



Developing Countries Farm Radio Network

FINDING A NICHE FOR SPECIALIZED CROPS AND LIVESTOCK

What are Niche Agricultural Products?

For many small-scale farmers, the difference between simply surviving versus generating income to exit poverty is the ability to create a product that serves a small niche market. Niche farm products are specialized crops or livestock for which there is a very particular but limited market. Examples include apples, mushrooms, irish potatoes and other vegetables, flowers, spices, fruits and medicinal herbs. Snails and rabbits are types of animals or small livestock that are considered niche products in parts of Africa. If a farmer chooses niche products wisely, they can provide both needed income and, in some cases, food for farm families. They can also provide "insurance" for times when staple crops fall short of expectations.

The market for niche crops is relatively small and specialized. This is what can make them attractive to the smallholder - the markets are too small for big producers to bother with. On the other hand, this also makes it a risky strategy for smallholders. The market could dry up suddenly or, if it grows, it could become attractive to large producers that can easily undercut the smallholder's prices. Converting whole farms to the production of niche crops is therefore a risky strategy. Careful planning together with the support of a farmer's organization can help ensure that niche crops improve the livelihood of farming families without endangering basic food security by taking too many resources away from the production of staples.

To help farmers develop profitable niche farming



strategies without jeopardizing household food security, we recently developed a package of radio scripts focused on this theme. In this package, we profile seven niche products: mushrooms, cashews, jatropha trees, potatoes, snails, bamboo trees, and rabbits. None of these are considered staple crops in Africa, however there are markets for them. And, even if they're not marketed, these products can be used domestically within households. Jatropha, for instance, can produce lamp oil, lowering households expenditures on kerosene, and rabbits and snails can provide good sources of protein. In our scripts, we emphasize the importance of forming farmers' groups to enable cooperative marketing. The scripts also identify strategies for working with other organizations, including processors, retailers, and national or international research organizations to help farmers groups successfully enter and thrive in niche markets.



African Farm Radio Research initiative (AFRRi)

DCFRN is excited to announce that the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation has approved a grant for AFRRi - a 42-month action research project to be implemented in 5 sub-Saharan African countries - Ghana, Mali, Malawi, Uganda and Tanzania. The Foundation has made the grant to our partner, World University Service of Canada (WUSC). DCFRN designed AFRRi and is being engaged by WUSC to implement it.

Next to person-to-person agricultural extension, radio is the best medium for sharing information about farming and food security with and among smallholder farmers in Africa. However, the effectiveness of radio in improving food security has not been well studied, and there is much to be learned about best practices. As we enter a new era of cheap and accessible cell phones, MP3 players and other communication technologies, we need to learn more about how best to employ radio-based communication strategies to advance farmers' goals of food security and self-reliance.

To fill these knowledge gaps, Developing Countries Farm Radio Network, in partnership with World University Service of Canada, and with funding from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, is launching a new project called African Farm Radio Research Initiative, or AFRRi. The Gates Foundation approached DCFRN to plan and

implement this study because it recognizes our close ties with African broadcasters and our understanding of the needs of smallholder farmers. As Dr. Roy Steiner, Senior Program Officer with the Foundation wrote: "We are happy for this opportunity to support DCFRN and WUSC in implementing this important new action research project: DCFRN, because of its grassroots connections with African radio broadcasters and its knowledge of the practical information needs of smallholder farmers; WUSC, because of its strong management capacity and its commitment to knowledge and education."

The project will be a 42-month, participatory, action research program aimed at learning the most effective ways to use radio to help smallholder farmers in Africa. The project will also offer capacity-building and training services for participating radio broadcasters.

AFRRi will be implemented in

five African countries: Mali, Malawi, Uganda and Tanzania. It will be led by a Program Director, Gizaw Shibru, and Senior Research Manager, Martine Ngobo, with National Research Coordinators implementing the Project in each country. National Advisory Committees will be formed to provide advice and input in the development of action research plans. Once plans are in place, AFRRi will produce a variety of innovative farm radio programs using a wide range of formats that engage farmers in addressing food security priorities. By comparing farmers' knowledge and practices before and after the programs are broadcast, we will learn how radio and other communication technologies can be most effective.



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New Radio Drama to Address Climate Change

Smallholder farmers in Nigeria - particularly female farmers - are highly vulnerable to the impact of climate change. Many parts of Nigeria experience variability in rainfall, which threatens the livelihoods of the majority of households that depend on rain-fed agriculture. While Nigerian farmers are adjusting and developing some coping strategies independently, there is a great need to produce and disseminate information that helps them adapt their farming methods and mitigate the impact of climate change on their livelihoods and on their local ecosystems. A major challenge facing governments, research institutions, civil society organizations, and donors in meeting this need is providing such information to large numbers of people, many with very limited literacy.

