Footsteps 71

Photo **Mike Webb** Tearfund

Effective communication
Working with the media

by Babatope Akinwande

The media is a major force in shaping both national and international agendas on development issues. 'Media' includes newspapers, magazines, radio, television, the internet, books, and other forms of publishing. If the media highlights a particular issue, it can often really change the situation and encourage a response from the public and the government. It is unhelpful to see the media as separate from relief and development work or as something to avoid. Instead, it is vital that development organisations and churches build good relationships with the media if they want to make changes and have a real impact in the world.

For several years I worked as a journalist covering social, political and development issues for international news agencies in west and central Africa. I often felt frustrated because most of the press or information officers within the development organisations I worked with could not appreciate what I wanted from them. I longed for simple stories that focused on individual people's experience. Instead, I was given lots of long press releases full of technical terms that took several phone calls to understand.

When I contacted organisations for stories, some were so scared of talking to journalists that they never kept their promises to call back. At the other extreme, some would organise 'meals' and press conferences for simple issues that I could have dealt with in just a few phone calls.

As a journalist, what I found most useful were short press conferences where I could learn relevant facts and possible news items that I could use in my five-minute radio programme. Instead I would be invited to grand ceremonies with speeches delivered by everybody from the village chief to his chief warrior. By the time we got to hear the facts, my editor would be furiously calling me to get back to the studio or move to another assignment.

With experience, I became more selective of my sources of information. I turned down many press conferences and shredded boring press releases as soon as they emerged from my fax machine. I quickly realised that only a few organisations really know how to deal with the media. Most organisations, even though they are doing excellent work, do not know how to share this information with the public.

In this issue

Developing good relationships with the media

The key to working effectively with the media is to build good relationships with journalists. Find out which local reporters write about the issues that relate to your work. Get to know them, find out what sort of stories they are interested in. Then when you have a story you can send it directly to them, and follow up with a phone call. This is often more effective than sending out general press releases.

- Most journalists, except the few who are involved with very specialised and technical fields, are interested in stories of individuals' experiences. Avoid sending lengthy, dull reports and policy documents to them. Unless reports are specifically requested, break down the content of reports and policy documents into interesting short stories focusing on the people involved.

- When press conferences are necessary, keep them short and be very clear about the message you want to give. Do not bore journalists with long speeches about your organisation.

- Press releases should be short and contain the most important information in the first paragraph. Journalists are often more likely to use a story if it is already written in the style and length of article appropriate to their publication.

- It is very helpful for organisations to have a dedicated staff member who can deal with the media. This person is usually known as Press Officer or Information Officer. He or she should be trained how to communicate with the media and be able to develop useful relationships with them. If your organisation cannot afford such a post, a senior person in the organisation should be trained and given responsibility for carrying out this important work.

- Although it is a good idea to take the initiative in sharing information, avoid making constant demands for media attention. Do not organise unnecessary press conferences or media lunches or try to attract cheap publicity for your organisation, as

Photo **Geoff Crawford**/Tearfund

ELINATA KASANGA is a subsistence farmer from Balakasau, a remote village in eastern Zambia where Tearfund partner Evangelical Fellowship of Zambia works. In July 2005, she spoke to the UK Chancellor Gordon Brown by live video link organised by Tearfund. The conversation happened on the day that the leaders of the UK, France, Germany, Italy, Russia, Japan, Canada and the US met in the UK for talks, which included discussions on development and climate change.

Elinata was able to speak directly to the Chancellor and raise the issues that people in her village face. She highlighted the

this may mean the media will not take you seriously.

- Never allow your organisation to be pushed into a situation where you have to pay for stories about your good works to be printed or broadcast. Be careful about any gifts you may make to journalists.

- Respond as quickly and as accurately as possible to queries from media organisations. Be honest.

- In difficult situations, don't be afraid to refuse to answer a question. Try to avoid unhelpful responses such as 'No comment'. When in doubt, ask for time to provide a better and accurate response. Be firm but polite.

Media as an advocacy tool

Organisations can use the media in a strategic way to share their objectives, visions and goals with a larger audience. Through careful planning, organisations could gain the attention of the wider public on the issues they are dealing with. For example, an organisation working with abandoned children fathered by foreign peace–

keepers in Liberia, brought the plight of these children to the knowledge of the world through working with Liberian and international journalists. As a result, the Liberian government and the international community has been forced to look into issues of child abuse and to develop better policies.

It is very important for organisations to understand the media environment in the area where they work. Remember that media organisations have their own vision and objectives, and will often have their own agenda on an issue. This may be openly declared or hidden, but needs to be clearly understood. If not, an organisation could become involved in a relation–ship that, instead of supporting and promoting its work, could harm it.

Babatope Akinwande worked as a reporter for the BBC in Côte d'Ivoire, and freelance for Radio France internationale and Deutsche Welle Radio covering west and central Africa. He is now Tearfund Desk Officer for Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea-Bissau, and Chad. He continues to write occasional articles in journals, magazines, and online.

Photo **Markus Perkins** Tearfund

problems of HIV and drought. 'So many people have died in our village and that has led to orphans who have been adopted by foster parents and orphans who are in child-headed homes. This is a big challenge for us.' Elinata also told the Chancellor that her two eldest children

could not go to secondary school and that her family was denied adequate healthcare because the costs were too high.

The Chancellor said that governments must take action to end poverty and told Elinata that 'you and your family are one of the reasons why we must take action.'

