

PSC Paper No. 25

RADIO IN PROJECT SUPPORT COMMUNICATION

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May, 1974

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Radio is equivocal in its effects. In terms of audience coverage, it is the mass medium par excellence in the developing countries; but what does the audience get out of radio? The message it delivers is a fleeting one. Frequent repetition is therefore required ("Play it again, Sam!"). And, as with verbal information in general, listeners "edit" what they hear. They retain the messages they already agree with.

Use of radio for development support must therefore be very calculated. Things cannot be presented in a boring fashion or the listeners will simply tune to another channel. Nor can new ideas be forced on listeners. New ideas must be introduced in a way that excites people's curiosity — "Do you know that?" — or as alternatives to old concepts which people should know about in order to keep up with the world and their neighbours. To put it in a nutshell, radio is a permissive medium, requiring the listener's indulgence. Whether one believes in permissive education or not, radio education has to be permissive. You cannot make the listener "do lines" or stay after school for having missed the message.

One of the best examples of the use of radio for social development was the recent Mtu ni Afya, Mama ("Man is Health, Mama") campaign in Tanzania — a campaign which the Government regards as a phenomenal success. An excellent description of the campaign can be found in the April 1974 issue of African Development. Several things stand out about the campaign. It was carefully worked out ahead of time, the preliminary investigations having started 18 months in advance. It was adequately financed, with a \$200,000 grant from SIDA, the Swedish aid organization. (About half of

this amount was for explanatory pamphlets.) Listening groups were organized throughout the country, and 70,000 discussion group leaders were given advance training. The twelve half-hour radio programmes included music, dramatization, sound effects and interviews. Each programme was repeated three times in a given week so that different groups could listen at their convenience. The emphasis was on what people could do for themselves, in other words environmental health, and the specific health problems discussed were malaria, hookworm, dysentery, bilharzia, tuberculosis and water. Other media were also called into play: there were special newspaper supplements, for example, and the Friendship Textile Mill printed three special lines of Mtu ni Afya kangas.

The most famous example of entertainment-format development broadcasting is probably "The Archers", the British Broadcasting Corporation's daily family-life serial. The UN magazine, Development Forum, published an interview with its creator, David Basely, in August 1973. Basely describes how Britain was hit by an agricultural crisis 23 years ago. The BBC got the best people from universities and experimental farms to give radio talks aimed at farmers, but it didn't seem to do much good. Basely and the BBC finally switched to a family life serial. The Archers live on a farm in the Midlands. Dan Archer, the head of the family, is a good farmer but not a superman. He has one neighbour who's a good farmer and one who's a bad one. People listen to the programme — it has a tremendous following — because the members of the Archer family fall in love, get married, get sick, surmount one crisis after another. New farm information works its way naturally into the plot. Basely's formula for a programme of this kind is: "10 per cent education, 30 per cent information and 60 per cent entertainment".

In the United States, the Population Institute has been working with the producers of television continuity serials to introduce ideas about family planning into popular discussion. The idea is not to preach family planning but to raise the issue it involves in a dramatic setting. (See W.C. Wood's television column in The New Republic, March 23, 1974.)

UNICEF and the United Nations Fund for Population Activities are now working with Radio Sri Lanka to develop a dramatic family life serial which can become a kind of carrier wave for various social development messages. Each episode will pose a familiar family problem which different members of the family wish to approach in a different way. The programmes will be punctuated by playful banter, passing jibes and wisecracks, but in the end a rational solution will prevail. The "recommended" solution will not prevail until the whole issue has been thoroughly thrashed out by family members, friends and neighbours, however — and this is very important.

These are examples of what can be done with radio. It takes courage, imagination, and careful preparation to use the medium effectively. Otherwise, beaming didactic messages out at random over the airwaves is probably not much more effective than putting them in bottles and throwing them out to sea.

A PIONEER OF RURAL RADIO

That great rural philosopher Will Rogers once remarked. "Course, we don't get meat as often as our forefathers, but we have our peanut butter and radio." He was probably referring to an early ancestor of rural radio which only came into its own after World War II. The father of rural radio in its modern sense is Godfrey Baseley. A former B.S.C. Midland Region agricultural correspondent, Baseley created one of the longest-running daily radio serials of all time. "The Archers" enjoyed by millions of urban listeners as well as the entire agricultural community of Great Britain and a good part of the Commonwealth. The underlying principles of "The Archers" and modern rural radio communication generally are to mobilize, educate and inspire the rural community for its own economic betterment and for national development. At a time when the United Kingdom faced a food crisis, Baseley's radio programme broke new ground. It has continued to pioneer for the past 23 years and serves as a successful example for rural communications all over the world.

