Handpicked Presents: Voicing Change

Season 4, Episode 1: Explaining Voicing Change

Featuring Dr. Andrew Spring, Dr. Eve Nimmo, Enock Mac'Ouma

# **Transcript**

**Speakers**

Charlie Spring: **CS**

Laine Young: **LY**

Andrew Spring: **AS**

Eve Nimmo: **EN**

Enock Mac'Ouma: **EM**

{[intro music]}

**LY**: Hi everyone and welcome to another season of Handpicked. We are so excited to have you here to chat about the work of food systems researchers and community members. You’ll remember from the end of last season that our dear Host and Producer, Amanda diBattista moved on to other endeavors. But I’m thrilled to share that Dr. Charlie Spring has joined the team as Host and Producer. Charlie is a Postdoctoral Researcher at the Laurier Center for Sustainable Food Systems and an integral part of our team. Hi Charlie, Welcome!

**CS**: Hi everyone! And thanks Laine. I’m really looking forward helping you to tell these stories!

**LY**: We’re really glad to have you. It’s actually great timing because this season is going to be a little different. Like we did last season with the Indigenous Health & Food Systems Podcast, we are presenting another special guest podcast for you all. This podcast comes from a project that Charlie has been a part of called “Voicing Change: Co-Creating Knowledge and Capacity for Sustainable Food Systems” Charlie – what's the Voicing Change project about?

**CS**: This project is a partnership between the Northwest Territories in Canada, Migori County in Kenya, and Parana in Southern Brazil. And we’ve been trying to use a participatory approach to developing community-led podcasts where each region can discuss threats to their food systems as well as innovations, but all with the aim of centring traditional and Indigenous knowledge.

So, the podcast episodes that we’ll be sharing with you over the coming weeks are the culmination of this co-learning process between students, post-docs and researchers in all three regions, which we describe as our Community of Practice.

**LY**: Can you explain to the listeners what a community of practice is?

**CS**: Of course, a Community of Practice is a group of people who share a common interest and who work together to learn and to find solutions.

**LY**: This sounds like a really interesting project, and I can’t wait to share it with everyone. Throughout this season, we will be presenting episodes created through the partnership that will focus on agroecology; forests, food and people; and some of the key learnings from the process of creating these outputs. In this first episode three team members will share their visions for the project.

**CS**: Alright, so without further ado, let’s hear the first episode of “Voicing Change”.

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**CS**: Welcome to the Voicing Change podcast. This is a podcast that raises the voices of farmers, researchers and others involved in building fairer and more resilient food systems in Brazil, Kenya and Canada. I'm Charlie Spring. I'm a postdoctoral researcher at Wilfrid Laurier University in Canada. In this first episode, we welcome three of the creators of Voicing Change to share their visions for this project. Turning now to our guests, let’s start with hearing a bit about the work that you do. Andrew, as Director of the Laurier Center for Sustainable Food Systems, how about you go first.

**AS**: My name is Andrew Spring. My work takes place up in Canada's Northwest Territories. I work with several Indigenous communities up there who really face this complex situation of food insecurity due to a lot of issues of kind of colonial policies through throughout northern Canada. One of the lessons that I've learned in the north is, you know, you take care of the land and the land takes care of you, right. And that's really typifies the northern food system for me.

We can learn a lot once we have these relationships and start communicating about, you know, what some of the challenges are across food systems and what some of the innovations at the community level are.

**EN**: Hi, my name is Eve Nimmo. I am a research associate at the Laurier Center for Sustainable Food Systems. I'm also an adjunct professor in the Department of History at the State University of Ponta Grossa in Brazil and the president of an NGO called CEDErva, which is the Center for the Education and Development of traditional Erva-mate systems. And Erva-Mate is a tree that grows in southern Brazil and the leaves are used the process to make a tea called Mate. And the knowledge about this tree and how to consume the leaves comes from the Guarani Indigenous people in southern Brazil.

**EM**: My name is Enock Mac'Ouma. I'm a research fellow in the School of Information Communication and Media Studies, which is based at Rongo university in Kenya. In addition to that, I'm the coordinator for the UNESCO Chair on Community Radio for Agricultural Education. This UNESCO chair we work with a diverse group of communities of practice, which include students of media and journalism. We also work with about seven community radio stations which broadcast indigenous languages within Migori County. In addition to that, we work very closely with agricultural researchers within Rongo university and policymakers from the county government of Migori.

