what formats appeal to them.
- Survey women farmers to find out what information they need.
- Interview successful women farmers and seek out women experts to provide on-air advice.

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- Understand that women's and men's roles in agriculture are not the same, and that this needs to be considered when planning radio programs.

With women's contribution to household food security, and their increasingly important role in agriculture, meeting their information needs is essential for food security and rural development.

International Women's Day

At Farm Radio Network we work to improve conditions in low-income countries and focus on long-term, sustainable change. Achieving these development goals requires active participation and equality of women around the world.

March 8th 2004 is International Women's Day – a day to recognize the contributions women make in their communities and to promote and protect the equal rights of women everywhere.

In developing countries women's activities are central to food security. They produce most of the food and provide most of the labour for food processing, marketing and preparation. Yet they often lack access to land, credit, extension services and training.

You can help to change this! This March 8th take action:

- Learn more about women's issues and the challenges women face everyday.
- Find out about – and participate in! - celebrations and activities in your community. For more information about what's going on, check out www.swc-cfc.gc.ca
- Support Farm Radio Network, and help us continue to meet the needs of rural women around the world.

Fundraising Update

Our winter appeal to launch our 2004 fundraising campaign is now in progress. Our goal is to raise \$200,000 through our direct mail appeals to individual donors. This amount is matched by the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), and will be used to support the rural radio stations in our network. Their radio programs, in turn, benefit many millions of small-scale farmers whose main source of information is their local radio station.

Please give generously this year – and help us reach new supporters! Last year, 2,400 direct mail donors contributed \$170,000 to our program. With just 200 more donors, and an average gift increase of 10%, we will meet our goal.

Monthly donations increasing

Our monthly giving plan offers additional convenience to our donors and provides financial stability throughout the year for our work. If you are currently a direct mail donor, consider the convenience of:

- Automatic deductions from your chequing account or charges to your VISA or MasterCard
- No campaign appeals
- An annual receipt

Last year, Friends of Farmers donors contributed \$11,000 to our program. Our goal for 2004 is to sign up 50 new members and raise a total of \$25,000 (an average monthly gift of just \$15) for further program development.

To inquire about our monthly plan, please call Victoria Houston at 416-971-6333 (toll-free 1-888-773-7717), extension 30.

Richard Curriel V.

Network promotes peer-to-peer learning



Maria Luisa Diaz

When George Atkins founded Developing Countries Farm Radio Network, his philosophy was that development is based on knowledge, and farmers and farm broadcasters in the South have plenty of knowledge to share.

Our newest volunteer, Maria Luisa Diaz, is a case in point. A student of mass communications at the University of Costa Rica with experience as a radio producer and script writer, she has much to offer our radio partners. During a recent visit to Canada, Maria volunteered to share lessons learned from her experience producing a regional radio show for women, by contributing an article for our partner newsletter, *Voices*.

Here's some of what she wrote:

Last year, I participated in the production of a radio show for women sponsored by a large transnational corporation. The show broadcast information relevant to the daily lives of women via interviews, commentaries and fact vs. myth updates.

A topic we dealt with in the show was women's nutrition. However, the Executive Producers restricted medical and nutritional information to just two minutes each day compared to a larger amount of time focused on weight-loss diets, healthy low-fat cooking and fast-food restaurant-sponsored advertising. For a show airing in Central America, we thought we weren't hitting the right note. We believed advice about good nutrition, rather than weight-loss diets, would be more relevant.

So we opened a mailbox address and made a fax number available. We asked the program hosts to request listener feedback about the issues they wanted covered and why. I clearly remember a letter from a woman in her late forties saying: "I love your show, but here are some issues you should be talking about..." Her list of interests included medical and nutritional insights. She was not the only one who felt this way.

We took her letter (with others) to the Executive Producers along with a proposal to redistribute the time per issue in each show. However, since our client was a corporation and not our audience, the value of the audience feedback wasn't recognized, and no changes were made.

The good news is that when working with community radio, the rules are different. When the audience – not the sponsor – is the client, programmers are able to develop radio geared to the listeners.

We hope that Maria's experience will be a catalyst for our partners to discuss ways to approach commercial sponsorship so that content that responds to the needs of their listeners is not compromised.

Thank you, Maria! We are grateful to you – and to all of the volunteers who contribute in so many ways to our work.

Reaching new audiences in Africa

We're always excited to hear from radio broadcasters with whom we have long-standing partnerships. Equally exciting, however, is learning more about new Network partners.

Recently, several broadcasters from the Democratic Republic of Congo, Mali, South Africa, Nigeria and Ghana joined the Network. One of these is the Foundation for Rural Education, Empowerment and Development (FREED).

Based in Tamale, in northern Ghana, FREED has a radio program that offers an innovative alternative to formal education. Responding to a need for more primary and junior education in the region, FREED began using FM radio to broadcast prepared school lessons. On-air lessons in math and English now reach students in remote and underserved areas.

FREED's educational programming isn't only for children. In the evenings, FREED airs educational segments for adults on health, agriculture and resource management. Through documentaries, dramas and interviews, they broadcast fifteen hours each day, in English & Dagaare.

FREED's programming is a great example of radio reaching people who are physically and socially isolated – people who may not have any other means to obtain the information they need.

We are very pleased about our new partnership – and so is FREED. "We are really excited about this association with your organization," writes Hippolyt Pul, from FREED, "and the opportunities it offers us to develop and enhance the quality of our programs. We look forward to a very fruitful working relationship with you!"

Campaign Update: Radio to benefit rural children

Thank you to everyone who contributed to our Fall 2003 campaign to produce radio programs about improving conditions for rural children. We received almost \$40,000 in response to our appeal, and an equivalent amount from CIDA. With this funding, we were able to distribute radio packages to over 500 stations and broadcasters in December. Scripts covered child safety and labour issues on the farm, the safe use of pesticides and appropriate tools and workloads for children. Broadcasters also received background information about children's issues and material to help them research and produce additional programs using other information sources.

HIV/AIDS Alliance

Supporting broadcasters in developing countries to strengthen small-scale farming and rural communities.

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Now it is even easier to support rural development – we are accepting on-line donations. Please visit our website donations section at www.farmradio.org.

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