



RADIO: A LIFELINE IN LOCKDOWN

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, one of Yeshe Diba's biggest farming challenges was tackling stereotypes about women farmers.

With the help of a radio program, the 38-year-old had been making headway on changing perceptions in her community. But the COVID-19 pandemic brought farming activities to a halt.

"We believed that if we go outside, the virus will catch us," says Yeshe.

Yeshe farms with a group of other farmers. They work together to ensure everyone's farms are weeded and fertilized, and travel to markets together to buy fertilizer, seeds and other outputs.

With a fear of the literal outdoors, Yeshe's farm became overgrown with weeds, and she lost a significant portion of her crop.

"I thought COVID-19 was waiting outside to hook us."

Her radio set brought some relief:

"We just locked down at home [until] finally we heard from the radio about COVID-19 protection. We could work with proper protection."

Yeshe was not alone in her worry — though many people's fears have turned from the disease to vaccines.

Just over two per cent of the world's vaccines have been distributed in Africa. In Ethiopia, only 2.1 % of the population has been vaccinated. Much of this is due to levels of access to vaccines, but part of it is due to fears about vaccination itself.

"People from rural areas have a lot of anxiety related to vaccines. There are perceptions that if one takes a jab they will die within two years, or that they may lose fertility," says Catherine Mloza Banda, Farm Radio's Regional Program Officer for East & Southern Africa. Those claims are false — COVID-19 vaccines are the best and safest way to prevent the disease — but they can be pervasive.

There are many similarities between communities in Africa and those in North America. Misinformation builds on misinformation, and rumours spread like wildfire.

Yet behind it all is often a simple desire — to stay safe.

"The reality is that there are a lot of unanswered questions surrounding COVID-19 and vaccinations."

Catherine Mloza Banda

"It is understandable that not everyone can be at the same level of acceptance at the same time. Others need a bit more information, answers and examples before they accept something new," says Catherine.

Radio is playing a significant role in filling those gaps. Broadcasters who are well informed, who have access to the latest information, and whose communities already trust and rely on them for information, are making a difference in the daily fight against COVID-19. It's why Farm Radio International continues to work with local stations.

And for farmers like Yeshe, it makes the biggest difference.

"I don't have to rely on people anymore to get information about anything, especially on COVID-19," says Yeshe.

INTO THE FIELD

Nebiyu Yetsedaw, a country project officer with Farm Radio International in Ethiopia, spent a day in the field with broadcaster Zekarias Fiqru, of the Oromia Broadcasting Network. He sent us back these pictures.



Zekarias alongside Farm Radio and local wereda (district) employees plan their visit for the day, discussing what topics need to be covered and where they want to visit.



"Having the detailed design and communication objective set before I go do fieldwork makes my work clear and efficient," says Zekarias. "Most of my work is done even before I leave the studio for an interview. I have all my questions and issues of discussion ready."



Zekarias interviews Bedhassa Jambo for his program. Bedhassa used to grow cereals, but recently moved to tomato and onion farming because of the programs, and is making a much better market price for them.



Zekarias records some last bits of audio in the field.



To finish up, Zekarias returns to the studio to build and broadcast his program. Zekarias says the calls and appreciation of farmers is what keeps him working week in and week out.



WHAT 3,494 FARMERS TOLD GLOBAL LEADERS

ON AIR
DIALOGUES

THANKS TO RADIO

This September, the United Nations held a global summit on Food Systems. The goal: work with world leaders to improve how we grow and consume food.

But where do rural voices fit into that?

Farm Radio International, alongside a consortium of other international organizations, took the lead in finding out. Working with six radio stations, in six languages, in four countries, we took to the airwaves, broadcasting programs about food systems and asking key questions: What does the future of farming look like for today's youth? What are you worried about when it comes to the safety and quality of your food? What would bring you success as a farmer?

“Farmers should be given a platform to share their views and problems so that together with the agriculture officers their issues will be resolved. Also, use that same platform to train the farmers.”

Abraham, Ghana

Using Farm Radio's Uliza technology, farmers could use a simple mobile phone and call a number to respond. **3,494 farmers** did. Men, women, and youth from Burkina Faso, Ghana, Tanzania and Uganda **left 11,854 answers to questions, and 2,648 audio messages** about their hopes, challenges, and solutions for the future of food.