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**CS: ￼**It’s great to have all three of you here to talk about the present and future of Voicing Change. Before we get into that, Andrew, as the principal investigator of the project, can you tell us how Voicing Change came about?

**AS**: Voicing Change is like the culmination of several years of relationship building between, I guess, myself and some of our researchers here at Laurier, Eve, folks down in Brazil and more recently, our friends at Rongo University in Kenya. We have been involved at Laurier Center on Sustainable Food Systems in a lot of projects over the last several years, one being FLEdGE. It was a SSHRC partnership grant called ‘Food Locally Embedded, Globally Engaged. And that was to talk about building sustainable food systems across Canada. Eve and I had always had conversations about how the similarities of the work in the North and the work that's going on in southern Brazil.

And that actually culminated in a workshop in southern Brazil in 2019, where Chief Lloyd Chicot from Kakisa and I traveled down to Brazil for an Agroecology workshop. We had an absolute great experience, and there was not only just learning from the people and building these really wonderful relationships, but there was a point in time where Chief and I were just kind of walking around a farm and it was just, you know, you're in this beautiful forest, and there’s these faxinal, which is a kind of a shared community space, right, where people are maintaining the forest and they're maintaining some sort of agriculture. And it's just this really wonderful relationship. And, you know, both Chief and I just kind of looked at each other. We said, like, wow, this this could be exactly what farming looks like in the Northwest Territories. And for us, that really kind of struck the chord of like, wow, like we can learn a lot once we have these relationships and start communicating about, you know, what some of the challenges are across food systems and what some of the innovations at the community level are.

And so voicing change was born out of out of that kind of opportunity to collaborate among these three, you know, geographically distant, but actually quite similar places.

**CS**: It’s great to hear how an academic project can be really rooted in that tangible and community-centred experience of cultural exchange and the participants really actually wanting to learn more from each other. How about you Eve, how did you become involved in Voicing Change?

**EN**: One of the things that really spoke to me about working in this, this community of people is this kind of shared methodology of taking a community based and participatory approach to research and outreach and sharing narratives and stories. And so as an anthropologist, and archeologist working in a history department, we have developed an area of research around oral history interviews. And so we, myself and my colleagues conduct interviews with farmers and Erva-mate producers talking about their their lives, their histories, their memories of the system of the forest and how those those practices they use, the traditional knowledge that they have, has developed over time. And I think it's what we found from doing this kind of research is that sharing technical information in some ways is is very important. But sharing those personal stories and memories and that traditional knowledge is a way that connects people in a way that we didn't really expect. And I think this project provides that opportunity not only at the community level. And so connecting people, creating a community around these shared histories and memories. But we can also expand that to the regional level. So we're working across 11 different municipalities and they in communities are connecting among themselves based on this, these shared knowledge practice.

And also we're managing to connect these people at an international level, which I don't think any of the farmers that we work with would have ever expected, you know, that they can share their stories with people from Migori County in Kenya or from the frozen north, which they can't even imagine right here in southern Brazil, those stories have resonance there, their challenges are shared, and the strategies that they might be able to implement can be shared across those very different contexts. And so this kind of developing of of shared information and shared narratives and stories was something that really drew me to the project as well, because I think it creates a kind of solidarity across this international network that's that's really important

**CS:** I really appreciate that point about communities recognizing their shared struggles and seeking innovative ways to share knowledge and strategies to face those struggles across really long distances. Mac, how about you? What brought you to Voicing Change?

**EM**: So what basically attracted Rongo university, and myself and the team in Kenya working for voicing change? Well the mere fact that Voicing Change is a platform for the end user of the research activities happening in the three institutions. To share the experiences. To share their challenges and to share what they discovered the process of doing basic research at community level. In Migori County, we are working with about seven radio stations and these radio stations broadcast in indigenous languages. So we are using Voicing Change as a platform to give a voice to smallholder farmers and any other person that is within the stakeholder ecosystem of food production to share their experience. So we found this really exciting because of its uniqueness in terms of using podcasts and radio platforms to share ideas about sustainable farming practices.