Editorial

In this issue we look at different ways of sharing information. For example, *Footsteps* is available as a printed magazine, on CD Rom, or can be read and downloaded from our website. Now it is also available as an email edition. On page 8 we look at how to document our work effectively, and there is a competition to encourage readers to contribute their own ideas as articles for a future issue of *Footsteps*.

Communication is so important in development. We need to communicate well to share ideas and learning, to keep up to date with good practice, and to support and encourage each other. There are many other ways to communicate apart from writing. In oral cultures, visual images, stories, songs and role-play can be very effective ways of passing on information. Technologies such as mobile phones, computers and television can also be used to share information and provide new opportunities and access to information for remote communities.

I hope this issue encourages readers to think about how they use the information they read in *Footsteps*. Is there anyone in your community that you could share ideas with? How could you put these ideas into practice?

Future issues will look at family life, home healthcare and innovative ideas in development.

Maggie

Maggie Sandilands,
Sub Editor

REMINDER – we are currently updating the *Footsteps* mailing list. If you want to continue receiving *Footsteps*, you need to return the pink re-registration form (attached to issue 69), email us, or log onto the tilz website: http://tilz.tearfund.org.fspp

Encouraging local ownership of information

by Isabel Carter

One in six of the world's population is unable to read and write. Many of these people speak local languages and may be unable to understand the national language of their country. This means they are often unable to access information from outside their communities.

The **PILLARS approach** to learning is based on people's enjoyment of discussion and their willingness to share their knowledge within a small group situation. PILLARS Guides are books which are produced by Tearfund to meet the needs of people whose access to outside information may be very limited. To benefit from the Guides, people need to meet together in small groups with at least one person who is literate. Most of the learning is discussion-based. The PILLARS approach to sharing information aims to enable communities to initiate, manage and sustain positive social and economic change in their lives.

There are currently 11 PILLARS Guides on subjects such as mobilising the community, agroforestry, food security, small businesses, HIV and AIDS, human rights, and hygiene and sanitation. Every guide contains 20–25 topics, each of which provides material for one meeting. Each topic is covered on a double page with explanatory text to read out, one or more illustrations, discussion questions and sometimes practical activities. The Guides contain group Bible studies that help to link action with spiritual principles.

Discussion-based learning

The discussion questions are carefully designed to draw out people's existing knowledge and experience and then challenge current practices and attitudes. This discussion-based learning helps to encourage a sense of ownership relating to the new information. It helps people to work together to solve their problems, and increases their confidence to make decisions about their future and take action as a group.

Facilitating discussion

It is not necessary to have a trainer from outside the group in order to use a PILLARS Guide. But they do need someone in the group with

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> Tips for discussion leaders

Read through the whole Guide and become familiar with the content. Consider what people may want to know more about. Recognise your own attitudes and beliefs about the subject and try to avoid imposing these on others.

Introduce the particular topic – relate it to recent events. Use role-play if appropriate.

Explain new words and concepts. This is particularly important when literacy levels are low. People are usually too embarrassed to ask if they do not understand difficult words.

Agree on how the group will work together. Enjoyable meetings, where people are relaxed and can laugh together, tend to result in more worthwhile and productive groups.

Read through the text together. If there is more than one copy available, those who are literate can help others to follow the text.

Work through the discussion questions Don't be afraid of silence as people may need time to think. Remember that there is rarely just one correct viewpoint; so encourage discussion of different viewpoints. Encourage everyone to contribute. Don't criticise responses that you feel are wrong – draw out more information and ideas.

Don't be afraid to say you do not know the answer to a difficult question. Instead say you will respond to the group later when you have more information.

Explore and develop the group's response to the ideas presented.

Document the learning. Make simple notes in a notebook to draw together the learning and any decisions made before closing the meeting. Note down plans for any action. Over time these may prove a really helpful record.

Draw the discussion to a positive close. Try to summarise and feed back the main points raised during the discussion.

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the confidence to facilitate group discussion. This is very different from training or teaching. Facilitation helps to draw out learning and experience from the group members, rather than telling them what to do. Group facilitators may benefit from some training in facilitation skills to help them to use PILLARS Guides. There is a *Facilitation skills workbook* that enables organisations to provide simple training and experience in things like role-play, participatory tools and activities which will help people relax and enter more fully into the discussion.

Adapting the PILLARS approach to meet local needs

Local languages

The PILLARS approach values local language and culture. People are encouraged to translate and adapt the books to make them more relevant for their local situation, though Tearfund does request that the factual content is not changed. The Guides are designed to make it as easy as possible to translate the content. The design files are freely available on CD Rom, together with alternative illustrations for either Africa or Asia. FELM (the Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Mission) translated PILLARS Guides into the Wolof and Serer languages in Senegal. One of their staff commented, 'It is hard to find appropriate, ready-made

Translating a Guide into the Ticuna language in Brazil.

> ### Using role-play in communication

Role-play can be used in all kinds of ways: to highlight problems and attitudes, to share common thinking and frustrations, to bring out likely tensions or to show possible solutions. Role-play makes it easier for people to talk about sensitive topics because they are speaking as if they were another character, not as themselves. Two or three people can usually provide a good role-play with just 10–20 minutes of preparation, if they have clear guidelines. Trying out role-play can also help to bring a group together. Role-play is a really useful way of communicating because:

- it attracts people's attention
- role-plays are usually fun and encourage people to relax and be more open to new learning
- it can raise sensitive issues and explore them in a non-threatening way
- it helps people to remember short but powerful messages.

material on development to translate. Therefore the PILLARS materials are much appreciated by us.'