Radio broadcasts are an excellent mechanism for disseminating information to farmers in Nigeria. They have many benefits:

- They are spoken-word, and therefore not constrained by illiteracy
- The technology for broadcasting and the means of receiving broadcasts (radios) are widely available and affordable
- They can use popular education methods such as drama, music, and profile actual experience of farmers

We were therefore delighted to receive word that the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) has agreed to fund the African Radio Drama Association, DCFRN, the Women Farmers Association of Nigeria and the University of Guelph to collaborate on the research, development, production, and broadcast of a 26-episode radio drama dealing with the issue of climate change in Nigeria.

Last year, DCFRN and ARDA collaborated on the production of a script for a 13-episode radio drama called [The Long Dry Season: A Tale of Greed and Resourcefulness](#) which incorporated information about desertification in a gripping radio soap opera. With IDRC funding, we will be able to produce and broadcast a lengthier drama about the effects of climate change and how farmers can adapt their farming practices to minimize the negative impact. Over the next two years, this drama will be researched, written, recorded in Nigerian languages in audio format with actors and musicians, and broadcast by 5 partner radio stations in northern Nigeria.



Farm Radio Weekly

In April 2007, DCFRN initiated an exciting pilot project called Farm Radio Weekly. This new service was identified as a way to respond to the reality that radio stations broadcast up to 365 days a year, so producers are constantly looking for new, interesting, relevant material. Most radio stations experience difficulty in satisfying their information needs. This is certainly the case in areas of the world such as rural Africa where information is generally more costly to access and, when available, is less relevant to the needs of rural radio listeners. This is despite the fact that over 52% of DCFRN's 300 partners have email and can access information electronically.

Farm Radio Weekly was designed as an electronic, easily updated news and information service for rural radio broadcasters in Africa. It was tested with a group of 26 broadcasters in nine countries of sub-Saharan Africa. We produced and released a total of five issues as part of the pilot, and then conducted an evaluation to see how it was used and whether it should be continued. The Weekly was sent by email out every Sunday night so that it arrived in broadcaster's inboxes every Monday morning. The pilot issues of Farm Radio Weekly included:

1. A weekly synopsis of relevant agricultural and rural news collected from African and international sources.
2. Tips for broadcasters, including links to DCFRN scripts information.
3. Partner program information: News about special programs our partners have produced and that other partners may want to replicate.
4. Information about training opportunities and forthcoming events of interest to broadcasters.
5. Links to websites with useful information.
6. Notice of forthcoming DCFRN program packages, competitions, surveys and news.

The response of our pilot group to this new service



was overwhelmingly positive. The news and information included in the Weekly was widely used. Sometimes stories were broadcast just as they were written, though most often, the broadcasters used the news stories to develop their own stories. One broadcaster reported that our material is "exceptionally rich and different". Another said "You are including everything that one broadcaster can want to learn."

Due to the positive results, DCFRN has decided to introduce Farm Radio Weekly as a regular service for all our members with e-mail access for at least the next year. We plan to add a French-language version in the coming months. Our long-term goal is to see this service handed over to one or more African partners who can sustain it into the future from Africa.

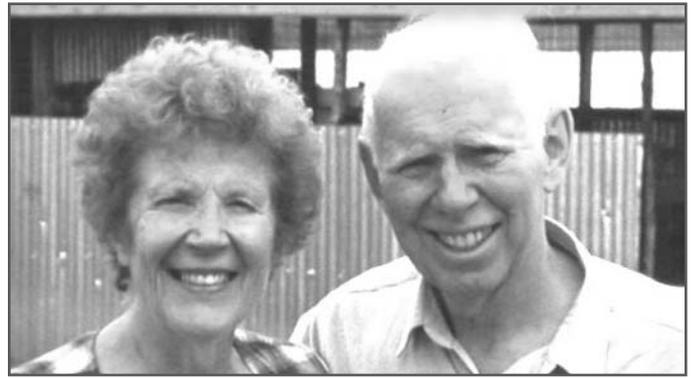
Special thanks to the creative team of staff, consultants and volunteers that worked together to produce Farm Radio Weekly, including Doug Ward, Heidi Schaeffer, Stuart Sutton-Junes, Rachel LePage, Bart Sullivan, Blythe McKay, and Christine Spetz. We also extend gratitude to the 29 radio broadcasters in Africa that participated in the pilot, provided feedback, and offered input to the Weekly.