DE: How did the idea of the Archers form in your mind ?

BASELEY: Because of a failure in the kind of programmes the BBC was then doing for farmers, - a failure to get to the people that mattered. The BBC set out to bring to the microphone the very best people from the universities and from the experimental farms, and the biggest farmers to talk to the audience and discuss with them farming matters, but it was far too sophisticated for the mass of the farmers to get hold of, and they were, after all, the people that you really wanted to reach.

There had been so much development during and after the war - in techniques and mechanisation - and farmers weren't accepting this from the advisory people properly. So I tried every kind of programme: talks, discussions, magazine programmes. And then I thought that farmers really learned by looking at what their neighbours were doing and picking the best out of it, so I started a programme called "Over the Neighbour's Hedge".

I got a well-known Midlands farmer - who ultimately became president of the Farmers Union - to look at farms round the country and talk about them. Then he had to stop because he got busy and couldn't do it. The idea came - in the absence of a really good farmer, why not use an actor ? Why not create a family to go with him and make him just that little bit better than normal, but not a superman ? Let him have a good neighbour and a bad neighbour. And this was how it really started. I talked about it to a lot of other people and they all thought it was a good idea but quite crazy - they said you will never manage it, people will never listen to it, the BBC won't let you do it - but they did.

DE: You started with a pilot project lasting a week, didn't you ?

BASELEY: Yes. For safety's sake we were given just a morning period. They thought we couldn't do much damage in that week, but when it came off people wrote in their thousands and said "Heh, what do you think you're doing taking it off." Well, it was a regional programme and the region couldn't afford it. The regional budget wouldn't allow it and we had to wait until it could be taken on by what was then the Light Programme.

The Controller for the Light Programme was just about to leave and a new one was appointed. Fortunately for us it was left in the "In" tray of the new man, and he liked it and said 'right, we'll have a go'. It was useful because that time we had a programme on the air called 'Dick Barton', a thriller, and the BBC was being accused of setting a bad example to youth - juvenile delinquency and so on - and they were looking for a successor to it. So they gave us a trial, once again in the morning, so we couldn't do much harm. Within a fortnight or three weeks they had made up their minds that the new programme would do and then they switched us from the morning to the Dick Barton evening spot and there it was.

DE: So not only did you take over this very popular Dick Barton spot but you actually took over the two script writers who had been writing Dick Barton for years ?

BASELEY: Yes, that was probably the most successful thing of all, because they were brilliant script writers. They knew about situations, they knew how to write dialogue, they could take a briefing - they were really professional writers.

After a while we began to work out a formula for the programme and we decided we really must not have more than 10% of education in the programme. We could take about 30 or 40% general information but all the rest must be entertainment because we were after a mass audience.

Although we thought of it originally as a purely farming programme, we became quickly aware that the general public was enjoying it. It was a relaxation for them. People living in the cities with concrete and brick around them were remembering things of the country, we were bringing the smell of fresh air and the noise of animals to them - it was gorgeous - and they loved it, so they hung on.

DE: You had two script writers who were used to writing a spy, special-agent serial. How did they switch to writing what is a very rural story ?

BASELEY: Well, they had the ability to absorb a brief. I would tell them what was going to happen, what kind of people we wanted, all the characters I had drawn myself. I created the village of Ambridge and had three or four long meetings with them. I took them out into the country with me and we talked the whole thing over. Then they went away. With a good written brief they created the story.

DE: And did this continue over the years, you providing the story line and the script writers adding flesh to your skeleton ?

BASELEY: Basically that is so. We always did it jointly. We met regularly to discuss what would be possible, and what would be acceptable to us as a group and then from this general discussion I would create the overall pattern and feed it to them on paper.

DE: Farmers are pretty critical listeners. No doubt you had to be very very careful that all your facts were accurate as well as entertaining.

BASELEY: That was absolutely vital, and I made up my mind that as this was coming out of the BBC Farming Programmes it had got to be accurate. This was absolutely essential - if we were to get farmers to believe us.

