

Workshop report: Participatory communications for orphans and vulnerable children in Malawi



**Training and Research Support Centre (TARSC) and
Country Minders for People's Development (CMPD)
in the
Regional Network for Equity in Health in east and
southern Africa (EQUINET)**



**Monkey Bay, Malawi
3 February 2010**

With support from IDRC Canada

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Cite as: Training and Research Support Centre, Country Minders for People's Development and EQUINET (2010) 'Participatory communications for orphans and vulnerable children in Malawi,' *Workshop Report, 3 February 2010, Monkey Bay, Malawi.* EQUINET: Harare.

1. Background

Institutions in the Regional Network for Equity in Health in East and Southern Africa (EQUINET), co-ordinated by Training and Research Support Centre (TARSC) and Ifakara Health Institute (IHI) have built skills in participatory action research / participatory reflection and action (PRA) through including the approach into their work in different countries in east and southern Africa. The projects have generated knowledge from community level about local health systems. The PRA approach supports communities, often in dialogue with health workers and other stakeholders, to conceptualise their health issues and concerns, and then develop plans to resolve those issues and concerns. Trained facilitators from academic institutions and non government organisations (NGOs) use PRA methods to strengthen the power within groups of local people to voice issues and act on their health systems. While the process involves review, feedback and monitoring of progress within communities, formal reports and papers are produced by the researchers and facilitators. This puts the latter in a position of communicating with the outside world about the knowledge generated. While statements and images from communities are included, the voice of communities and the selection of key messages is often then filtered through others, rather than more directly.

Equity in health is not just about the delivery of resources, facilities, medicines, services and service providers. It is also about who speaks, whose voices are heard and who is listened to. To achieve equity in health therefore, it is important for research participants to have the power to speak to others (within and outside their own communities). Media and publications are one way to ensure the sustainability of people's voices.

This project was conceptualised to help build community voice to communicate about their own problems; in addition, EQUINET has undertaken other streams of work, such as the 'Eye on Equity' community photography (see www.equinet africa.org), to help give voice to community concerns and actions.

Following skills support from TARSC, Ifakara in EQUINET and with mentorship from REACH Trust, Country Minders for Peoples Development (CMPD) a community based organisation in Monkey Bay, Malawi used the PRA approaches in their work with communities in Monkey Bay with the aim of profiling the needs of orphans and vulnerable children and orienting local community based organisation support for these needs. The work was done between May 2008 and February 2009, and the report 'Promoting and protecting the health of orphans and vulnerable children in Monkey Bay, Malawi' was published in May 2009 (Asibu W, Chingoni J, Majawa D, Jambo H, Kambewankako T, Namakhoma I, Loewenson R, Country Minders for Peoples Development (CMPD) Malawi; REACH Trust Malawi, and TARSC (2009)) available at <http://www.equinet africa.org/bibl/docs/CMPD%20PRA%20Report%20May09.pdf>. The project recognised the need for ongoing work with the community based organisations (CBOs) in Monkey Bay, and felt that it would be important to highlight the issues of orphans and vulnerable children using media. In follow up, TARSC and Country Minders for People's Development (CMPD), under the auspices of EQUINET, undertook this pilot project with the CBOs and a few of the orphans and vulnerable children in Monkey Bay.

Rebecca Pointer, a consultant with TARSC met with Wilson Asibu from CMPD at the EQUINET conference in September 2009, during which Wilson outlined the PRA project already done in Monkey Bay. He expressed great concern, particularly about the girl orphans and vulnerable children who were turning to commercial sex work. He felt that it was important for these girls to find their voice and thought the participatory communications project would enable that. Rebecca and Wilson then worked together to generate a suitable workshop process, drawing on the issues raised in the PRA report (ibid).

In the workshop that was planned, the specific aims were to identify

- a key message that participants in the PRA process was to communicate;
- a target audience that those involved in the PRA process wanted to communicate with; and
- the most appropriate medium for communicating that message to that audience.

2. Introduction

The participants introduced themselves (see *Appendix 1*), and Rebecca Pointer from TARSC/ EQUINET explained the purpose of the workshop while Kingsley Chikaphupha from REACH Trust translated. She said that this project was a follow-on from the work of CMPD using PRA approaches that had been done in 2008/9. The intention was to develop a communications project around one of their key issues, identified through the PRA approach. She explained the programme for the day (see *Appendix 2*) and explained that the purpose was to identify *who* the participants wanted to communicate with (audience), *what* action message they wanted to communicate and *how* they wanted to communicate (medium) (e.g. song, radio, video, poster, etc).

After this introduction she asked for questions. At this point two participants refuted that any PRA work had been done. A discussion was held on what had previously taken place. Country Minders insisted that they had implemented the PRA project in the community (cited above) and also outlined a health literacy project undertaken with REACH Trust. Several members from CBOs in the area agreed that these processes had taken place. However they were concerned that the changes that took place after these processes had not met their expectations. Community members expected that more money would have been made available to fund projects around the problems they had identified during the PRA process. They were therefore concerned about what had happened to these funds. CMPD clarified that, as they had indicated at the time, the PRA process was itself not intended to be a source of funding, but a process that allowed communities to identify and act on their own priorities and then use this to negotiate for local funds. If funds were needed to tackle problems identified through the PRA work, it was intended that the community, working with Country Minders and others, develop their proposal and seek funding for the actions identified, either from the local council or more broadly if needed. Community members suggested that CMPD should have communicated this more effectively initially, while CMPD noted their efforts to do so in the PRA work. They agreed that they would follow up with the community to take forward the issues raised in the PRA work. Rebecca further clarified that this work too would not involve funding of projects but was limited to building skills for communication tools. While the two participants who initiated the discussion left the meeting, the remainder caucused and agreed to proceed with the workshop on the participatory communications, drawing on the issues they had raised in the PRA work.