Donor Profile

Stewart and Evelyn Dunlop

As a geographer interested in the developing world, Stewart Dunlop first learned of DCFRN through Lorna Jackson's CBC radio interview with DCFRN founder, George Atkins in 1987. Aside from Mr. Atkins' obvious enthusiasm, what encouraged Mr. Dunlop to support DCFRN was its true grassroots aid approach to helping rural farmers by disseminating information using existing and widely available technology. He also really liked the planet-friendly solutions that were provided in the radio scripts.



Recently Stewart Dunlop and his wife, Evelyn, decided to donate some securities that had gone up in value. *"It was an easy call to my broker", says Mr. Dunlop. "The whole experience fully satisfied the need to look after our own financial resources in an efficient way, as well as our desire to help DCFRN".*

A donor since the 1980's, Mr. Dunlop sums up his thoughts on DCFRN, *"As an aid organization, DCFRN delivers low cost and workable solutions in a multitude of situations. No wonder I tell people DCFRN is one of my top two charities (out of about 30)!"*

For more information about donating stocks as a tax-smart way to support DCFRN, please contact Brenda Jackson at 1888-773-7717.

Volunteer Profile

Mark Elliott



Mark Elliott wasn't a curler. But he knew what a bonspiel was - a wintertime event involving friends and family, especially popular in rural Canada. One day, it dawned on him that this could also be a great opportunity to raise funds while having a great day. "The wonderful thing about bonspiels is that people of all skill levels and all ages can play together", Mr. Elliott said, "It's a real social event". He found that some people had curled when they were young and wanted to play it again, while others just wanted to give the sport a try.

Mark's first bonspiel event was held in 2002. It attracted 50 participants and was a big hit. Since then, it has grown to involve 90 curlers with another 20 friends and family watching. The most recent Bonspiel raised over \$3,000 for DCFRN.

As the grandson of DCFRN founder, George Atkins, Mr. Elliott has grown up hearing stories of the effect radio can have on rural farmers. He believes that DCFRN is a great cause because it's really about "people helping people". "It is providing the tools to have people help themselves and additionally, helping a region in the world that needs our support very badly".

Are you a Curler?

If you are interested in running a bonspiel to benefit DCFRN in your town/neighbourhood, please contact Brenda Jackson at 1-888-773-7717 or brenda@farmradio.org for more information.



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

Contact us at:

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Now it's easier to support rural development — we are accepting on-line donations

To make a secure online donation, visit our website donations section at www.farmradio.org.

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Contributors: Kevin Perkins, Brenda Jackson, Sanoussi Mayana Issoufou

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Partner Profile

Community Radio in Niger

—By Sanoussi Mayana Issoufou

In 2002, as part of Niger's development strategy, Nigerien authorities decided to create several community radio stations across the country. With assistance from development partners (UNDP, UNICEF, FAO, the NGO "Karkara") and in certain cases community members themselves (in the case of Agoudoufoga in the Tillabery region), community radio stations were built.

The aim of this initiative was to enable communities to use the community radio stations and new information and communication technologies (ICTs) powered by solar power to help promote community self-sufficiency related to basic human needs.

There are now close to one hundred community radio stations in Niger's eight regions. There are 17 stations in Agadez, 14 in Diffa, 18 in Zinder, 5 in Maradi, 15 in Tillabery, 8 in Dosso, 5 in Tahoua and 3 in Niamey. There are also a dozen or so private radio stations in Niamey.

The community radio stations are broadcasting local interest programs in local languages and on development themes. The radio stations are meant to be apolitical and non-religious and as a result all partisan broadcasts are banned.

As a whole, the radio stations struggle to find the necessary means to produce their own programs and have pre-recorded programs on local topics. However, the broadcasts they do manage to produce, including debates, stories and radio dramas centred on social, economic and cultural aspects of development, are inspiring to their audiences.

Sanoussi Mayana Issoufou and his NGO RDD-le micro vert are helping DCFRN grow in Niger by connecting with 10 community radio stations in five of the country's regions. The stations are receiving Farm Radio Network's script packages, are providing feedback on the information received and also identifying topics they would like to see or write about for future scripts.

The stations involved in this initiative are:

- Niamey: Radio Assemblée Nationale
- Zinder: Sassounbroum; Wacha;
- Mrirriah; Malawa
- Tillabery: Libore
- Dosso: Dan Kassari
- Maradi: Zinaria de Nafouta;
- Tessaoua; Mayahi.