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**CS**: Thanks, everyone. You've all spoken a little bit about the potential for collaboration to occur, both within your different regions and also between these very different contexts to share traditional knowledge and really validate those different kinds of knowledge and also thus challenging conventional ideas of what research can look like and what it can do. So maybe let's think a little bit more about the outcomes you're envisaging for this project and your visions and hopes for the project. Mac, perhaps we can start with you?

**EM**: Our vision is to find ingenious ways through which local communities in Migori county can respond to the negative impacts of climate change in relation to food production. And this, from where I sit, can only happen if we involve the local communities as much as possible, as deeply as possible, and create an engaging process whereby they are not bystanders waiting to see the results, but they are participants every step of the way in the process of research and also in the process of sharing the findings. The local communities have got quite some experience and knowledge to share. What they lack is the correct platform to do so. So our aim is to involve the local communities. And just for your information, we are working with a huge number of community of practice that involve the students, that involve researchers, that involve community radio, content developers, that involve policy makers. So our aim basically is to bring all these people together and create a forum for them where they can not just wait for results to to come out of the research process, but also participate and be able to share together the experiences, the challenges and what they think could be potential interventions to help the community grow better food and in a more sustainable fashion.

**CS**: Great. And Eve, what do you hope for the Voicing Change project?

**EN**: The one thing that I really hope comes out of this project, is to really create a sense within southern Brazilian communities of the importance of agroecological and traditional knowledge systems.Right now, most people who drink Erva-mate as a tea or chimarrão, they have no idea where or how Erva-mate is produced. So they don't know that there are different ways of producing it. They don't know that traditional systems that are agroforestry systems have been really key to preserving forests in southern Brazil because there's been so much deforestation. And so one of the things through sharing knowledge among the communities, among farmers and also internationally and expanding that beyond to the lay community, I think is a really important step in creating that kind of recognition of the value of these systems and not just in terms of environmentally because they are key to forest preservation, but also culturally and historically in understanding that they have a long tradition and that tradition and culture should be valued and should be understood. And if we think about things like climate change or food security, the kind of production that comes from agroecological and traditional systems could be really key for the future. And so documenting these knowledges and ensuring that communities understand that they do have value can help to ensure that they continue into the future. And so bringing some some light to these stories, these narratives, these practices, I think is really important for people to recognize their value. The farmers themselves recognize it because as Andrew said earlier, there's so much pressure to move towards to conventional systems. I think this project can help demonstrate the potential and the value of these traditional systems.

**CS**: Thanks, Eve. I'm really starting to see some of the connections between your different places and the things that you're hoping to achieve with this project. Andrew, what are your visions and hopes for Voicing Change?

**AS**: Yeah, I think Mac and Eve have done a really good job just taking the words out of my mouth really. But I think you can see there's a lot of overlap here, right? There's a lot of knowledge within these small communities around the world and giving voice to that knowledge is important. You know, we're facing a climate emergency here. And I think what we believe is that there's that knowledge within communities to overcome some of those challenges. And I think what we hope to get out of Voicing Change is, is this platform to share those knowledges. And we've seen firsthand how sharing that knowledge between southern Brazil and the Northwest Territories really works. Not only does it supply kind of new ideas or things to try out, you know, to solve problems in other places. But it creates that relationship and those connections. And I think that's really important. And it's something we want to achieve here is that we've got, you know, folks across the world as part of this project. And I think what we really want to get out of this is that, you know, they're not in isolation. They're part of something that that is trying to find these solutions to value, you know, small, traditional livelihoods. And so that's that was one of the ideas behind Voicing Change is just to make some of these connections and amplify voices and build solidarity. You know, all these really kind of big things that we're we're trying to take from these really kind of small scale projects.

**CS**: Well, you've all made me feel really excited to see some of the outcomes of the Voicing Change project and also to realize that the stakes are high, not just for people producing food, but for all of us as consumers. So thank you all for sharing. I just have one more question for you, which is how do we achieve these visions? So, let's start with you, Eve.