We became the farmers' Bible, without a shadow of doubt. We could get things across easily. What would normally take an entire Ministry booklet to do we did in a couple of sentences. I'm not being rude to the Ministry, but this was the difference: it was an ordinary person passing on the information. Dan Archer, the farmer, could say in a sentence something that had taken someone else months to prepare.

DE: And because he was believed the message was there ?

BASELEY: Of course, he was a farmer. Oh, he was real. We had all sorts of people write to him as a farmer.

DE: But it was not only the farming information that had to be accurate. You also brought in Women's Institutes, Farmers Union and legal matters, so everything else had to be accurate too, no doubt ?

BASELEY: We started by thinking that we could get away with the farming and horticulture and general country matters, but this wasn't true. Within a very short time everything we touched on had to be absolutely accurate.

DE: Now to do all this you must have had to liaise very closely with people like the Women's Institutes, the National Farmers Union, and the advisory services. Did they ever try to influence you ?

BASELEY: To begin with yes. But I let it be known that I was the editor and I was not accepting propaganda unless it had a real value to people and they quickly learned this. We worked together very very well. Most of these organisations appointed someone to liaise with me, and they knew the kind of things we wanted to know and they got us the material and they worked jolly hard.

Take foot and mouth disease or fowl pest, for example. We wanted all the details. Well, all the veterinary service of the Ministry was at our disposal. This was a marvellous service, and this applied to other Ministries or Institutions which had anything to do with the countryside.

DE: Did you ever tread on people's toes ?

BASELEY: We got in trouble with the Shorthorn Society once, because we wanted Dan Archer to change from Shorthorn cows in his dairy to Friesians. It was right for him to go in for Shorthorns to begin with because when the programme started they were the major dairy herd at the time. But slowly Friesians became tremendously important and I wanted to change.

I thought it was only good manners to let the Shorthorn Society know, but they questioned the right of the BBC to damage men's livelihoods, which obviously we would do. The programme was looked upon as being so important that if Dan Archer abandoned Shorthorns, then obviously the Shorthorn trade for bulls and pedigree stock was going to suffer. And indeed this kind of influence was not envisioned in the charter of the BBC, so we were told that we could not do this for at least two years.

DE: How did you get out of that situation ?

BASELEY: Well it was fairly easy in our case. We just wrote in an outbreak of foot and mouth and killed off all the Shorthorns. Dan Archer then went in for beef for a while and came back to Friesians two years later.

DE: This must have been a very gratifying, if surprising, indication of just how big an influence you had, that people should feel that you could influence farmers from going out of one breed of cattle into another ?

BASELEY: Yes, we had a very great responsibility. I think this was the first time that I realised what a responsibility we had gained and how important it was not to be flippant and foolish in this programme. We took it very seriously. We knew that it was being appreciated by a lot of people because of the kind of things that were being said and written about us, but we really hadn't realised that it was as important as that until this particular episode cropped up.

DE: A few years later there was again a demonstration of just how big an influence you had when one of the major characters got killed ?

BASELEY: Yes, this was I think the first time ever that a leading character in a popular series was killed. It was a real shock to the country, because she was a really lovable girl. You see, we didn't want her any more: we had been through the courtship, we had had the first year of married life and then she was just settling down into being another married woman in the programme and we thought it would be much more exciting if we had a young widower and followed his fortunes again. We thought that this would give us more scope.

But the reaction was fantastic ! It all happened on the day that commercial television was introduced, but we got all the headlines and the new TV went into the middle pages. Wreaths were sent, blinds were drawn and the writers and myself had to keep out of the way for a few days. People were really angry at us. The BBC telephone lines were absolutely blocked that night.

DE: Dan Archer is, or certainly was in his younger days, the leading farmer in the district. Now, to have any influence in agricultural extension, the leading farmer has to be a local man. But in a country such as Britain or larger, you can't have a leading farmer who is local to everybody. How do you think it was that farmers identified with Dan Archer from a long way away and from quite different kinds of countryside from Ambridge.

BASELEY: I'm not quite sure that you are right about this. A farmer is a farmer, is a farmer is a farmer! And Dan Archer was very fundamental. We didn't create Dan Archer on a sketch book. We dived into his past. We went back six generations. He had been brought up under the old Squirearchy and his father was the bailiff of the Home farm. Then Brookfield farm became vacant and the bailiff went into it but still looked after the Home farm.

