



network

news

FARM RADIO INTERNATIONAL

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Helping millions of African farmers over the airwaves

Cayenne pepper to discourage elephants from grazing on farm fields . . . placing a lit candle in a container of grain before sealing it to deprive pests of oxygen, or organizing a community to clean up its water supply . . . It's these simple, low cost solutions that have been hitting the airwaves and changing the lives of smallholder farmers and their families for thirty years.

When George Atkins - Canadian farmer, journalist, and farm radio broadcaster with CBC - first visited Africa in the 1970s, he found that Africa's smallholder farmers weren't short of good ideas appropriate to their circumstances, but distance, language and limited literacy often prevented them from sharing these ideas with each other. Radio seemed the natural solution. But George soon found out that farm radio programs in Africa weren't meeting this need - instead, they were aimed at large commercial farms and plantations. Their typical programs were about machinery, chemicals or fertilizers that were irrelevant to smallholders. It wasn't what George was hoping to hear.

He asked his broadcasting peers: "if you had scripts that talked about issues of importance to subsistence farmers, would you put them on the air?" The answer was an emphatic "yes", so George returned to Canada and created Developing Countries Farm Radio Network - now called Farm Radio International. On May 1, 1979 the first script package was sent. Today, 884 radio scripts later Farm Radio International celebrates its 30th anniversary of successfully reaching farmers through what remains the cheapest and most reliable medium in the developing world - radio.

Now with a staff of 10 based in Ottawa, Farm Radio produces scripts about farming and rural development for more than 300 stations in Africa.

Umar Baba Kumo of Gombe Media Corporation in Nigeria, says he broadcasts FRI script content to about a million listeners.

"The scripts are relevant, simple and easy to adapt to local languages and settings. Messages from listeners indicate overwhelming support. A script on food/grains storage using pepper instead of chemical pesticides was particularly helpful."

Thanks to continuing support from Canadian donors, Farm Radio has been able to expand its programs through a weekly e-newsletter, and it is now conducting a Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation-funded African Farm Radio Research Initiative in five countries to discover the best ways to use radio to support smallholder farmers.

Atkins, now 91, stepped down from the Farm Radio board only two years ago, but remains a keen supporter. He says "at this time, millions of the poorest of the poor farmers of the world are hearing this information to help them increase their food supplies and have better nutrition and health. If that isn't helping people in developing countries, I don't know what is. I have to pinch myself when I think of the people who are helped by this service that is available to them by just turning on their radio."

Atkins said he hopes Canadians will continue their generous donations to support the low-cost but effective approach he started 30 years ago, noting that the world food shortages of the past year have reinforced the importance of supporting smallholder farmers around the world.

Farm Radio helps Trans World Radio to serve farmers across Kenya

by Heather Mill, Editor for Farm Radio Weekly

On a recent holiday to Kenya, I had the enjoyable opportunity to visit one of our Partners (Trans World Radio Kenya) and hear first-hand how important Farm Radio International is.

David Angango began working with Trans World Radio in 1989. His task was to produce a program called Africa Challenge for shortwave broadcast in Swaziland and South Africa. His problem was lack of information on the program's themes – agriculture, health, and the environment. The solution came from a somewhat surprising place: Canada. Mr. Angango explains that practical agricultural information was all but impossible to come by in Kenya, except for script packages that arrived regularly from the Developing Countries Farm Radio Network (now Farm Radio International). The scripts became an integral part of Africa Challenge for years to come.

By 2005, Mr. Angango had something to be even more excited about. Trans World Radio had been granted FM licenses for seven communities throughout Kenya and began broadcasting in six. With the expansion came a renewed focus for Trans World Radio-Kenya. Health became their top priority, followed by agriculture and family matters. Mr. Angango was now Programs Manager for Trans World Radio-Kenya. Unfortunately, he had lost touch with Developing Countries Farm Radio Network. But, since his office now had Internet access, he easily found Farm Radio online.

"Now we are able to get the scripts as soon as we want them – as soon as they are posted online," Mr. Angango says. Improved access to materials is important, since his team now provides content for six stations that broadcast up to six hours of original content each day. He takes advantage of Farm Radio's online materials, including scripts and Farm Radio Weekly, as they arrive.