Training youth leaders

Siam-Care Thailand works with families affected by HIV. They needed new ideas for training their youth and community leaders. They translated *Building the capacity of local groups* into Thai, and distributed it to these leaders. They provided some training in using the Guide and then monitored how it was used. They found that mixing the use of the guide with games and activities gained people's interest. Sharing opinions and group participation were very important. Using the Guides consistently with the same group of people also proved important for success.

Developing writing skills

ACTS in Burkina Faso translated two Guides and then wrote their own Guide in Mooré on HIV. It was the first time they had written something in Mooré. In Burkina talking about HIV is difficult because it means talking about sex, which is taboo there. Now they find the guide has 'freed' a lot of groups to talk about these issues, particularly in the churches.

They have a strong sense of ownership about 'their' Mooré guides. They

commented that translation does not give such a strong sense of ownership as writing. 'The writing work was very hard – but these are our ideas – we formulated them. We see that they are of the same value to the communities. We have learnt to use our own wings!'

Bible study

SIL in Sudan commented 'We used the Bible studies from Genesis as this is the only part of the Bible available in the Keliko language here. The women enjoyed it very, very much. Their eyes were opened very wide as they said, 'We have already read this part several times but we have never thought about this passage in this way.' They were really seeing the connection between the Old Testament stories and their lives.'

Literacy training

WARMYS work with women's groups in the highlands of Peru where literacy levels are low. They have used PILLARS Guides as a way of providing literacy training. A leader or group member reads out the text (usually downloaded from the tilz website in Spanish). The women then work in small groups, reading the text again together, reading out the questions, discussing their answers and then writing them down before coming together again in a larger group to share their learning. Through

A women's group in Mumbai, India, using a community-mapping tool from PILLARS.

this the women are gaining literacy skills as well as knowledge about hygiene, health and nutrition.

Refugees

Solomon Dibaba in Ethiopia used the PILLARS approach with the Mabban people, who are Sudanese refugees in the Ethiopian border region. Solomon realised refugees are often seen as hopeless, displaced and traumatised people with little to do but sit about and wait. He explains: 'Our experience proved otherwise. During our first workshop we planned for 30 people but ended up with over 80. We translated *Mobilising the community*. Of 10,000 Mabban refugees in Sherkole camp, only ten were able to read and write, but it was amazing to see the difference these ten could make, spread out among the translation groups.'

The Mabban rejected the existing pictures in the Guide but there were six artists in the camp so they worked on new illustrations using the two colours the Mabban love – black and red. After translation the Guides were field tested. One man jumped for joy on seeing the first two pages and said, 'We are a people, we are the Mabban!'

Many challenges lie ahead as so few Mabban are literate. They need a literacy programme in order to use the Guides. The trauma of refugee life, with little hope of returning home, means people question the point of learning. However, Solomon comments, 'Empowering refugees is

very important. They need skills and training. Using PILLARS is key for all sorts of development work.'

Mobilising the church

Pastor Soudré Albert works with Ouahigouya Apostolic church in the north of Burkina Faso. He bought the PILLARS Guide on *Mobilising the church* at a training workshop because he thought it looked interesting and could help to motivate his church. He divided the church into groups of ten people that meet three times a week for 30–40 minutes each time. Each group has its own leader and goes at its own pace. 'Over time we have seen the fruit of these Guides in the church. To come across these Guides has been a blessing for the church. It has really given the members of the church a new vision – understanding that as Christians we

can change the world in which we live. People have come from other churches to join the discussion groups. *Mobilising the church* is a document that has really changed me and my church in a very concrete way.'

Isabel Carter developed the PILLARS approach based on doctoral research. She has helped facilitate numerous workshops to help organisations produce Guides in their own languages and has written 11 PILLARS Guides.

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SPECIAL OFFER

If you would like to try out the PILLARS approach to sharing information, we are making a special offer during 2007 only. To organisations that have not used PILLARS before, we will send, **free of charge**, either:

- two Guides (one of your choice – see Resources page for full list – and a facilitation skills workbook) *or*
- a PILLARS CD Rom (which contains Guides and workbook in pdf format so they can be printed out).

Letters

News ▪ Views ▪ Information

Disability and social inclusion

Photo Krishna Lamichhane

Disability is the effect of physical, mental or sensory damage before, at or after birth, by any cause. It means that a person cannot perform his or her daily living activities as normal. Disability is both a cause and an effect of poverty.

Society should respect the rights and dignity of people with disabilities and should not discriminate against anyone because of his or her caste, religion, sex, colour, livelihood or disability. But here in Nepal disability is still stigmatised. Community Based Rehabilitation Service (CBRS) seeks to address this through inclusive education, income generation programmes, and awareness and rights programmes. We carry out home visits to encourage and support people with disabilities, and we offer family counselling. CBRS helps people with disabilities to set progressive goals to increase daily living skills and enables them to take part in community and social activities.

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Training HIV educators

The Democratic Republic of Congo has been ravaged by years of civil war. Our organisation, MEC-APROSCAC, set up a Credit and Savings Union to fight against poverty. However, we quickly realised that as long as HIV continued to spread, our efforts to improve economic and social conditions would be ineffective. We therefore turned our attention to training young people as HIV educators. Their aim is to raise awareness about HIV and break down taboos about sex education at school or in the family so that more young people can be well informed. They are trained to speak out against the stigma that surrounds HIV, and against sexual harassment at school, university and professional settings. Maybe other readers are doing the same and we can share useful lessons from our experience?

