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THE ROLE OF TRADITIONAL MEDIA IN LEARNING FOR CHANGE

FINAL TECHNICAL REPORT

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The Project

Project Name: Traditional Media in Learning for Change

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Major Research Theme: To ascertain whether traditional media can enhance learning among local communities.

Country of Research: Tanzania: Regions of Iringa, Morogoro, Tanga and Shinyanga.

Major Output Expected: A publication in book form of the results from the research.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 *The research project*

The Role of Traditional Media in Learning for change was an effort to understand what role traditional media such as songs, dances, stories, dramatizations, proverbs, jokes and so on can play in inducing learning in local communities. The starting point of the project was that these media were part and parcel of a people's accepted and evolved way of communication. Such media had been the bulwark of traditional communication, and they had been effective in passing on knowledge about society ethos (Mlama 1983).

With the imposition of a different educational value system, information dissemination had developed new forms and the traditional ones no longer received the necessary impetus and/or recognition. The new educational system had not, however been able to absorb and include everyone, and only the young, stood a chance of benefiting directly from the new dispensations. Even for the young, only a small percentage could benefit fully, as there were insufficient opportunities for continuation.

For the majority of the people in the rural areas, and all those dropping off the educational main track after standard seven, for example, there was no other major pervasive media which they could use to voice out their needs and aspirations. The big and technical media such as radio, television, film, newspapers and so on were more accessible in the urban areas, and even so to the more educated. Some of them, such as television or film required substantial infrastructure, most of which were unavailable in the rural areas.

Yet governments are faced with the challenge of developing the rural areas, and galvanizing the rural population towards selfsustaining development. The media readily available were the topdown ones, where

government could send development messages to the people. In a way while there has been considerable response to some of the messages, many in rural areas remain outside the development bandwagon.

The research project was therefore in response to such dilemma. Would the age-old media forms familiar to the people be effective in enhancing learning for development? Given a chance, would community people create artistic responses to prevailing situations, designed for community self-advancement? Would the community respond?

This report outlines the major activities of the research that was carried out. As it will be accompanied with a publication, this report does not delve into theoretical background, as it is dealt with in the manuscript.

2.0 METHODOLOGY OF THE RESEARCH

2.1 *Background*

The research was basically two pronged. The first aspect looked at how community people would react if a performance considered topical was performed in that community. In this particular case, the plays had already been created and were currently being performed. The performances had been created by the people themselves with the assistance of facilitators, with the participation of the researchers. The performances were taken to adjacent communities deemed to have similar problems.

The second prong sought to examine whether communities themselves used the traditional mode of communication to convey important community issues amongst themselves. Through preliminary research, researchers would try to find out whether indeed the traditional modes of communication were used by the communities, and in addition, they would ask the communities to create artistic responses to any of the problems they themselves saw as prevalent in their communities. They

would then perform them to their fellow communities, and researchers would follow up on the communities to ascertain if there was any impact from the performances.

In order to be able to compare results, two regions were selected for this second aspect, one in the north, the other in the South of Tanzania. The Southern communities chosen were essentially agricultural, while those from the North were more associated with cattle keeping, although they were not nomadic. For the first type, three regions were chosen, one from the coast, the Central and Southern regions. The major influence in the selection was the fact that the researcher knew of the plays and the groups. He had seen them perform and was aware of the hold they had in areas where they had performed.

Structurally, the research project was interdisciplinary, with the participation of three University departments, later four. Departments which participated were that of Kiswahili, Literature and Fine and Performing Arts, but had several advisors from other Departments, including Education, Statistics, the Ministry of Education and Culture, the then Tanzania AIDS Project, UNICEF and Television Zanzibar. The advisors were *ad hoc* however, and apart from their participation in consultative meetings, they were otherwise consulted on a “need” basis.

