

WORKSHOP EXERCISE

An Experiment in Two-Way Communication

The importance of two-way communication in PSC campaigns had emerged right from the start as one of the major concerns of the workshop. The participants wanted to discuss practical ways of achieving this laudable aim. As an experiment to translate our aims into practice, the workshop organisers had asked Kabwe Kasoma, Harrington Jere, Steven Mulenga and Ivy Joy Setiloane to take a cassette recorder out into the squatter settlements and discover how the inhabitants defined their problems, what they considered the most important problems and, finally, what they knew of the forthcoming upgrading project. The interviews were conducted in Nyanja and Bemba and the transcripts were prepared and translated by Ivy Joy Setiloane. Excerpts from the cassettes were played to the workshop. Some of the professional radio men in the group criticised the technical quality of the tapes, but it was pointed out that the idea was to show how extension agents might use simple communication tools like the cassette recorders to bring the opinions of the squatters themselves to the attention of the City Council. It was, in any case, intended to edit the tapes before playing them to the Council. There was not enough time to edit the tapes during the workshop, but to show the value of the interviews as raw material. John Balcomb wrote a short newspaper story from the transcripts (see below).

A lively debate followed as to the wisdom of releasing such a story to the press. The Community Development Workers felt that it would prejudice the success of the project. Others felt that the article said nothing that hadn't already been printed in the papers and, anyway, what was to stop a newspaper reporter going and writing such a story without any prompting from the outside. If that happened there would be no guarantee that the reporter would get the facts straight, and was it not better that the correct information was disseminated? It emerged from the discussion that there was a profound distrust of the press as a medium for two-way PSC work, and despite an impassioned plea by a professional journalist at the workshop, the distrust could not be dispelled.

The workshop discussed briefly the possibilities of using video in urban projects for two-way communication and John Balcomb explained the Canadian Challenge for Change experiment. It was generally felt that while video would have an important role to play in the future, not all the bugs had been ironed out of the equipment. Meanwhile, we would have to continue our search for viable two-way communication in other directions.

It was pointed out that the letter page of the Tanzanian "Daily News" had become a national institution and gave a platform for the free exchange of strongly held and powerfully expressed opinions on government policies. This was certainly a genuine channel of two-way communication.

A Botswana participant stressed the importance of political structures, particularly at the local level, for getting opinions back to the authorities.

In conclusion, the workshop felt that while two-way communication was a desirable goal in theory, the one-way usage of existing media, and the restrictions imposed by political considerations, made two-way communication difficult to achieve in practice.



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"An experiment in Two-Way Communication" workshop exercise using cassette recorder during Part V of the UNICEF/PSC Workshop on Communication for Social Development, held at the University of Zambia, Lusaka, 29 April to 10 May 1974

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Notes

Durnig Part V, Workshop Exercises, participants had a chance to approach local squatters in a settlement near Lusaka, using a cassette recorder to collect the views of prospective project beneficiaries of what their situation was and how they viewed the proposed project. A newspaper article was produced on the exercise by John Balcomb.

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