**EN**: Yeah, that's always the most difficult question to answer is how are we going to go about doing all of these great things that we plan to do? So here in southern Brazil, we work with a large community of practice of Erva-mate producers. And so, as I mentioned, we work across 11 different municipalities and not all people who produce, Erva-mate follow traditional systems or use these kind of agroecological, agroforestry practices. So what we're trying to do, first of all, is is identify who these people are. And so we've working within the municipalities to find these farmers and discuss the project with them and talk about what we plan to do. And so that's kind of the first step we're doing is consolidating the community of practice, building that that up to the regional scales through workshops. We held our first workshop in April. And so we're really focused right now on, on talking to the communities about the things that they would like to share and the things they would like to learn. And from that, we're going to start recording with farmers: information, discussions, start doing the podcast recording that we set out to do. To build regional strategies to address some of the issues that farmers are facing in southern Brazil. And so I think that we have a lot of work ahead of us, but it's such challenging and great work to do working with communities. So and I'm hoping that at some point we all get to visit each and every one of these contexts that each of us are working in. So I hope to go to Migori County and to the Northwest Territories at some point in the next couple of years. But we'll see if we manage to do that.

**CS**: Thanks very much, Eve. And Andrew, what are your plans for the project moving forward?

**AS**: You know, a lot of our friends and community members, you know, have been exposed or have had COVID or, you know, have had been in various stages of lockdown for the last couple of years.

And so I think for us and Voicing Change for folks that we work with up in the north is really getting back. And I guess strengthening those relationships, ok, like they're still there, but of course, a lot of the work that we have had to do lately has really taken the back burner as some of these bigger kind of issues have have come to the forefront. So so for us, it's it's about going back, building those relationships, you know, checking in with the communities to see where where we're going in terms of a lot of the, our kind of food producing projects and really what the message is that we can share with, with our friends in Brazil and with our friends in Kenya. And so a lot of the stories that we hope to get and share, with not only the communities in the region, but but across the Voicing Change, a lot of them we're going to kind of figure it out as we go along. And that's the the beauty of community led research. But everyone's very excited. You know, we did get to meet with Chief Lloyd not too long ago up in the north, and he was very excited to again start speaking to his friends that he made down in southern Brazil. So I think we're just thinking about where this needs to go. And yeah, having a lot of those reflections about What is the knowledge and what do we want to discuss? And so I think there's going to be a lot of opportunities through workshops and other things that we're kind of doing this summer to get people together again and start thinking about how, you know, if the food related projects and the various opportunities to radio broadcast or podcasts could mean involvement and engagement at a regional level, which is which is also very exciting.

**CS**: Thank you Andrew, it’s great to hear your excitement about what comes next for Voicing Change. And Mac, I know you've been working in community radio for some time. What are you planning for the Voicing Change Project moving forward?

**EM**: To respond to that question, one, we want to strengthen the collaboration that you already have with our community, that’s the local community of practice within Migori, Kenya, and build global community of practice that involves the team working in Brazil and the team working in Canada. And apart from that, we think that the best way forward is to, you know, engage in a deeper and more meaningful partnership.

And that's why I'm grateful to the fact that we chose to use participatory action research methodology. And in a scenario where there’s a huge and diverse community of practice, meaningful participation and collaboration is key to achieving our objectives. And therefore, as UNESCO Chair on Community Radio for Agricultural Education we are looking forward to strengthening the partnerships, so that we are able to achieve, I mean, results that can be shared across the board.

**CS**: Well, thanks to all of you for sharing some stories from the places that you're working in and some of your hopes and plans for the Voicing Change Project. So thanks, Eve. Thanks, Andrew. Thanks, Mac. And thank you for listening to this episode of Voicing Change. This episode was hosted by me, Charlie Spring, with editing and sound design by Narayan Subramoniam. Our music is composed by Ali Razmi.

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We would like to acknowledge that these podcast episodes have been recorded on the traditional territories of Indigenous peoples in the lands now known as Canada, Brazil and Kenya. Though the histories of colonization, decolonization and reconciliation differ across these contexts, we recognise the ongoing legacies of colonial dispossession that have contributed to the food system injustices that we aim to tackle in this podcast. Nevertheless, this podcast was also inspired by the survivance of traditional food systems based on care for the land and other beings; we acknowledge and pay our respects to the ancestors, elders and inheritors of these ways of knowing and being that continue to benefit us all to this day. In a spirit of reciprocity, we recognise the harms done by colonial powers, including by institutions of higher learning, and aim to cultivate an approach of listening and sharing knowledge rather than extracting and profiting from it.