2.2 *Preparation for the Research*

Before fieldwork could begin, there was a consultative workshop to discuss the proposal and the field methodology, which took place May 15th –16th, 1998. Among the participants were a folklorist, statisticians, teaching and learning expert, artists and others active in the field of development work with rural communities.

The workshop lasted two days, and among its recommendations were:-

- ◆ The need to privilege ethnographic methodology.
- ◆ The importance of spending more time in the communities so as to understand better community dynamics.
- ◆ The need to put emphasis on group discussions more so than individual interviews.
- ◆ The importance of avoiding “development biases” and predefinition of development.
- ◆ The need for regular consultations as the research progressed, as this was a relatively new field of inquiry.
- ◆ Contextualising the field research, rather than approaching the work in a dry scientific manner.
- ◆ The need to be wary of what constituted elements attributed to the research interventions.
- ◆ The importance of widening the research areas so as to be able to have results that are more comparative, hence more reliable.

By this time however, and as the budget had been already predetermined by line items, there was little that could change in terms of some of the requirements from the consultative meeting. However in a past workshop meeting among the researchers, it was decided that they should re-visit their plans for field work, and after the first visits, it would then be necessary to hold another consultative meeting which would review what had happened during the field visits.

One other important decision taken was to send an advance team to the research areas so that permits for field work could be obtained much faster, so that there would be little time wasted when the principal researchers went to the field with their teams.

3.0 THE FIELD VISITS

3.1 *The First Field Visits*

As indicated above, there were three main research teams all of which needed to go for the preliminary visits.

- (i) The first team was to go to Iringa, Morogoro and Tanga. This is the team that dealt with theatre performances that had already been put together. The primary objectives for the first visit of this group were to identify and hence conduct preliminary research in the identified communities, particularly to ascertain whether the problems dealt with in the performances were identifiable in those communities. The second objective was to find out if those groups which had created the performances were still functional, and could still put together a credible performance. The groups could then put on the performances, to be followed by post performance discussions. These visits took place in Iringa July 16-22, Morogoro July 23-29 and in Tanga August 4-10.

The second and third research teams had similar objectives, in that they were to go to the communities and “see” what was there in the form of traditional media. They were to hold background research and discussions in the communities about the roles of the traditional media as seen by the people themselves. They would then request the communities with whom they worked to set up groups that would create performances, based on identified problems of the area. These would be performances which they (the community) themselves saw as reflecting important problems in the area, which they would want to bring out to the larger community.

The two teams were to visit three (3) villages, in the South and three (3) in the North. Selection was largely influenced by the

principal researchers' familiarity with the areas of research, and the hope that working with largely agrarian communities in the South may want for comparison with the Northern groups which keep large herds of cattle.

The first visits in the South took place in three villages, in Lulanzi June 29-July 6; Lyamugongwe July 13-19, and in Usokami July 22-28.

In Shinyanga to the North, the first visits were also in three villages, in Budalagujiga Miswaki and Nyamalapa, between July 10 and August 10, 1998.

(ii) The Second Consultative Meeting

In accordance with the recommendations from the first consultative meeting that the researchers should exchange notes and experiences, a second consultative meeting was held after the first visits September 2, 1998. Present were Professors Mulokozi, Mbele and Lihamba (chair) and the three principal researchers.

The essence of this consultative meeting was to give an opportunity to the researchers to raise any issues they had been confronted with during the first visits and be advised on how to proceed. A discussion of observations and results are discussed in the next major section of results. The results will be detailed further in the book.

3.2 The Second Visits

The second fields visits were essentially two fold as well:

- (a) The first dealt with evaluating the impact of plays that had been performed in Iringa, Morogoro and Tanga. The principle aim was to

see whether any of the performances had precipitated any identifiable impact on the communities. It involved going to households as well as holding group discussions with the community members where the performances had taken place. These visits took place in Iringa, Morogoro and Tanga.

