

FARM RADIO

PROFILES of PROGRESS



One Sunday evening, after a long day tending her fields of maize, pepper, and okra, Faustina Klutse switched on her radio.

What she heard changed her life.

A new farming show was on the air encouraging listeners to plant a drought- and disease-resistant rice variety that would thrive in Ghana and fetch good prices at the market.

Like many farmers in Ghana, Faustina was reluctant to experiment with new crops. But after listening to the program, she decided to give it a try. Week after week, she tuned into the show to hear farmers and government agricultural extension agents offer advice on where to buy the seed, how to prepare the soil, when to plant, and how to tend the rice fields. She joined a listening group where she could share advice with other farmers.

When it was time to harvest, her crop was in high demand at the local markets, giving her the opportunity to make a handsome profit. For the first time in her life, Faustina, a 46-year-old mother of two, suddenly had money to spare.

"There is now happiness in my house. I never had enough money. Now I'm able to send my children to school, and I have enough income to eat," Faustina says.

Faustina had tuned into a new kind of radio show created by Farm Radio International, a Canadian-based nonprofit organization.

In Africa, many governments lack resources to educate farmers about new agricultural practices and technologies that can help them increase their productivity and incomes. In Nigeria, for example, there is one government agricultural extension agent for every 3,000 farmers, giving each farmer less than 30 minutes of time with an agent per year. But more than 70 percent of Africa's rural population has access to radio, making it a reliable way to reach farmers.

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—Faustina Klutse, smallholder farmer and Farm Radio listener, Ghana

In 2007, Farm Radio, with support from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, launched the African Farm Radio Research Initiative, a project aimed at exploring how to use radio to help rural farmers improve their lives. Working with five partner radio stations in Tanzania, Uganda, Mali, Ghana, and Malawi, Farm Radio has already reached 39 million farmers, providing information on disease-resistant crops, composting, animal housing, soil and water management, and a range of other vital agricultural issues.

Farm Radio has already reached **39 million** farmers, providing them with vital agricultural knowledge.

In Ghana, where the radio campaign promoted the high-yielding rice, New Rice for Africa (NERICA), to smallholder farmers like



Farm Radio Research Initiative

Goal: To research the best ways to use radio to share vital agricultural information with African farmers

Partners: Farm Radio International (www.farmradio.org)

Progress: Working with five partner radio stations in Tanzania, Uganda, Ghana, Mali, and Malawi, Farm Radio has reached **39 million farmers** with new information on a range of agricultural techniques. Some key successes include:

- In Mali, a campaign on improved composting methods resulted in a **fourfold increase** in the percentage of farmers adopting this practice.

- In Uganda, farmers who listened to the program planted 57 acres more of an improved cassava variety than in 2008, an increase of **510 percent**.

- In Ghana, the radio show generated widespread interest in a high-yielding rice variety, NERICA, nearly doubling demand for the seed in 2009 over 2008, exhausting the Ministry of Food and Agriculture's supplies.



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The key to the success of the shows, listeners say, is that they focus on the questions and concerns of smallholder farmers themselves. "Hearing about the rice from other farmers made it more convincing," Faustina says.

In Ghana, the radio campaign to promote NERICA rice was also a breakthrough for the government, which had struggled to promote the drought-tolerant rice as an answer to the country's water shortages. Many farmers had resisted trying the new crop not only because it was unfamiliar but also because the government didn't have the resources for follow-up information or guidance.

Richard Wussah, a government agricultural extension agent, has spent years bumping along dirt roads on his motorcycle trying to meet with more than 2,850 farmers in his district in eastern Ghana. He's never had enough time to reach everyone.

But when Farm Radio sponsored a show at his local radio station, Richard decided to take his extension work on the air. To his surprise, many of his farmers were

listening. Now every Thursday and Sunday he parks his motorcycle and takes a seat in the radio studio. Reading glasses perched on the edge of his nose, he sits hunched over a microphone taking calls from across the region. Joseph from Tibre has a question about improved seed varieties; Nathan from Attorkerpe asks how to use cow manure as fertilizer; "TT" from Lekponguror is seeking advice on how to improve his pepper crop.

Richard answers each question, extending the broadcast an extra half hour so he can accommodate more callers. He doesn't mind the extra time. It's a lot easier than riding his motorcycle to visit them all.

"With just one person on the air, you can reach all the farmers in the area," he says.

Guided by the belief that every life has equal value, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation works to help all people lead healthy, productive lives. In developing countries, it focuses on improving people's health and giving them the chance to lift themselves out of hunger and extreme poverty. In the United States, it seeks to ensure that all people—especially those with the fewest resources—have access to the opportunities they need to succeed in school and life. Based in Seattle, Washington, the foundation is led by CEO Jeff Raikes and Co-chair William H. Gates Sr., under the direction of Bill and Melinda Gates and Warren Buffett.

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