I ask Mr. Angango how he knows it's worthwhile, how he knows the programs are relevant to his listeners. His smile widens as he talks about some of the farmers who have responded to Trans World Radio's agricultural programs. "We do get somebody [who] tells us, 'what you said here was true, I did this, let me tell you about my experience,'" he says.

He recalls a farmer who was losing his stored maize to weevils, and learned how to manage the pest through Farm Radio information broadcast on a Trans World Radio station. He flips through a number of letters, finding one from a farmer in a nearby village who learned that he could intercrop sweet potatoes and beans to improve his yields. Many of Farm Radio's scripts address the problems and interests of farmers, he assures me.

Almost twenty years after he first started using Farm Radio's resources, Mr. Angango has just one suggestion for others who work in radio: "If I talked to producers, I would say this is a resource you must [have]. If you have not subscribed, it would be good – you will learn something there, like I have done."



Heather Miller, Farm Radio International staff visiting David Angango at Trans World Radio, Partner with FRI.

Gender Equality and Radio Workshop in Ghana



Thanks to the generosity of a major donor, Farm Radio International, in collaboration with the Ghana Community Radio Network and the Centre for Sustainable Development Initiatives planned and delivered a unique five-day workshop on gender equality and radio in Puso Namongo, Ghana, Africa.

In the workshop, 19 broadcasters from 10 radio stations across Ghana were introduced to the basic concepts of gender and gender equality, and were provided with an overview of gender and development and its links to poverty eradication. A story-based approach to program production, developed by Farm Radio International through its African Farm Radio Research Initiative (AFRRI), was also presented, providing participants with a model for creating radio programs of particular benefit to female farmers. For

instance, when female farmers have the opportunity to share their stories on the air, it gives other women farmers the unique experience of hearing each other on the radio. The workshop also featured visits to two communities during which the broadcasters were able to meet with women and men and talk about challenges to gender equality in agriculture. They also discussed how these can be overcome through community action.

The broadcasters left these communities with fantastic recordings of interviews and discussions, which became the raw material for a 10-minute radio program on a gender-related topic. The workshop concluded with a live presentation of these programs and feedback from peers and community members.

This hands-on, practical experience reinforced what the participants learned during the introductory sessions, and gave them knowledge and tools needed to make their future farm radio programs more relevant to all their listeners – female and male.

Last summer, we brought you the story of a woman named Maman Christine. A farmer in Cameroon, she was able to improve her harvests thanks to information she learned from radio programs that were inspired by the scripts of Farm Radio International.

Because the large majority of farming is done by women in Africa, it is important that farm radio programs meet their needs. But this is easier said than done. While rural radio is more accessible to women than most other agricultural extension services, in too many instances, rural women are less able to benefit from it than their male counterparts. Often this is because rural radio broadcasters do not fully understand the listening needs, habits, and priorities of female farmers, nor the role that radio can play in promoting greater equality between women and men in agriculture. In February of this year, Farm Radio International was able to take an important step towards addressing this challenge.



30th Anniversary

Well Wishes

"30 years! As one who was present when George Atkins first recognised the need for such a service to assist rural broadcasters in Africa and Asia, I salute him for his vision and tireless travel over many years to achieve a very worthwhile dream. Over the years, he and his colleagues have developed a much-valued resource for countless rural radio professionals, helping to keep practical information and inspiration flowing through radio to those on the ground, who ultimately help feed the nation. Congratulations and good wishes for the future to George and your successors."

Michael Pickstock, Founder WRENmedia and former Editor BBC World Service "The Farming World"

"Congratulations for your support to smallholder farmers for thirty years. During my trips to Africa more than fifteen years ago I found radio stations that valued your practical scripts very highly -- and I have been a supporter and a donor ever since."

The Honourable Flora McDonald

"Happy 30th!

Farm Radio International has always appealed to me because it combines three passions of mine: journalism, broadcasting and giving something back. I'm so glad that George Atkins signed me up as a volunteer supporter when he did. As a journalist, I appreciate the critical importance of Farm Radio International's services for African broadcasters.

Keep up the great work!"

Lloyd Robertson, Chief News Anchor and Senior News Editor, CTV News. Farm Radio International spokesperson and sup-



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

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