He came of the teaching group. In the old days of the Squirearchy the Home farm was the teaching place where people went to see what was done in the best way and Dan had this all behind him.

Now setting the programme in the west Midlands, we got something of everything. We were thinking of the smaller farmer, the 250-acre farmer and less, probably even the 100-acre and less. So Dan Archer epitomised this quite easily, because he had sheep, he had pigs, he had dairy cattle, he grew a few mangels and Mrs. Archer had a few hens, and he was a likeable chap, the chap you would like to meet anywhere. He went on holidays and talked to other farmers on their holidays and he went to Wales to buy sheep and he went to market and met other farmers. He didn't fit into the Scottish picture but for the rest of England he was pretty good.

DE: You said you were particularly interested in getting to the medium and smaller farmer. You felt that this was the size of farmer who really needed the message you were trying to put across?

BASELEY: Yes, indeed. Since the war so much had happened and this information hadn't got across to them; they weren't using it. Take the question of pedigree grasses. They had heard about them, or read about them, been to a lecture about them or heard from somebody who had been, but they didn't know what pedigree grasses did; they didn't know what nitrogen did; they didn't know about inoculation; they didn't know about new developments in housing or intensive poultry production. All these things were new and Dan Archer could report on these things. He had a big farmer next to him, a wealthy chap from the city, who was wasting money and Dan was commenting on whether this was good or bad, and this was important because they were sharing these experiences without losing any money themselves.

DE: BBC Audience Research showed the interesting fact that the programme was particularly popular among farm workers. Why do you think that this was so ?

BASELEY: Well, it was understandable for them, and quite apart from that we have farm workers in the programme. We gave them far more coverage in this programme than they had ever been given in other programmes. In the early days of the BBC the farm worker was hardly ever mentioned unless it was to mention the question of his wages. But here we got the farm worker talking over his problems with the boss and they were saying true to life things. After all, we were working in close co-operation with the farm workers' union just as much as we were over the farmers' union. We gave time to the problems that were being aired and they liked us for it.

Another thing they liked was to go to the boss and say "Guvnor, isn't it about time we were putting that spring barley in like in the Archers."

DE: Do you believe that this dramatised form of extension is better for people who haven't got a very full education ?

BASELEY: I'm sure of it. I'm absolutely certain. I think people dislike being preached at and lectured to. I have sat in on some of these things and I know what it is like. People prefer to receive the message in a quiet, gentle, neighbourly sort of way instead of being punched at. It happens too often. We are directed, we are told, and we are talked to (and talked down to) and we don't like it. I don't care who you are, if you can pick out what you want yourself and you don't know you are being got at, this is the winner every time.

DE: For a programme to survive it has got to change with the times and times have changed in the last 25 years since the Archers started. How have the Archers changed ? Has the purpose changed ?

BASELEY: Well, I think it has now got to the point where it really needs a big reorientation. I think the problem today, in Britain at any rate, is not to educate the farmer any more but to educate the townsmen about how to behave, how to get the best out of the country and how to appreciate what the land is being used for and to respect it. I don't think very many people who go out into the country realise that the land they see is the farmer's factory floor. So I think the job of the Archers in the next ten years is to show the mass, the millions, how to use the leisure they have, the affluence they've got, how to get the best out of the countryside and to show a lot of farmers how to make some money out of this so that as the economics of farming fall, the smaller farmer can reimburse himself with the tourist trade. He becomes a part-time farmer and a part-time hotelier. I believe this is the future. By the end of this century our farming will be carried out by about a third of the present number of farmers.

DE: Turning from the Archers in Britain to the possibility of the formula being used overseas. It has often been said that the formula can be used in developing countries, in the tropics, do you think that the formula is as easily transferable as is sometimes supposed ?

BASELEY: No, I think the formula is right but it is not easily transferred. You've got first of all to look for someone who knows as much about the country of origin as I know about Britain; someone who knows the problems and difficulties there. That is the most important person. He can easily be a staff person. I was a staff BBC man. He must create a situation and characters out of what he knows by study and based on what goes on in that country; and where the Government of that country, if that is the important factor, wants agriculture to go and where it is necessary for it to go. Once he has created this situation he can bring in any writers so long as they are well and truly briefed. Any writer who can write dialogue and develop situations can do this. But you must have one person who studies the needs and requirements of the area to which the broadcast is going to go, whether it is a nation or a local area. I think you want a minimum of three who will make themselves acceptable to their listeners as nice, interesting people.