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Helping dairy farmers to make wise decisions

Financial management is an important part of any modern business. I have developed a simulator using an MS-Excel® spreadsheet to help dairy farmers to make decisions about investment and planning. This simulator contains a set of typical records and accounts based on an imaginary farm situation. It allows a farmer to plan and assess the economic consequences of any decisions they make. The full version is available upon request.

Nega Tilahun
Ethiopia
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Sustainable technology

I am a water engineer with CMS (Church Mission Society), working with the Diocese of Hyderabad in Pakistan. I read with interest the article in *Footsteps 67* about household biosand filters, which allow families to purify their own drinking water.

Projects that develop local people's skills and their capacity to help themselves have many benefits. By sharing information and scientific knowledge, we have taught people how to make their own filters, so they don't have to buy them. This is more sustainable in the long-term. We use only affordable, locally available materials and the ideas are simple so that people can pass them on to each other. These skills can be carried with people even when they are displaced by war. Our design for a home-made biological sand filter is available on www.cms-uk.org/water. We have also developed a method of removing salt from sea water.

We would like to encourage other engineers and development workers to adapt technology and put it within the reach of those who need it, by simplifying designs and adapting them to use only locally available and affordable materials.

Maurice Connor
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Rubbish collecting

Photo GDA Afrique Centrale

Urban planning problems such as how to deal with rubbish collection can cause city authorities a headache. These wheel barrows are very useful for collecting rubbish but sometimes they are also used for carrying food to sell. It is very important not to use the same wheel barrow for both food and rubbish, as this can spread disease.

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Effective writing

When we document information, whether it is for a report, case study, newsletter or poster, it is very easy just to write down everything we know about the subject. This can be very boring for the readers! It may also mean that they do not read past the first paragraph. If they do decide to read on, they may waste a lot of time reading text that is not relevant to them before they get to the part which is really useful.

To ensure your document is effective, there are three important things to consider:

1 Purpose

Consider the reason why you are writing, not just what you are writing about. Ask yourself the following questions:

- What do I want to achieve? What change am I looking for?
- What do I want the reader to think, learn or do?

What is the most effective way to share information?

An effective document promotes action. If you can think of the action you want your readers to take, you will be better able to provide the ideas and information to help them to take it. Adding discussion questions at the end of an article will help the reader to think about how to apply the information to their own situation.

2 Audience

Writing is effective if the reader finds what you write to be useful. It is not just the content you need to think about, but whether the style and language used is appropriate to your readers. Consider these questions:

- Who is your audience? Who are the main people you want to communicate with?
- What are their roles and responsibilities?
- What or how much do they already know?
- What do they want to hear? What do they need to hear?
- How does the audience best understand information and ideas? Would a discussion, practical demonstration, radio programme or a role-play be more appropriate than writing?

Pretend you are speaking to your main audience as you write, this will help you to write in an appropriate way. Some audiences will understand difficult or technical words, others will not. Make sure the language is appropriate. Choose short, simple words where possible. If it is necessary to use long words, such as technical terms, that your audience is unlikely to understand, then explain what they mean. Make average sentence length around 15–20 words.

3 Key Message

A message is a piece of information targeted at a specific group of people. Summarise your main message in 15–20 words. It is the single most important point you want to make.

Think about how you can share the information most effectively. How will you encourage people to take practical action?

'Most of what is in *Footsteps* I already know, but when I read it in *Footsteps* it makes me want to go and *do* something about it'

Footsteps reader quote

Tips for writing a document

Outline

Before you start, write an outline of what you want to say. The outline will help give the document structure, act as a guide as you write the first draft and help the document to flow. Write a sentence that contains the main message and then make a list of the key points you want to make, in order.

You may want to show the outline to colleagues or a representative of your main audience to help you to improve the usefulness of the document before you write the first draft.

Title

The title of the document should define the content in as few words as possible. An effective title attracts the attention of the reader. Use the title to deliver the key message, indicate the content of the document, or be a challenging question. The golden rule is to keep it short: express just one idea or subject in the title.

Introduction

The introduction is one of the most important parts of the document. It is the next thing the reader will read after reading the headings. If the introduction doesn't attract the reader, they are unlikely to read on. The introduction can:

- Help the reader to put the document into context (this might include some background information).
- Explain the problem you are addressing.
- Mention the question you are seeking to answer.
- If you are writing a case study about a project, you could briefly explain why the project came about, what the project involved and what the impact was.

The introduction is sometimes easier to write once you have written the main part of the document. Make sure the introduction is kept short. By writing your key message in the introduction, you can make sure that the reader learns something even if they decide not to continue reading.

Editing

When you have written a draft, pause for a break and then go back and edit it. Editing usually means taking away words that you don't need and correcting any mistakes. It should ensure that the document:

- is easier to read
- makes better sense
- does not miss out anything important
- does not include anything irrelevant.

It can be helpful to ask someone else to review it for you.

Headings

Use headings carefully. Use them to shape the structure of the document rather than to make the page look better.

Graphics

Tables, diagrams and images help you to explain your point. They also make the page look less boring. Keep graphics simple and place them on the page where you refer to them.

