



Project Profile: Farm Radio International

In Mali, many women don't have opportunities to raise and sell animals and produce in the marketplace the way men do. Deeply rooted traditions and gender roles often keep them from accessing the most fertile land and controlling the money they help earn. And while almost 80 per cent of the working population is involved in agriculture, families headed by women are twice as likely to face food insecurity as families led by men.

Canadian non-profit Farm Radio International (FRI) set out to change that through a series of radio programs broadcast between 2015 and 2017. FRI worked with local partners Radio Kafokan, Radio Sikidolo, and Initiative Développement FM, to create participatory radio campaigns that strengthened local food security and improved the lives of small-scale farmers and their families in the Koulikoro, Sikassa and Ségou regions of Mali.

The project, known as Agricultural Value Chain Development Radio, was funded by Global Affairs Canada.

Over the course of two years, radio stations reached 91,000 farmers with programming focused on poultry-raising practices: sanitation, disease prevention, the construction of chicken coops, and marketing.

Radio hosts raised topics of gender equality and women's rights, inviting call-ins and asking questions to get communities talking. Some hosts used traditional and religious examples to explain the importance of empowering women. They discussed topics such as the division of labour and how fertile land is allocated to men and women.

Before the radio project started, animal and poultry farming was almost exclusively men's domain. Now, a result of the project, many more women in the area are involved in raising and selling livestock and poultry.

“We know that it's not always easy to convince communities to try new things. So we designed these programs specifically to promote understanding, discussion and to support the decision making and implementation process,” says Mamadou Bangaly, the country representative for FRI in Mali.

Community members, poultry specialists, extension workers, and the radio hosts themselves were invited to play an active part in workshopping the episodes before they were aired.

Later programs followed up with “echo campaigns,” which repeated previously broadcast information, but invited farmers who had taken up the new practices to talk about their experiences in order to encourage others to do the same.

Radio stations also broadcast a program that informed listeners on marketing techniques, advised them on pricing their poultry, and put them in touch with other market stakeholders.

“Thanks to my income from poultry farming, I am more or less financially independent,” says Sata Diarra, a woman who farms in Kléssekôrô, Mali. “After each sale, I pay for clothes for my children and food for my family. If I have a relative who comes to visit me, I go into my chicken coop and I take a chicken or a rooster to use for the meal, since in our culture, we slaughter a chicken to welcome travellers.”

Thanks to knowledge from the programs, women are not only selling chickens at a profit, but they are preventing their birds from dying of disease and housing them in properly built chicken coops. They share their knowledge and skills with others in the community.

Four years after the end of the project, women have more access to better land and markets. Shifts in cultural attitudes are noticeable, says Bangaly. “It's exciting to see how radio has made such a longstanding change in the lives of women.”

The Farm Radio International project is featured in new research commissioned by the Canadian Food Security Policy Group (FSPG), a coalition of civil society organizations seeking to improve Canada's food security work overseas. The Farm Radio International project is featured as one of six independently researched case studies in West Africa that demonstrate how support for agriculture in rural communities can improve livelihoods, promote gender equality and build climate resilience.

To read the Farm Radio International case study, and other reports from the Food Security Policy Group's research project, please visit <https://ccic.ca/leaders-in-the-field>.