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**Book Review-** Deacock, A. & van Poelje, R. (1997). *Artists As Experts: A Participatory Methodology to Produce Traditional and Popular Media*. Rome: FAO.

(No ISBN #; Videos 26 minutes + 23 minutes available in PAL, Secam and NTSC formats; Cost US \$50; Order from: publications-sales@fao.org)

Over the past 30 years the concept of development has shifted in focus to meeting human needs rather than securing rapid economic growth. Current definitions now recognize the central place of real dialogue with, and participation of, local people in changes that intend to increase their social and material well-being. Communication and discussion are the means by which new ideas and versions of reality are jointly created, agreed upon, and transmitted to others. Yet many development projects that seek to foster social change do so with little consultation with their intended beneficiaries and therefore lack the cultural understanding and specificity they would need to succeed.

There is growing recognition that initiatives that come from outside of the local cultural context have a lower probability of being fully accepted and contributing to real change at a structural or interpersonal level. Often development workers aren't the best people to champion transformations at the local level, since as outside experts they may be unable to connect with people deeply enough to inspire them to reflect on and change their behavior. Instead, the people who can best fulfill that role are locals who can open dialogues and personally transmit messages in culturally and linguistically appropriate ways.

The "Artists as Experts" toolkit by Anamaria Decock and Robert van Poelje of FAO's Communication for Development Group, was designed for community development agents to work with local people and thereby address the repeated disappointments and failures of development communication initiatives to create lasting change. The toolkit is a highly practical step-by-step guide for development workers to conduct a 12-day workshop designed to produce culturally relevant communication materials around a specific topic for a targeted audience. It was written based upon the authors' six years of personal experience of holding training workshops to create traditional and popular media messages in Burundi, Malawi, Uganda and Guinea.

The authors assume that after seeing the artists' performances, the audience will reflect upon and discuss the issues that were raised and that over time this dialogue will lead to changes in the underlying values causing the targeted behavior. Through stories, plays or songs about fictional people, villagers gain the ability to discuss sensitive topics in a non-confrontational manner, identify with problems from other points of view, develop the empathy needed to see past their own stereotypes and construct local approaches to dealing with development

problems. Through this workshop artists become experts at bringing change messages to community audiences in a way they will understand and react to positively.

The toolkit is composed of a detailed step-by-step manual for communication experts and local facilitators to run two workshops, handouts for the participants, a videotape to be shown in the workshops and a diskette with the text of the handouts so that they can be adapted to different languages and varied local circumstances. The workbook includes practical advice from prior training experiences as well as the rationale behind each step to ensure that subsequent workshops done using the manual will not blindly follow the proposed strategies without considering local conditions.

The authors assume that a rigorous research report on a specific development problem has been conducted prior to the workshop and that a complete communication strategy has already been designed to address it. The toolkit makes no recommendations as to which topics should be considered, how the research should be conducted, or if local communities should play a role in framing the research questions or the communication strategy.

The intended media production process outlined in the manual actually includes two workshops: the first 4 days are for the communication specialists to train local facilitators who then run the 8-day artists' production workshop. The facilitators should ideally be a mix of local technicians, extension workers, and media specialists from the government, NGO and community sectors. The artists who participate may be dancers, drummers, comedians, puppet players, actors, storytellers or other creative and talented people from the local area.

The facilitators' workshop encompasses three main themes: the overall communication strategy for the campaign, the research that was conducted and its findings, and creating a common understanding of the role of the facilitators during the artists' production workshop. The facilitators familiarize themselves with the purpose of the workshop through the video that includes two case studies of previous training experiences in Malawi and Uganda. They are then introduced to the content of the problem that the research uncovered and that the communication strategy is designed to address. Subsequently the facilitators are taught techniques for audience selection, targeted message design and pre-testing of the completed productions in nearby villages based on the roadmap of the communication strategy. Lastly, they participate in several exercises intended to help them facilitate effectively, work together as a team and understand the importance of fostering the artists' creativity during the workshop.

The subsequent artists' production workshop is run entirely by the facilitators; the communication specialist only holds an evaluation and reflection session with the facilitators each evening. At the beginning of the artists' workshop, each group introduces themselves with a presentation of their talents. They then learn about the research and the overall communication strategy as well as their role within it. The artists complete an exercise in which they analyze a popular song in order to learn about targeted messaging and then each group decides what type of production to make and how best to present their message using local references and symbolism. The next step is two and a half days of creation, feedback and refinement of the artists' presentations. Finally, the performances are pre-tested in a

nearby village to see what the audience thinks of the content and whether the intended messages have been understood. Towards the end of the workshop, contracts are signed with the artists to ensure that the productions are completed and made ready for distribution within a designated time frame. As a final step the artists complete an evaluation of the workshop itself.

While extremely detailed, the toolkit is missing a crucial last step: it does not recognize the need for an evaluation of the overall communication strategy. The manual should include a method for determining whether changes in behavior have occurred based on the communication messages, and if so, how those new behaviors can be sustained. Additionally, the authors should outline a feedback mechanism so that the messages can change based on audience learning.

The methodology of the “Artist as Experts” toolkit is strongly grounded in participatory communication theories yet it also draws upon more traditional “modernization” theories like the social marketing method and edu-tainment frameworks, which assume that knowledge is the missing key to social change. Social marketing theory has its roots in commercial advertising techniques that target, research, pre-test and monitor audiences and their reactions to messages. Edu-tainment approaches were first championed on the radio by the BBC and on television with the *Simplemente María* soap opera in Peru and further developed by Population Communications International and John Hopkins University. Drawing on Bandura's (1977) social learning theory that posits people learn new behaviors through observation and identification with other, researchers and broadcasters seek to influence behavior by providing positive and negative role models through the media in order to increase audience members' knowledge about an issue, and ultimately change their attitudes and behavior. Both methods call for the introduction of outside information and change messages through media to manipulate people's behaviors and attitudes. Because of these theoretical roots, the “Artists as Experts” toolkit unintentionally serves to reinforce the outdated notion of a passive audience that functions as the object of new information.

The toolkit encourages a participatory and entertaining approach to creating change messages, but ultimately the development agenda remains outside of local control because it doesn't advocate a role for the community in framing the problem or the solutions. Proposed development solutions may therefore not echo with a community's own sense of self. The authors focus on building the capacity of facilitators to conduct future workshops and of local artists to craft more socially conscious change messages; yet they limit viewer input to the post-production performance testing phase. Additionally, the artists' work is intended to address individual level change, not broader structural or institutional change.

Overall, the “Artists as Experts” toolkit offers a comprehensive and thought provoking step-by-step guide to producing culturally appropriate communication for social change messages. As such, it is a valuable resource for anyone involved in designing communication materials with the intention of fostering increased dialogue and change around a specific topic. Development practitioners and communication specialists will find the toolkit most useful; it will also be of interest to program managers, policy makers, researchers, artists and others with an interest in community development and social change.