

**Developing Countries Farm Radio Network****Central African Profile**

In Central Africa DCFRN has a total of 54 radio stations and organizations representing 19 per cent of our 281 radio partners! Radio stations in this area broadcast in 45 different languages, including English, French, Swahili, Pidgin, Lingala, Bassa, Ewondo, and Kikongo.

Cameroon, with 23 partners, holds the record for the Central African country with the most Network partners and the longest standing partnership. James Achanyi-Fontem of Cameroon Link has been active in Developing Countries Farm Radio Network for more than twenty years.

Radio programs developed by our partners in this region focus largely on health, children and youth, agriculture, environment, nutrition and gender/women issues.

Number of Radio Partners per Country

- Central African Republic (2)
- Chad (4)
- Democratic Rep. of the Congo (13)
- Rep. of the Congo (5)
- Burundi (2)
- Cameroon (23)
- Gabon (1)
- Rwanda (4)

A Unique Partnership for Sustainable Farming

Radio is the widest-reaching medium on the African continent, and a particularly valuable tool for low-literate populations. Drama and stories are effective formats for conveying ideas and messages to change attitudes and behaviours.

The serial drama in package #77, *The Long Dry Season: A Tale of Greed and Resourcefulness*, comes thanks to the efforts of the African Radio Drama Association (ARDA). Inaugurated in 1994, this non-profit organization seeks to contribute to Africa's development through the most accessible and appropriate methods of communication.

The Nigerian chapter of ARDA, which developed and wrote package #77, started operations in 1996. Since then, it has been at the forefront of development radio in Nigeria, developing, writing and producing a number of popular serial dramas in English, Pidgin and the three main local languages. These programs, syndicated on 30 radio stations throughout the country, touch on issues prevalent in Nigerian society such as good governance, ethnic and religious conflicts, reproductive health, HIV/AIDS, youth culture, human rights, sustainable environment and many others.

ARDA has been an active Network member since it joined in 2000. In October 2005, DCFRN commissioned ARDA to write a special 13-episode serial on the issue of desertification. This marks the first time ARDA has dealt extensively with the important but often overlooked issue of farmers and their land. Most of Africa is agrarian so a program that gives advice on sustainable methods and how to combat desertification was necessary.



Data Phido, Program Director of ARDA, describes the relationship as symbiotic. "We may write scripts for DCFRN, but we also use a lot of their ideas for our own scripts," she said in an interview at her home recently. "We have used some of the old scripts on the DCFRN website and those sent with the regular packages to develop some of our own scripts." As an example, she mentions how ARDA used scripts in package #73 on the effect of HIV/AIDS on farm labour and community food security as the main resource for a recent serial, a Hausa language program called *Kukan Kurciya*.

Mrs. Phido's face lights up as she shows me the glossy, spiral-bound volume that DCFRN sent to its members. It is the sum total of ARDA's effort, containing all 13 scripts of their anti-desertification serial, *The Long Dry Season: A Tale of Greed and Resourcefulness*. "I am very proud," she beams. Even so, ARDA had some help. The serial is based on 10 existing DCFRN scripts sent by Vijay Cuddeford, DCFRN's managing editor. "It made us more aware of the issues and the dangers of desertification," says Phido. "Once we understood the technical and scientific aspects, making it entertaining and simple to understand was a piece of cake." "A lot of work..." she laughs, remembering the sleepless nights at ARDA, "...but a piece of cake."

By: Ted O. Phido

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A word from our volunteer

Volunteers offer essential contribution to any organization and DCFRN would like to introduce Ms. Heidi Schaeffer who is a development communications practitioner and a long-time DCFRN volunteer.

Heidi, you have spent many years working in rural radio for development. How did you become involved in this work?

I have always had a passion for radio and its role in facilitating and reflecting social change. I began my career more than 20 years ago, producing environmental documentaries. Then I moved into international development work with Ryerson University where I joined the Asia-Pacific Project for Broadcasting in Development. It was one of the first development communications projects to be funded by CIDA in the late 1980's. The project involved setting up dedicated development broadcasting teams with national radio and television stations in India, Indonesia and Papua New Guinea. I guess that's when I saw first-hand how important radio was for development in rural and remote communities.

On a number of occasions, I was lucky enough to visit small villages with radio broadcasters from Bandung, Indonesia. While the official headmen had a meeting with some of the senior radio producers, the young women radio producers walked into the village to find women who would talk with them. Because of the great respect shown by the broadcasters to these rural women their relationship built over time. The rural women trusted the broadcasters. They began to share stories about their hopes for their families and their challenges and ideas about generating income.

When I returned from South-East Asia, I started to look for work in radio for development in Canada. I spent five years helping to strengthen community radio stations in Aboriginal communities in Ontario. Part of my job involved visiting radio stations in very small fly-in communities. I also helped newly emerging stations in southern Ontario. Community radio stations were these amazingly active places with people coming and going sharing information and local music was playing. I had the dream job of strengthening these stations with training and resources so they could promote and celebrate their language and culture.

Tell us about your work with the Farm Radio Network?

I joined the board of the Farm Radio Network in 1999. I knew the network was doing very important work in broadcasting for development. My main reason for joining the board was to advocate for the network to become more participatory and interactive with its partners. My background in community radio means I am biased toward participatory communication approaches.

After a while, I was invited to chair the program committee. In a few years we shifted the program focus to the area of greatest need: Africa. We began to gather important new research with African broadcast partners and conducted a training needs assessment and a programming needs assessment at that time. Over this same period, more and more of the script material was commissioned and produced by African radio partners.

In 2004, I left the board to help launch the first on-line learning initiative with Farm Radio Partners funded by the Commonwealth of Learning. This electronic discussion group is still active today and there are plans to develop a French language group discussion. I am currently looking for ways to build the electronic community of rural radio practitioners by creating opportunities for the broadcasters to meet face to face in Africa. I am also seeking funding to enable DCFRN to hire African moderators and resource people.

On behalf of Farm Radio Network I developed a partnership with UNESCO which resulted in funding for a CD-ROM of Farm Radio scripts on the Millennium Development Goals as well as a script writing contest.

I really enjoy my work with the Farm Radio Network and am very grateful to be able to continue working with rural broadcasters.

Submitted by: Heidi Schaeffer



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

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