- Bullet points are useful for presenting a list, but use them sparingly.

Highlighting is useful for emphasising words or ideas. **Bold** and *italics* are better than underlines or CAPITALS.

Photo Tearfund

Ask others to help you review your writing.

Credits

Make sure that the author of the document is mentioned. Credit any photos or illustrations used.

This article was compiled by Maggie Sandilands and Rachel Blackman using information adapted from Writing for Change *by Alan Barker and Firoze Manji. This excellent resource is produced by Fahamu in English, French and Spanish, and is available to order on CD Rom or read and download from their website:*
www.fahamu.org/wfc.php

FOOTSTEPS COMPETITION

Has this issue inspired you to share information about some exciting aspect of your own work? We are holding a competition for our readers to write an article with 500 to 1,500 words. Your target audience is *Footsteps* readers around the world. The challenge is to share information about a new idea in a really interesting way, which will encourage other readers to use and benefit from it. Please make use of diagrams, photos or illustrations if appropriate. Articles must be your own original work.

The closing date for articles is 31 January 2008.

PRIZES
We are offering prizes for ten winners:

- Their articles will be published in Issue 74 of *Footsteps*
- They will receive US $100 worth of books of their choice from Practical Action, Hesperian, TALC or Tearfund
- They will receive ten complimentary copies of the issue that contains their article.

Using mobile phones

Training teachers with text messages

by John Traxler

The Government of Kenya has made education a priority, seeing it as a way to encourage social and cultural transformation on issues such as poverty, disease, child-marriage, corruption and adult illiteracy.

In January 2003 the Government announced the introduction of Free Primary Education. This led to nearly one million new pupils enrolling in primary school. In individual schools the number of pupils increased by up to 25%, which placed great demands upon the Ministry of Education. Over-crowded classes and under-trained teachers meant that many students soon dropped out. A major challenge was to rapidly increase the numbers of trained teachers.

A school empowerment programme was developed to train 200,000 primary school teachers. This is a distance learning programme which trains teachers as they work. It makes use of information technology such as video cassettes, audio cassettes and radio broadcasts, as well as printed materials. A study was carried out in 2004, to look at attitudes to information and communication technology among teachers in eight areas of Kenya. This showed the potential of using mobile phones and

Photo **Geoff Crawford** Tearfund

SMS (text messaging) as part of the learning process. SMS is a system for sending messages as short typed texts on a mobile phone.

The benefits of using SMS in Kenya are clear

Conventional methods of sharing information are limited due to:

- Poor roads and postal services
- Remote rural areas
- Poor landline telephone networks
- Poor access to electricity from the national grid
- Little or no internet access outside one or two major cities
- Few modern computers, and little or no user expertise, especially in smaller towns and rural areas.

SMS has great advantages:

- Good mobile phone networks
- The potential for using solar power to charge mobile phones
- High levels of mobile phone ownership and usage.

Teachers showed interest and acceptance of using SMS for learning. The use of SMS to share information is well established. However, its use in supporting teaching and learning based around discussion is more exciting and challenging. In this teacher training programme, SMS is used for delivering:

> ## Mobile phones and the Millennium Development Goals

Goal 8: Develop a global partnership for development (trade/aid/debt).

Target 18: In co-operation with the private sector, make available the benefits of new technologies, especially information and communications.

Indicator 47: Telephone landlines and mobile (cell) phone subscribers per 100 population.

- The countries with the fewest telephone landlines are the Democratic Republic of Congo (fewer than one per 1,000 people) and Chad (one per 1,000 people).

- The average for Sub-Saharan Africa is ten landlines per 1,000 people and 74 mobile phones per 1,000 people.

- In 44 out of the 48 Sub-Saharan African countries, there are more mobile phones per 1,000 people than landlines per 1,000 people.

Source: Statistics from World Bank, October 2006

Photo **Isabel Carter** Tearfund

Increased access to communication technology such as mobile phones brings many new opportunities for sharing information.

- Study guide material and week-by-week support, highlighting the important issues to focus on
- Content such as hints, tips, outlines, lists, summaries, revision
- Reminders about future assessments, assignments or meetings
- Discussion in the form of feedback, questions and answers
- Support and encouragement
- Urgent messages about errors, cancellations and changes.

The system is free to authorised teachers who use an individual identity code. At a local level, study groups of registered participants can use the system to chat about their work and encourage each other.

At the end of trials, the technical and organisational achievements of the system were impressive. 8,000 teachers took part in the trials. About 85% of them were active users and over a quarter of a million SMS messages have been sent to date.

John Traxler is Reader in Mobile Technology for e-Learning in the School of Computing and IT at the University of Wolverhampton. He researches ways of using innovative technologies to support sustainable learning in Africa.

He is co-editor (Kukulska-Hulme A and Traxler J, Eds 2005 Mobile Learning: A Handbook for Educators and Trainers, *Routledge, London) and co-author of* Commonwealth of Learning guidance on Mobile Learning in Developing Countries.

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Access to low cost technology

Photo **Patrick Kamoyani**

Patrick lives in Western Kenya in a remote village with no electricity or landline telephone. His home, which he also uses as an office, is very simple, but he is able to use up-to-date technologies. He produces KiSwahili translations of development publications for a website.