This second visit to Iringa took place September 8. The second thrust involved going to the villages which had been told to “create” artistic works in response to identified problems in the communities where they live. The visits to the three villages in Iringa took place September 9-15, 1998, Lulanzi, September 16-22 Lyamugungwe and September 23-29 Usokami. In Shinyanga the second visits took place between 18-October 18. It is important to note that the second visits had originally been expected to take place one month later, but the advisers had suggested that 30 days may be too short a time to go back to see changes in a community, and they had recommended to increase the time between visits.

3.3 *The Third Consultative Meeting*

After returning from the second visits, it was considered important that we share our experiences with the advisers and members of the consultative team that took place in the discussion of the proposal. This meeting took place December 22, 1998 and the researchers presented the interim reports from the first and second visits. In all the three researches, there was indication of “positivity” and the consultative meeting indeed appreciated how the research was proceeding. Among their recommendations were:

- (i) to add control villages
- (ii) to stratify results by age
- (iii) to give detailed contexts in which the research was being done

3.4 *The Third Visits*

The third visits were to be the last scheduled visits for the research. In the proposal, these had been envisaged to take place 3 months after the performances but again advisers had suggested that there should be a considerable lapse of time so that when researchers go back to the communities the association factor wont be so direct.

The objectives of the third visits were rather similar across the groups in that they aimed to ascertain the presence of any developments that could have resulted from the interventions of the research. In the work being done on the plays, the visits took place in May in Iringa, in August and November. In Morogoro and in March in Tanga. In Shinyanga, the visits took place in April 1999 and in Iringa it was from March – April. The latter two more were follow-up visits to assess the impact of the performances of the creations by the communities.

Results

The results from the research were presented at a workshop held at the Tanzania Episcopal Centre, Kurasini in Dar es Salaam May 3-4, 2001. The delay for organizing the workshop was in part due to the delay in releasing funds for the final phase of the project and also because even when the funds were forwarded by IDRC, there was delay in accessing the funds.

The preparation for the results presentation included sending interim reports to Canada in March 2000, for comments from IDRC also duly received April 26, 2000, but the results presentation workshop did not take place until May 2001, in part due to finances, as mentioned above and also because corrections of the interim reports took longer than expected. Funds were not available until late 2000 and we could not access the funds until early 2001.

A meeting to plan for the workshop was held March 24, 2001 also at Kurasini, which among other things set-up dates for the workshop and insisted on the urgency of finalizing the presentations for the workshop.

The major purpose of the workshop was to get views and comments from participants about the research results so that the results could be published. In addition it was expected that as participants were also expected to be practitioners, then debates could also be raised on policy issues vis-à-vis the results from the field.

The workshop was opened by the Deputy Minister for Community Development, Women and Children, Hon. Shamim Khan. In her speech, she paid tribute to the multi-disciplinarity of the research, the importance of doing research in an area close to the people: that of their own communication methods. She challenged the participants to debate on change, and the role traditional media can play in developing the people of Tanzania. She paid tribute to the people of Canada and hoped that such research would be extended to other regions so that the data could be better generalized.

The preparatory meeting had recommended that the presentations be broken down in the following manner.

- Background to the Research.
- Background to theatre in Tanzania.
- Work done in Morogoro, Tanga and Iringa where theatre was taken to the people.
- Work done in Iringa where the people created their own mediated performances.
- Work done in Shinyanga, again where people created their performances.

There were then general discussions, and a drawing up of recommendations. The researchers had prepared short paper versions which are annexed to this report. The workshop was closed by Mr. Myendu from the Planning Section of the Ministry of Education and Culture.

