About Farm Radio International

Established by a Canadian broadcaster in 1979, Farm Radio International is the only organization in the world focused exclusively on serving African farming families and communities over the radio. We have three main areas of work:

1. **Radio Resources** We send broadcasters research on farming issues, sample scripts, and farming news by African writers, and provide training to help broadcasters create high-quality, farmer-centred programs. We currently serve more than 640 radio partners across 39 sub-Saharan countries.

2. **Radio for Results** Our impact projects are designed to tackle specific agricultural, health, and social challenges, such as soil erosion, marketing produce, nutrition, and gender inequality. We have major projects in Tanzania, Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Ghana, Mali, Uganda, Kenya, Malawi, and Niger.

3. **Radio Innovations** Combined with newer technologies, radio can become a two-way, interactive communications tool. Finding new ways to enhance the power and reach of radio is the focus of our team at The Hangar, our innovation lab in Tanzania.

Our Input into the International Assistance Review Consultations

Our submission focuses on two themes:

1. The need for enhanced dedicated investments in sustainable small-scale agriculture as a special and core element of a clean and inclusive economic growth strategy; and

2. The opportunity to advance all development goals and objectives by investing in mobile knowledge exchange and communication platforms.
1. INVESTING IN SUSTAINABLE SMALL-SCALE AGRICULTURE

Agriculture is an essential element of an economic growth strategy in the developing world that is inclusive, lifts millions out of poverty, improves the health and welfare of rural women, creates opportunities for youth, and responds to the challenge of climate change and the need to shift to a low-carbon economy.

Farm Radio International is an active member of the Food Security Policy Group and is in full agreement with its thoughtful submission to these consultations.

Here are six key reasons why Canada should invest significantly in agriculture, pastoralism, and fisheries as a special and core element of its contribution to clean and inclusive economic growth:

1. In its 2008 *World Development Report on Agriculture for Development*, the World Bank reported that “economic growth from agriculture is at least twice as effective at reducing poverty as growth from other sectors.” This means that one million dollars invested in sustainable agriculture will lift twice as many people out of poverty as the same amount invested in industry or mining, for example.

2. About 65% of working women in sub-Saharan Africa and Southeast Asia are working as farmers. Gender equality cannot be achieved without increasing the resources and supports that are made available to female farmers. Investing in female farmers can make a huge contribution to agricultural yields and economic well-being for women and their families. The FAO says that providing women with the same access to agricultural resources as men (land, inputs, extension services, market connections) would increase their yields by 20-30%. Women farmers’ right to economic security, nutrition, and health depends on further investment in their livelihood.

3. Globally, agriculture is responsible for an estimated 14% of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. Huge reductions in GHGs can be achieved by the widespread adoption of farming practices that are low or no carbon, or even carbon negative (through the creation of carbon sinks).

4. Climate change impacts will be felt most intensely by small-scale producers in low-income countries. In Africa alone, climate change will expose 77-200 million people to greater water stress. Small scale farmers need mitigation and adaptation supports more urgently than any other group on the planet.

5. Food insecurity is a key driver of political insecurity, conflict, migration, and instability. Food insecurity and consequent rural-urban migration have been cited as contributions to the civil war in Syria.

6. Agenda 2030, embraced by the global community in 2015 and a key consideration in Canada’s International Assistance, includes the goal to “end hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture.” At least three of the eight targets set for this goal, Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) #2, directly depend on enhanced investments in agriculture.

Canada’s contribution to agriculture and food security has been significant, both as a major producer of food for the world, and through international assistance programs. The Canadian International Food Security Research Fund, for example, has made a great contribution to the development of evidence-based innovations in agriculture and food security. However, Canada’s investments in agricultural development have dropped from an average of $450 million annually between 2009-2011 down to $320 million per year since — a decline of 30%. The new government’s commitment to clean and inclusive economic growth, gender equality and women’s rights, action on climate change, and diminishing global vulnerability to conflict and migration necessitate a substantial re-investment in this area.
2. Investing in Mobile Knowledge Exchange and Communication Platforms

Agenda 2030 presents a remarkable, inspirational, and challenging vision. It calls for integrated progress in many areas, and challenges the standard practice of creating "silos" or "stovepipes" for different issues. How will we identify and weave together actions that bring about these ambitious, yet essential goals? Strong platforms\(^2\) for communication and knowledge exchange will be a key factor in our success.