Patrick uses a 12 volt car battery with an inverter which increases the power supply from 12 volts to 240 volts – the equivalent of mains power. He runs a laptop computer, printer and mobile phone from this. The battery lasts four to five days and he then gets it recharged in a nearby shop. He has a dial-up connection between his mobile phone and laptop and uses Bluetooth wireless technology. This means he can use his mobile phone connection to access the internet on his laptop. He finds this is much cheaper than using internet cafes. Eventually he hopes to be able to afford a solar panel to charge his car battery at home.

Patrick provides a great example of how people in a remote area can benefit from technology.

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Western Kenya
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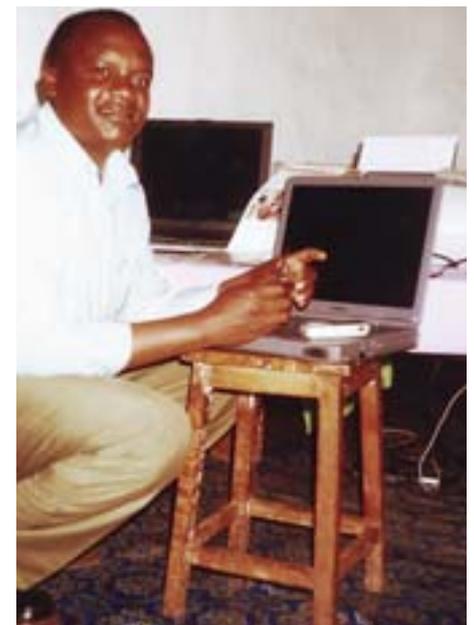
Photo **Patrick Kamoyani**

Mobile phones to save lives

In Orissa, India, few people have home telephones. Landlines either never reached the rural areas of this region, or were destroyed by terrorist groups. However, it is common to see people using mobile phones. A local organisation called TREAD (Trinity Rural Educational Association for Development) have a vision for developing healthcare in the rural areas using this new technology.

In remote areas many people die unnecessarily because they have no access to medical care. TREAD's vision is for each village in the area to have one local person trained in primary healthcare, and equipped with a mobile phone. They would be able to deal with many common health questions and also bring hygiene education to the village. When an emergency arose that was too complicated for their skills, they could contact the nearest health centre by phone and have an ambulance sent out immediately, to bring essential medicines or to take the sick person back to the health centre.

Many lives could be saved using this technology.

Sharing experience and learning together

by Doug Reeler

The aim of Community Development Resource Association (CDRA) is to help develop the capacity of community-based organisations working in development and social transformation in southern and east Africa.

For CDRA, learning is a main activity, rather than an addition to our work. We believe it is important to set aside regular, dedicated time for learning. Each month, all of our field staff take a week-long break from fieldwork to participate in a 'home week'. During this week, we meet to reflect on our work and on the previous few weeks in the field. We use this time to share experience, learn from each other, improve our practice, plan or re-plan, adjust our strategy, build relationships, and be refreshed and re-inspired for our work.

Time well spent

The balance of activities means that half of the week is spent learning about our fieldwork and practice, and the other half is focused on organisational maintenance, work planning, business and staffing issues. Taking time to focus on learning means that the business and strategy decision-making meetings are better informed, less complicated, less time-consuming, and more fulfilling.

The 'home week' creates and renews two-way learning relationships between staff. It builds trust and understanding, provides accountability and so improves our work. This process is the basis of CDRA, and is how we maintain and develop our organisation. It is not a static process, but changes as we change, to ensure a programme that challenges, stretches and motivates us.

When asked to explain why we set aside so much of our time for reflection on our work, we respond that the work we are involved in is complex, tiring and stressful. The learning process helps us to work better and use our

Photo **Jim Loring** Tearfund

Taking time to discuss work with colleagues can improve effectiveness and strengthen relationships.

time more productively. Our personal experiences of other organisations have been of many tired, stressed individuals working separately from one another. This leads to poor relationships and means people repeat mistakes. We find that spending a 'home week' together each month

A 'home week' pattern

The structure of the 'home week' is flexible, but it often follows this pattern:

■ MONDAY

Staff breakfast Eating together provides a relaxed social time when staff can share what has been happening over the past month.

Creative session We invite an artist to work with us, over a few monthly sessions, to use creative processes (such as painting, drawing, clay sculpting, dance, story telling or drumming) to explore and learn from. This lively session helps team-building and develops creativity, lateral thinking and innovation.

Report writing In the afternoon we document our work by writing a reflective report on the previous month.

■ TUESDAY

Staff meeting Dealing with the operational issues of the organisation. The field staff meet to respond to the requests received in the last month and to look at new opportunities. Each meeting is chaired by a different member of staff.

■ WEDNESDAY

Report feedback The day is dedicated to reading each other's reflective reports written on Monday, and giving feedback. The purpose is to learn from our own and each other's practice and to help us become accountable to each other.

■ THURSDAY

Varied agenda Can include writing case studies, discussing strategy, sharing tools or methods, designing a new course or discussing a difficult workshop that someone is going to facilitate. Every few months we have sessions which focus on personal development. These help us to ensure we maintain a balance between our personal and professional lives, to review personal development plans and work through any issues we are struggling with individually. Each person chooses their own supervisor for this.

■ FRIDAY

Conclusion Meetings are held to draw together all of the issues raised in the week, and for teams to discuss joint internal or external projects.

improves the quality of our work, and strengthens our relationships. It prepares us for three clear weeks of fieldwork, without any business meetings. It gives us renewed and clearer focus and always brings lots of new ideas and resources to enrich our practice. Most of the ideas in our organisation have come from the 'home week', which shows how valuable it is.