Major Highlights of the Results Presented

The results from the research are detailed in the book manuscript, and below are presented only some of the highlights:-

- Traditional media is still a powerful force in the rural communities, much communication and education still goes on via stories, songs, sayings, riddles, proverbs and “theatisations”.
- Performances give a voice and an opportunity to voice issues that are difficult to bring out. “Didn’t you see that man/woman in the play?” “Don’t you know that song which says.....”
- When confronted with characters in performances the people are forced to make a choice to be like the character they see or not. Even the neutral ones, according to one old man “cant say they did not see”.
- In areas where AIDS plays were performed, condom sales increased.
- Community members gathered more courage to deal with local issues via performances. Songs raised issues of poor schools, misusing community resources, leaders who do not care about the people and so on.
- Women in the coastal region took up some issues with their husbands.
- Coffee (a cash crop) was planted by community members as a way to deal with poverty.
- Latrines were built.

- More girls joined a rural secondary school, which hosted one of the performances.
- In all the research sites memory was high of the themes of the performances, although they took place only once.
- In the performances, men tended to remember men-related issues, while females picked from the performances, female-related issues. For example men when pressed to recall major issues in one community did not mention female-child molestation, while females mentioned issues of misuse of domestic resources, and problems caused by out-of-wed lock children.

Problem Areas

- Researchers did not stay in the villages long enough to get to see the dynamics better.
- The performances were only done once, and as such it was not easy for researchers to be able to isolate whether the effects seen were direct results from the research interventions, or whether they were part of the other interventions e.g. radio programmes, public rallies etc.
- Research tends to generate cynicism from rural communities who see “strangers” come and go, (includes government officials, researchers, development workers etc). Hence our reception in the communities met with such cynicism and our embarrassment is that we have not been able to take the findings back to those communities where we worked.
- We raised questions in the communities which as researchers we could not answer. For example when they asked us to “do plays” they are interested in, we could not, when they asked as to take their problems to the government, we could not, and some of the infrastructural impediments identified in the research, we could not handle them.

- We were told, for example that with the performances there was some change in the communities, but people reverted to the old systems soon after. For example in rural Iringa, because the play showed the danger of women “accepting/begging” local alcoholic drinks from men, in weeks following women sat alone in the bars, but the system has reverted to the old system.
- We did not plan our budget properly, to cater for coordination after all the major activities, which has led to tremendous delays in getting final documents out.

Highlights of the Recommendations from the workshop

Participants in the workshop got into groups at the end of the presentations, and came up with recommendations (annexed) the highlights of which were:-

- More research should be done in the area of traditional media to map it better.
- There should be workshops to sensitise policy makers on the issues of traditional media.
- Theatre should be given more prominence in the educational systems, as it works efficiently as an educational medium.
- Government should create an enabling set of circumstances to promote theatre such as reducing tariffs on equipment and performance fees.
- There should be a separate Ministry of Culture, responsible for overseeing the growth of the cultural sector as a viable and useful aspect of national development.

Areas that need Further Research

The research has produced considerable data to indicate that traditional media can work to raise issues and debate in the local communities where

we worked. However this work also raised a number of issues that deserve further research for example:

- (1) What would be the effect of concentrating such creative exercise in a community for say five years, where the community constantly and regularly creates performances responding to their problems, the way they see them?
- (2) It would be important to study in better detail what factors inhibit change in local communities, but also over time.
- (3) What are the preferred media in rural communities?
- (4) How do the different populations react to change? Women versus men, young versus old etc.
- (5) How can traditional media, which used to be critical in counselling moderation in traditional governance (King and Chiefs were most easily advised or alerted to problems in songs, dances, story telling, proverbs etc) be invoked upon to play a new role in the democratization process?

4.0 CONCLUSION

The research has only touched on the tip of the iceberg, in that it only looked at nine communities, and also for only 3 weeks each which were not continuous either. It has shown that theatre can work, though in the research it was not possible to isolate specific factors that led to the changes seen, except by association. Today, it has become increasingly apparent that the big media have not been able to deal successfully with information and communication deficiencies at the grassroots level. For example stories, programmes, and articles on HIV/AIDS appear frequently in the big media, yet you still find strange beliefs about the pandemic in rural areas. It is time that we go to the level of the people and communicate with those methods that are close to their “hearts”. Traditional media would be such media.