Ending poverty and hunger and promoting sustainable economic growth will require the wide and rapid distribution of knowledge and information that helps job seekers find employment, farmers boost their yields and adapt to climate change, and small businesses connect to markets and credit, to name a few examples. Farmers in particular need tools to connect with one another so to aggregate their produce to access better markets and so on. And, the poor need to have their voices and needs amplified through communication channels that bring their realities to the forefront of political and social discourse.

Ensuring healthy lives and promoting well-being will depend on communication strategies that facilitate social and individual behaviour change. It will also need systems for sharing and capturing information and data related to health-related needs, outcomes, and behaviour.

Achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls requires amplifying their voices and enabling them to exchange information and knowledge. Communication strategies are needed that end harmful attitudes and provide women with the resources they need for full and equal participation in society and the economy.

\(^1\) SDG #2 includes the following targets:

- **2.3** By 2030, double the agricultural productivity and incomes of small-scale food producers, in particular women, indigenous peoples, family farmers, pastoralists and fishers, including through secure and equal access to land, other productive resources and inputs, knowledge, financial services, markets and opportunities for value addition and non-farm employment.
- **2.4** By 2030, ensure sustainable food production systems and implement resilient agricultural practices that increase productivity and production, that help maintain ecosystems, that strengthen capacity for adaptation to climate change, extreme weather, drought, flooding and other disasters and that progressively improve land and soil quality.
- **2.5** By 2020, maintain the genetic diversity of seeds, cultivated plants and farmed and domesticated animals and their related wild species, including through soundly managed and diversified seed and plant banks at the national, regional and international levels, and promote access to and fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from the utilization of genetic resources and associated traditional knowledge, as internationally agreed.
- **2.6** Increase investment, including through enhanced international cooperation, in rural infrastructure, agricultural research and extension services, technology development and plant and livestock gene banks in order to enhance agricultural productive capacity in developing countries, in particular least developed countries.

\(^2\) “Platforms” refer to ongoing program opportunities, sustained by broadcasters working in collaboration with a range of community public and private stakeholders, upon which various communication and knowledge exchange objectives can be achieved, including the collection, interpretation, and distribution of relevant information, the convening and facilitation of dialogue, and the amplification of citizens’ voices. Mobile communication systems that combine radio, mobile phones, cloud computing, and other information communication technologies can help rural people and the urban poor truly benefit from the mobile phones and radio sets that are now so common across rural Africa.
All of this must be done at scale to achieve measurable results as cost-efficiently as possible.

Exchanging knowledge, distributing information, and amplifying the voices of vulnerable populations have been, until the last decade, difficult and expensive. Books, newspapers, pamphlets, and other text-based communication products are of limited value in serving populations with low literacy. Therefore, systems for distributing information used to depend on the deployment by government, NGOs, and sometimes the private sector of trained “extension workers” to hard-to-reach areas.

Radio remains the most accessible mass medium in sub-Saharan Africa. It is a proven a vital means of reaching the majority of citizens, including remote and vulnerable populations, and providing useful information. But, on its own, it cannot distribute knowledge and amplify the voices of listeners and facilitate links between and among people and organizations. Achieving scale, producing measurable results, providing two-way interaction, and doing so economically has been so difficult that sustained investments in communication for development shrank through the 1990s and the first decade of the new millennium. All of this has changed since the start of the mobile phone revolution.

One of the most notable differences between now and when the Millennium Development Goals were launched in 2000 is the richness and reach of the information and communication technology (ICT) environment and the potential this offers for more interactive and participatory communication that reach and connect vast numbers of people at a very low cost. For example, in 2002, only one in ten adults in sub-Saharan Africa owned a mobile phone, and coverage was very limited in rural areas. Today, more than 70% of adults own mobile phones and most rural regions have cellular coverage.

Radio has been a powerful, wireless means of connecting people with information in virtually every corner of the planet for decades. The ubiquity of radio has only recently been rivalled by mobile phones. But, far from replacing radio, the mobile phone revolution has made it better than ever. Combined with mobile phones, radio has been re-born as a two-way, interactive tool that enables knowledge exchange and gives voice to those who are typically heard from the least.

Add to this the power of cloud computing, interactive voice response, remote sensing, digital video,
and drones, and we see the emergence of integrated mobile platforms that provide even poor households in remote communities with reliable sources of information, learning opportunities, and a stronger voice.