Documenting our work

Many organisations insist on the importance of documentation, capturing learning and experience for future reference. However, in reality many reports are saved, filed away and never actually read. At CDRA we value the process of writing. On the Monday afternoon of 'home week' there is space to write a personal, reflective account of our recent work experience. The report is short (two or three pages), honest, informal and written in the first person, so the focus is not just on what we did, but our thoughts, feelings, questions and learning from the experience. On the Wednesday we read each other's reports and write down our responses, thoughts and questions. Then we come together to discuss these. We use the learning from that discussion as the basis for a monthly update on our website. The reflective reports are filed away for reference, but their purpose has already been achieved in what we have learned together through discussion.

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'Home weeks' give renewed and clearer focus, and always bring lots of new ideas and resources to enrich our practice

Bible study

Communication

Have you ever been hurt by the words of a friend or colleague? How did it make you feel? How did it change your relationship with that person?

It is probable that each of us has been wounded by the words of others. As a result, barriers can be raised between people and communication can become less effective.

Photo **Richard Hanson** Tearfund

Read Ephesians 4:20-32

When we try to look through a dirty glass window, we often just see the dirt and not the view. When people are angry or unhappy, they often communicate these emotions through their words.

- *In what ways do your actions and your words, positive and negative, affect those with whom you live and work?*
- *Talk with a friend about how to be an encouragement to others.*
- *Consider how you can use words in a more careful way.*

Some people say that using our ears is even more important than using our mouths!

Proverbs 18:13 says, 'The one who gives an answer before he listens – that is his folly and his shame.'

Listening is important. Many disagreements and a lot of pain could be avoided if people cared enough about one another to choose to listen attentively. Listening is an intentional act. We need to decide to listen to somebody. It doesn't usually just happen by accident. When we fail to listen, we communicate that we do not care about the thoughts or ideas of the other person.

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In the same way that we train to become good at sport, we need to practise good communication in order to have positive and effective relationships. It is a life-long challenge. We need to monitor our own progress and ask for help from others who will be honest in their responses. We also need to learn how to listen to God.

Tele-secondary schools

by Nigel Poole

Photo **Nigel Poole**

Access to education is often regarded as a human right, and achieving universal primary education is one of the Millennium Development Goals *(Footsteps 63)*. Education has many benefits:

- Reading and writing skills are important for social development
- Access to new knowledge is important to equip children and their families to adapt to a changing world
- Education enables people to take advantage of new opportunities for personal and community development.

A key issue in many countries is to ensure that girls share equally in these opportunities. For remote and isolated communities, education can be a means of development, empowerment and social and economic inclusion in the wider society.

The Tseltal, Tsotsil and Chol indigenous peoples live in remote areas of Chiapas State, southern Mexico. Economically, socially and culturally, these groups are often marginalised. To provide these remote communities with access to

education, the Mexican government uses television to provide secondary schooling. Lessons are broadcast daily by satellite to televisions in the local schools. Each class should also have a teacher to give further explanations and to distribute textbooks, although sometimes the lack of resources prevents this. There are about 16,000 tele-secondary schools in Mexico. This system has great potential to meet the needs of remote and marginal communities in other developing countries.

In 2006, a study was carried out to evaluate the impact of this system. More than 1,500 secondary school students, aged 12–16, in about 80 communities were surveyed. Many parents and community leaders were also interviewed. They reported many benefits from tele-schooling, for the students as well as the wider community:

- As the communities are so remote, the tele-school is the main source of information about new skills and knowledge.

- Students are introduced to information on social problems within society, such as abuse of drugs and alcohol, and family planning
- Many students were very motivated to continue their education
- Parents approved of the useful skills learned, such as bookkeeping, and the attitudes and adaptability of students.

However, such education can also bring some problems:

- Introducing students to new ideas, values and hopes that are unfamiliar to their parents seems to be promoting a gap between the generations.
- Many young people see education as a way out of the community. Their ambitions often lead them to migrate to bigger towns, threatening the long-term sustainability of their communities.
- Students who remain in the rural community may find that despite their education they are given little voice in community matters. Disappointment can lead to deep frustration, which can often cause problems of drugs, alcohol, violence and even suicide.

This study showed that the benefits of secondary tele-education spread beyond the classroom, but it also highlighted lessons to be learned about the content of such schooling and the way it is delivered. These include:

- ensuring that schooling is adapted to the local circumstances
- involving parents and community leaders. They also need to have some understanding of the new knowledge and the world beyond their communities. This way they can better understand the changes and challenges facing their children.

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Resources

tilz website www.tearfund.org/tilz

Tearfund's international publications can be downloaded free of charge from our website. Search for any topic to help in your work.

Partnering with the local church

This exciting new ROOTS book highlights the role of the local church in integral mission. It examines the various relationships between Christian organisations and local churches. It provides models for working, including church mobilisation. It covers issues such as leadership, partnership, changing focus and direction, and monitoring and evaluating this kind of work. It contains many case studies, discussion questions and tools. This is a practical and useful book for Christian organisations that work with local churches, including NGOs and church denominations.

To order, please contact:

PO Box 200
Bridgnorth
Shropshire
WV16 4WQ
UK

Email: roots@tearfund.org
Website: www.tearfund.org/tilz

On-line resources

LEISA (Low External Input Sustainable Agriculture)

LEISA focuses on finding technical and social options open to small scale farmers who seek to improve productivity and income in an ecologically sound way, using local resources and natural processes.