DE: What do you feel about the cost of a production like this, because many radio stations in the tropics haven't got very much money to pay editors, script writers or a lot of actors ?

BASELEY: Then don't think about it. You can't do it without money. You just can't do it. But if it is within the needs of the economy of a certain nation, then it must be looked upon as an important factor, as a productive investment.

DE: Do you think there is any possibility of using what is called the extemporising drama, or the African unscripted drama where you give the actors a storyline, eliminating the scriptwriter ? The actors do the episode spontaneously without a script.

BASELEY: If you can "type cast" and if you have three basic good characters that you can lay the story on to, then I think this has great potential. This might reduce the cost. I don't want anyone to think that this is a fantastic cost. It isn't a fantastic cost but you have got to pay the chaps who do the editing and scriptwriting well enough. I wouldn't like to put a sum on it exactly because how can you say ? But it mustn't be done on a shoestring otherwise the programme will be shoestring.

DE: Having now left the Archers, you haven't left rural communications. You lecture. In fact very soon you are lecturing to a group of African and Asian students on Drama in Radio. What is your advice to them about the possibilities in their own countries ?

BASELEY: Well, exactly what I have been saying to you. I want to show them how they can use the drama pattern for transmitting information and educational material. Forgetting the lecture, forgetting the teaching manner, I would like them to try this formula of 10% education, 30% information and 60% entertainment. I want them to really become a part of it and to understand how it is done. After all, everyone understands drama, everyone's life is a part of a drama; everyone likes to peep in the window or look through the keyhole to see what is going on in someone else's life - its the most natural thing in the world. And if you can organise this so that it has a form and a purpose, then you are bound to get listeners. You can't help yourself.

DE: If your African and Asian students after a week with you were to go away and only remember one thing that you had tried to put across, what would that be ?

BASELEY: I think I would like them to realise what a great responsibility they will have to be honest, truthful and real. It is a vast responsibility. It is almost as responsible as being Prime Minister. A programme of this nature that is going to have an influence on millions of people, is a very heavy responsibility. And one must be always conscious of this because in the wrong hands it can be very, very dangerous as a propaganda medium.

U N F P A

SPONSORED PROGRAMME TO LISTENERS IN SRI LANKA

The programme will be broadcast on the Commercial Transmissions (ie) Channel II, in Sinhala and Tamil. The programme will be scheduled three days a week in each language at peak listening times ("A" Class Time-Channels) on the basis of a 52 week run in the first instance.

The Programme Idea

The Principal characters are father and son. (In Sinhala - The Ayurvedic Physician and his son. In Tamil - The School - master and his son.) The drama is in a family setting. Each episode will reflect a family situation, and will pose a familiar family problem. In the discussion of this problem - there is the inevitable conflict between the father and the son.

The father is conventional, highly conservative. He has rigid views of a highly stereotyped nature. The old man is reluctant to depart from his hidebound habits and is suspicious of his son's new-fangled ideas. For all his adamant attitude, the father is unsystematic, unmethodical, makes ad hoc decisions with or without adequate data, and leads a generally chaotic life, throwing his family out of gear most of the time.

The son is sophisticated, well-read, methodical and has cultivated a scientific attitude. He programmes his life and although he makes his decisions speedily, he does so after careful and thorough consideration of all available information. His room is tidy though it presents a lived-in look. His books are always neatly arranged after use. He has a steady schedule for study and apportions his time in a well-ordered manner.

While the father dresses shabbily, the son is neat and clean - without ostentation. Where the father is short-tempered and domineering, the son is patient and tolerant.

However, the family get by, largely because they are all good people, united, sincere, and the father bases his life and role as breadwinner on the principle of genuine love. He has fourteen children.

Each programme carries a day-to-day situation. In the crucible, two divergent views develop, and inevitably the father and son are on opposite sides. The argument waxes strong and the problem becomes quite complicated. Playful banter and humorous anecdotes, passing jibes and wisecracks, punctuate the programme as the conflict develops.