Research over several decades has shown that interactive rather than passive listening increases both knowledge and behaviour change, such as the adoption of new farming practices. Through FRI’s practical research projects supported by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Irish Aid, and USAID, Farm Radio International is showing how this innovative blend of old and new communication technologies can achieve measurable results at scale. For example, Farm Radio International has generated compelling evidence that interactive Participatory Radio Campaigns can build knowledge, support the adoption of improved farming practices, and strengthen market connections for millions of farmers at a cost of less than $1 per farmer. Further, a rigorously designed randomized clinical trial study in Burkina Faso by Development Media International found that saturation radio campaigns on health-related themes saves lives.

Farm Radio International is at the cutting edge of developing innovative approaches that combine radio broadcasting with the latest communication technologies to deliver results at scale. These include our Radio Marketplace programs (which provides market information, advice for farmers about marketing, and linkages between buyers and sellers), our “Beep4Weather” system that gives farmers free and constant access to reliable weather information and related advice, and the Listening Post, which solicits the views of thousands of people and displays the results on an online dashboard in real time. Indeed, we just concluded a survey of over 2,800 Tanzanians using the Listening Post to gather views on the priorities for Canada’s International Assistance — one of the few sources of input to the consultations that comes from ordinary people living in a developing country. We have also developed Her Voice on Air as an innovative and very effective way to strengthen the voice of women on the airwaves so that their information needs are better met and issues of gender equality and the roles of women and men can be discussed widely.

A base or “platform” is needed to ensure the sustainable delivery of these and other approaches so that millions are served consistently. For Farm Radio International, that base is a network of radio stations trained and equipped to provide ongoing, high-quality, and interactive mobile communication services in collaboration with a range of stakeholders and funded by a variety of private, public, and social-impact revenue streams. We are committed to the development of networks of mobile knowledge exchange platforms.

Canada has long been an innovator in communication. The first transatlantic radio signal was beamed from Signal Hill Newfoundland in December 1901. Canadian Reginald Fessenden was a pioneer in using audio radio signals to broadcast weather forecasts and is now recognized as the inventor of radio as we know it. Canada developed the “Farm Radio Forum” in 1941, an innovative initiative jointly produced by three newly formed organizations: the Canadian Association for Adult Education, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, and the Canadian Federation of Agriculture. “During the winter months from 1941 to 1965, the Farm Radio Forum supplemented weekly radio broadcasts for the casual listener with printed educational materials that were mailed in advance to registered rural discussion forums.” (http://historicalstudiesineducation.ca/index.php/edu_hse-rhe/article/view/4256). The Farm Radio Forum was the inspiration for hundreds of similar initiatives across the Global South, including in India and Ghana. The Fogo Process was another influential Canadian communication project through which community-made films connected the villages of Fogo Island to each other and identified shared concerns. A catalyst for social change on the island, it inspired participatory video initiatives such as Digital Green. Several Canadian or Canada-based organizations are recognized as global leaders in developing innovative mobile knowledge exchange platforms that include

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1 Based in Ghana but established by Canadians in association with Engineers Without Borders.
radio, mobile phones, and cloud computing. These include Farm Radio International, the World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters, and Voto Mobile.  

Canada can build on this legacy and **take a leadership position** in supporting the development of innovative mobile knowledge exchange platforms that support a wide range of development and humanitarian objectives. Canada can deliver measurable development results at scale to millions at low cost using a blend of modern and conventional communication technologies. Canada’s International Assistance can play a variety of roles, from supporting innovation in mobile communication technologies, providing effective training and capacity development for communicators such as broadcasters and extension workers, fostering the development and evaluation of knowledge exchange and communication platforms, and facilitating the creation of content and methodologies. Canada can achieve these goals by working with civil society, multilateral organizations (such as the FAO and UNESCO), and national governments.  

Development needs, priorities, and trends change over time. Whatever the focus, a strong and sustainable system for communication and knowledge exchange will provide the platform to achieve them. Innovation in communication technology is creating historic opportunities to change the world for the better. Given our history and Canada’s current innovative work in supporting rural communication for development, the time is right for Canada to assert its leadership in the development of innovative mobile knowledge exchange platforms that deliver cost-effective, measurable results to tens of millions of people.