The on-line journal for LEISA is available on this website: www.leisa.info

It contains useful ideas and articles on key development topics such as agriculture, communications, urban health, appropriate technologies.

The Drum Beat

A weekly electronic publication from the Communication Initiative which explores initiatives, ideas and trends in communication for development. It covers issues such as children, health, human rights, HIV, sustainable development, governance. Issue 371 focuses on communication for development.

Email: drumbeat@comminit.com

The International Institute for Communication and Development (IICD)

http://www.iicd.org/

IICD specialises in information and communication technologies (ICTs) as a tool for development. IICD assists local partner organisations to make effective use of ICTs within their own context, and links local organisations with the international community to share learning on ICTs.

PILLARS Guides

Mobilising the church The role of the local church, leadership, Bible study groups, planning, working within the community and maintaining the vision of the church.

Building the capacity of local groups Encouraging groups to improve their communication, effectiveness and activities.

Mobilising the community An exciting process of encouraging and supporting communities to analyse their own situations and to take steps to work together to make changes for the better.

Credit and loans for small businesses Encouraging good practice in record-keeping, planning and maintaining savings and credit groups.

Healthy eating Ideas to help improve household nutrition at low cost – food groups, kitchen gardens, recipes, methods of food preservation, and hygiene.

Responding more effectively to HIV and AIDS Challenges unhelpful attitudes and practices. Provides information regarding infection, HIV tests, medicinal drugs and supporting people affected by HIV.

Preparing for disaster Encourages communities to consider possible risk situations and help them prepare to respond effectively. Includes information on first aid, emergency stores and community shelters.

Agroforestry Agroforestry improves soil conservation, nutrition, soil fertility, fuel wood production and family income. Includes details of nursery techniques.

Improving food security Practical information on pest control, grain banks and new techniques for food preservation and storage.

Encouraging good hygiene and sanitation Practical and low-cost ideas for promoting hand washing, keeping food safe, providing safe drinking water and building latrines.

Seeking justice for all Helping people learn about their human rights based around the UN Universal Declaration of Human rights. Understanding God's passion for justice, challenging unjust laws, promoting and protecting the rights of others.

Facilitation skills workbook Equips people with the skills and confidence to facilitate small group discussions.

PILLARS CD Rom v3 Contains most PILLARS guides, the PILLARS workbook and Facilitation skills workbook.

PILLARS Guides are available from Tearfund in English, French, Spanish and Portuguese. For organisations able to pay they cost £3.50 plus postage. Bulk discounts are available.

To order, please contact: PO Box 200, Bridgnorth, Shropshire, WV16 4WQ, UK
Email: pillars@tearfund.org Website: www.tearfund.org/tilz

Blogging

by Maria Kanini

A blog is sometimes just a personal diary on the internet. But to me, it is more than that. It is a voice – *my* voice. The first time I heard about blogging, I was excited. Finally, I could make my voice heard. Writing a blog gives you the opportunity to think about your experiences and form opinions of your own.

Blogging can be used to have a positive or negative effect in a society. Having the power to say what you want to say without censorship, transfers the moral responsibility to the writer.

I use my blog to highlight organisations in Kenya that do a good job concerning development issues. My top priority is HIV and I look out for good practice. A number of my blog entries have been published in newspapers here in Kenya. When I read those articles I think to myself, yes, my voice got heard.

Blogging is now taken more seriously in African society. A Media Blog Association has been set up. Anyone can write and publish a blog on the web, so blogging is a form of citizen journalism. It is also a networking tool – Kenya Unlimited has a website which is bringing together Kenyans around the world to discuss issues that matter to them.

I believe that development organisations should take advantage of blogs. What better opportunity to tell your story in your own voice?

Maria Kanini works with Trans World Radio as the Public Relations Officer, and is also involved in a lot of fundraising and project management.

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Photo **Maria Kanini**

An extract from Maria's blog

'Finally … the church is discussing HIV!

For the last two years, Trans World Radio – Kenya and Tearfund UK have worked together to translate, publish and distribute Swahili books about HIV. In 2005, Trans World Radio launched the Swahili version of the PILLARS book titled *Responding more effectively to HIV and AIDS*.

The idea was to have churches discuss the books in their meetings. You see, the argument in Africa and especially in Kenya is that the church is not doing enough about HIV. But the question is … are we equipping the clergy to do so?

We teamed up with All Nations Gospel Church Gikomba, in Majengo, one of the slums in Nairobi, Kenya. It took a while to convince the senior pastor of the church, but then he sold the idea to the board. His enthusiasm towards this project cannot be under-estimated.

So last night … I finally met up with the Bible study groups that have been using these books and discussing HIV. These people discussed this pandemic with no shame. It was amazing … no shame! This was a mixed group of all ages and there was absolutely no shame in discussing why women are more vulnerable to HIV. You would have thought that people would have walked out because of the initial tension as they openly discussed the anatomy of our bodies. But no, this church has decided it is time to be open and that silence has killed people for too long.

Finally, a revolution has begun. And hey, I thought they would only discuss this book for four sessions, but they plan to cover the entire book with over 20 sessions. How about that? The idea is simple … one church at a time, discussing HIV regularly in their Bible studies and with their leaders, keeping notes so that we can evaluate their reactions.

If this is not a revolution, what is?'