Oscar, a small-scale farmer from Tanzania was among those who took part in the survey. His comment points to one of the many inequities that exist across food systems. “Our crops are bought at a very low price,” he said. “The businessmen and middlemen buy our crops at their prices and not at farmers’ prices.”

Respondents like Oscar called for better access to loans and credit, inputs, better markets, and more information, as well as better training on farming techniques and business management. Women farmers, in particular, emphasized the need for access to loans, credit, and financial support as vital for their success.

It was an exciting partnership with the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), World Vision Canada and the Canadian Food Security Policy Group (FSPG), one we hope to see done again and again!

Farmers and rural people have plenty to say. As nations, organizations, and individuals, we all must commit to listening and taking action together.

WHAT WE LEARNED

- One third of farmers felt that changes would be necessary to enable the next generation to continue farming.
- Only one in nine callers thought youth should give up farming entirely.
- 90% of respondents felt there was something they could do in their community to cope with climate change.
- 75% of callers reported having concerns about the safety and quality of food that is accessible to them.
- Women were more concerned about household nutrition than men, and were more likely to consider loans and credit as key to farming success.



See all the interactive data and listen to the voices of farmers themselves at dialogues.farmradio.org.

Q&A

WITH A FARM RADIO MONTHLY DONOR

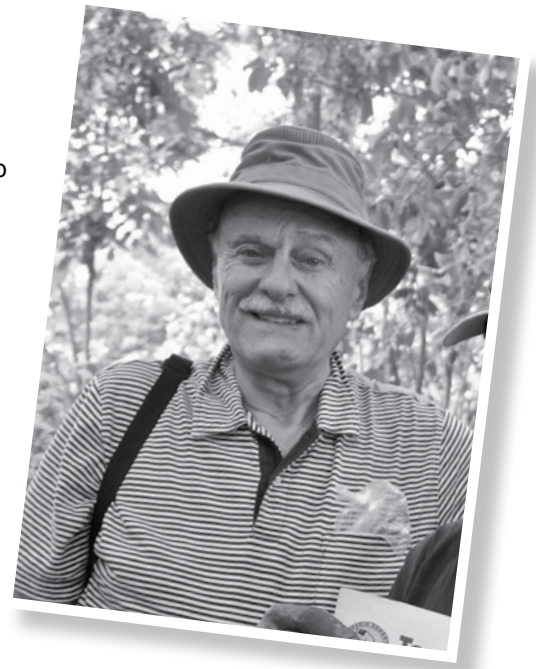
Roger Peters is a retired environmental engineer from Ottawa. He has been a Farm Radio donor since 1992, and a monthly donor for the past 11 years. He also joined Farm Radio International in Tanzania in 2017 for our first Learning Tour.

How did you hear about Farm Radio?

I was interested in development, as I had worked in southern Africa as part of a renewable energy network in the late 1980s and early 1990s. It hit a chord with me. I remembered the farm programs both in the UK growing up, and later here in Canada on CBC.

I have always valued radio, and get more news and information from radio than in any other source. Radio programs go directly to listeners, are always available, and are especially important when they don't have access to other forms of information.

Going back to Tanzania in 2017 cemented everything I learned about Farm Radio over the years. It was eye opening seeing broadcasters and new technology in action.



Roger Peters in Tanzania in 2017

Why did you decide to become a monthly donor?

I really believe in giving monthly. It's more convenient as a donor, and a great benefit for charities. Having worked for NGOs (non-governmental organizations), I really understand the importance of sustained giving for planning, budgeting, and being able to adapt to rapidly changing needs.

As a donor, how do you feel Canadians can best help farmers and rural communities in Africa?

Canadians have access to so much information in so many formats. Podcasts, for example, are very popular and have reminded us all that radio is not only entertainment, but it is a great way of delivering information. In Africa, the internet is not always available, but radio is. We need to make Canadians aware of how easy it is for us to get the information we take for granted, but in Africa it is not always so simple.

What impresses you most about Farm Radio International's work?

Flexibility — it can adapt quickly in responding to community needs. Information changes quickly at times and stations need to have up-to-date and accurate information. Also the integration of newer technologies with older, more available technologies in a cutting edge way is exciting. Two-way dialogue between listeners and broadcasters is critical.

Why do you think it is important to support rural people?

Farming is not just about farming — it requires social back up. Social, health, and other supports are necessary to have healthy farming communities.

**This Q&A has been edited for length and clarity.*



We make radio a powerful force for good in rural Africa—one that shares knowledge, amplifies voices, and supports positive change.

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