

WORKSHOP DISCUSSION

Radio and Project Support Communication

Radio kept coming up in the discussions. Two of the participants were radio men and several others were responsible for the supervision of broadcasting. Radio reaches the largest audience of any mass medium in Africa. It ought to play a significant role in communications for social development — but how? What is its role? The radio specialists were the first to admit that there are a lot of problems involved in the use of radio.

One problem is language. In Zambia, for example, there are 72 languages and in order to reach anything that can be termed a mass audience Radio Zambia is compelled to broadcast in five of them. Kiswahili is widely understood in Kenya and Tanzania, but rural and urban accents vary considerably: sometimes country folk cannot understand the "city" Kiswahili.

Then it is difficult to localize broadcasts, that is to give them a regional slant, and this is very important in certain fields of development. Tanzania has tried radio interviews with people in different districts, which is an idea that might be more widely adopted.

Radio, like the motion picture, is inherently a one-way communication channel, even limited feed-back being difficult to arrange. The better time-slots tend to be usurped by commercial sponsors, leaving public service broadcasts to be scheduled at hours inconvenient for listeners, who are primarily interested in music and news.

Even taking all these constraints into account, however, it was felt that more could be done with radio if broadcasts were carefully articulated with other aspects of communications campaigns and if more imaginative programming were used for

development broadcasts. In Botswana, radio is widely used by the Extra Mural Division of the University to promote adult education on a variety of topics, including the effect of the National Development Plan on conditions in various parts of the country. Herbert Mokhachane's young farmers' broadcasts in Lesotho are a case in point of imaginative programming, combining rock music, quizzes and useful information.

Just because radio is a good communicator of information, that does not necessarily make it a good medium for promoting change or for PSC work. It is a good medium for generating awareness but in order to promote change the medium of radio must be reinforced, as in Botswana and Tanzania, by listening groups and back-up material. Perhaps, therefore, the entertaining radio serial offers the best potential use of radio.

Creative use of development-support radio lags because of a shortage of good script writers and artistes and because there is insufficient money in public service broadcasting to pay for good scripting and performances. (As Kabwe Kasoma pointed out, one reason it is important to develop national theatre movements is to provide a talent pool for other media.) In any event, it was agreed that radio will not come into its own as a development communications tool until governments and others are willing to put at least a reasonable amount of money into "talent" as opposed to hardware.



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2