The scene shifts to various locations. A younger child has to be admitted to school; the family wants to go to the cinema; the

elder girl has to go for an interview; the son wants to buy a bicycle; the mother wants to order some jewellery; the family visits relations in a distant place; they embark on a journey to attend a wedding; the marriage-broker calls; there is a carnival in town; the girl next-door elopes; the roof is leaking and needs urgent repair; the house in front is burgled; the son is interested in a girl in the neighbouring town; the son has to choose his subjects for the examination; one of the younger children wants to attend a classmate's birthday party; the mother wants a new saree to attend a civic reception; the children want a new radio-set; electricity is installed; the fuse blows out; a careless neighbour allows his stray cattle into the vegetable plot; a long-lost relative returns; a young man writes a love-letter to the eldest daughter and it is discovered; an outhouse catches fire; one of the children wants to join a scout camp; an animal has drowned in the well; the family want to sell an extra bit of land; and a host of such situations in different locations arise as the core of each programme.

While the dramatisation develops in the quarter hour, through pure and simple ENTERTAINMENT there is the undercurrent which indicates that however rudimentary - life presents its day to day problems. These problems may have different solutions for different people - but - there is the cool, calculated, far-seeing, methodical approach to each problem, What is more, so many of these problems can be foreseen, and eliminated by forethought and planning. THIS IS THE IMAGE PORTRAYED BY THE PROGRAMME - IDEA.

Variety of sound is provided by variety of voices and tones, by suitable introduction of musical sounds, by the family radio coming up, participants breaking into song, excerpts from the occasional movie they visit, stage-shown attended by the family, and radios blaring from the market-place. Additionally there will be the inclusion of innumerable sound-effects.

The attention-getting factor is the creation of a character with whom identification is possible and desirable, He is the "hero".

PROGRAMME FORMAT

- Opening Theme:- A specially composed theme will be recorded by our orchestra.
- Opening Credit:- Restricted to mention of Sponsor.
- Presenter:- To launch each programme with a nappy introduction, brief summary of episode, reference to characters at point of time and drama commences.
- Characters:- Will appear in accordance with the script from a panel of top-grade radio artistes supported by talented and prominent young stars.

Audience Participation:- Presenter outlines the problem ... how was it resolved? Answer will be provided on next programme day.

Prize Offer:- Optional - recommended - neatest correct solution selected by a panel - prize suggested an attractive cash award to snowball if no entry of acceptable standard is received. Question and prize to be announced with closing Theme under Voice.

Closing Theme and Amendment:- Music specially composed stylised with announcement and reminder of next radio-date.

Music ends with dramatic flourish.

The basic resume will naturally be built upon "brick by brick". The idea is to create the character whose "name" becomes a household word and whose methodical way of life will serve as a persuasive model worth emulating.



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Page 22
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CF-RAI-USAA-PD-GEN-2007-000189

Expanded Number **CF-RAI-USAA-PD-GEN-2007-000189**

External ID

Title

"Radio in Project Support Communication" by John Balcomb, distributed at the International UNICEF/PSC Workshop on Communication for Social Development, held at the University of Zambia, Lusaka, 29 April to 10 May 1974

Date Created / From Date

Date Registered

Date Closed / To Date

4/1/1974

6/20/2007 at 12:14 PM

Primary Contact

Home Location **CF/RAF/ZWIA118_-1987-000016913 (In Container)**

F12: Status Certain? No

Item Fd01: In, Out, Internal Rec or Rec Copy

Owner Location **Programme Division, UNICEF NYHQ (3003)**

Current Location/Assignee **Upasana Young since 8/26/2007 at 6:51 PM**

Date Published

F13: Record Copy? No

Record Type **A01 PD-GEN ITEM**

Contained Records

Container **CF/RA/BX/PD/RP/LB/1987/T005: Africa: Social welfare, Nutrition, Sa**

Fd3: Doc Type - Format

Da1:Date First Published

Priority

6/22/2007 at 12:05 PM

Document Details **Record has no document attached.**

Notes

PSC paper No 25, by John Balcomb, Chief, Communications and Information Service, UNICEF, Nairobi Discussed during Part III of the workshop, "Media in PSC campaigns". Contains an excerpt from Development Forum, Vol I, No 6, August -September 1973, "A Pioneer of Rural Radio" about Godfrey Baseley who created a daily radio serial about the rural community. A section on UNFPA sponsored programme for listeners in Sri Lanka.

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SAROJA DOUGLAS

Saroja Douglas

15