3. Identifying key issues for orphans and vulnerable children

In a plenary session, led by Kingsley, participants recalled the key issues for orphans and vulnerable children that they had identified during the PRA process and added to these.

At this stage we did not restrict the participants to identifying *only* health problems, but encouraged them to think broadly. The key problems identified were:

- food and hunger
- school fees
- crime and drug use
- sexuality-related issues, including: early marriage of girl orphans and vulnerable children, prostitution among girl orphans and vulnerable children, and promiscuity.

4. Identifying the audience

Participants then broke into three groups to identify who could assist with tackling the issues. Rebecca emphasised that participants should think broadly, from global to local levels. When the groups had identified the relevant groups, they then decided which group would be most strategic to addressing the particular problem. The groups presented their discussions back to the plenary session.



4.1 Group 1: Food and hunger

Group 1 indicated that the main groups that could help tackle hunger among orphans and vulnerable children were:

- the World Food Programme
- SIDA
- the Evangelical Church
- government's Ministry of Social Welfare
- Joyce Banda Foundation
- CBOs
- the community.

The group said that the Evangelical Church had already set up an irrigation and food growing scheme to help feed the orphans, but that the scheme was failing due to a lack of volunteers. They therefore felt that it would be most effective to target the community to become more involved in the irrigation and food growing scheme and develop a campaign to show how this could benefit the whole community. They also said it was necessary for CBOs to become involved in the scheme. They suggested that a campaign to encourage volunteers would be appropriate.

4.2 Group 2: School fees & Crime and drug use

Group 2 indicated that the main groups that could help with school fees were:

- non-governmental organisations (NGOs)
- government, particularly the Ministry of Education
- International donors.

They said that, regarding crime and drug use, groups that could help included:

- non-governmental organisations (NGOs)
- government
- the police.

The group thought that it would be most useful to tackle the government and the Ministry of Education, by developing a campaign for free education (no school fees) for orphans and vulnerable children.

4.3 Group 3: Sexuality-related issues

Group 3 identified a number of groups to address the sexuality-related issues, including:

- guardians
- village heads
- peers
- CBOs
- the District Assembly (specifically Social Welfare)
- NGOs
- police services
- church elders
- Members of Parliament.

The group indicated that there had been a lot of debate about which group would be most strategic to target, as guardians were frequently responsible for forcing girls into early marriage or commercial sex work and the village heads and community did not see early marriage as a problem. It was finally agreed that a campaign to reach girl orphans and vulnerable children and advise them of services available if they are facing such cajoling was advisable.

4.4 Ranking and scoring to select the project

The ranking and scoring found that school fees were the most pressing to address, but as this was not a health issue, the community selected sexuality issues as the topic for media production. However, Rebecca urged them to take forward the suggested campaign around schools fees, such as by organising other CBOs to work with them to take the issue of lack of school fees for orphans and vulnerable children to the government.

5. Developing a key message

In a plenary discussion, it was agreed that to address the sexuality issues of orphans and vulnerable, it was important to send a message to girl orphans and vulnerable

children (who were most affected by these issues) that their life was worth more and that help was available if they wanted a way out of early marriage or prostitution.

The discussion was quite emotional, as the girl orphans struggled to articulate the issues and boy orphans thought that the campaign should revolve around encouraging abstinence in the girls. Various women from CBOs pointed out that the boys did not understand the issue, which was that girls often had little power in determining their sexual lives. The guardians had much more power in such decisions than the girls themselves.

The girls said that even though they felt pressure from their guardians to engage in early marriage or commercial sex work, they were also susceptible to peer pressure from other orphans and vulnerable children who had chosen commercial sex work to earn their own money. They indicated that they knew they could contract sexually transmitted diseases – particularly HIV and AIDS from this, but said that they felt that it was inevitable that they would get HIV anyway, so it was not a deterrent. The girls said that they thought commercial sex work meant they did not have to go hungry and they foresaw the possibility of owning nice, fashionable clothes, and not second-hand out-of-date clothes. The girls felt that the only way to persuade them not to go into commercial sex work was to supply them with good food and fashionable clothing.

Many of the CBO workers felt that it was difficult to persuade the girls away from commercial sex work as they felt that teenagers did not listen to their elders, and that the media had more power over the girls' choices than they had. They felt that media messages were strongly sexualised as well as highly materialistic, but they seemed to promise the orphans and vulnerable children a kind of life that was tantalising. The CBO workers felt that they were powerless to change the girls' attitudes around prostitution.

The workshop seemed to reach an impasse as neither the orphans and vulnerable children themselves, nor the CBO workers felt they knew a realistic way to turn the girl orphans and vulnerable children away from commercial sex work. At this point Rebecca asked if the CBO workers knew of women or girls who had left commercial sex work and turned their lives around. They indicated that they did. Rebecca suggested it would be most important to talk to such women and see how they had managed to do this, both in terms of their financial circumstances and the psychological aspects. The CBO workers agreed that this would be useful and that they might even ask those who had left commercial sex work to assist the girls.

In the meantime, the orphans and vulnerable children and CBO workers agreed that the message should highlight the negative aspects of commercial sex work – particularly violence, as well as what makes life good and worth living – e.g. love, integrity, self-worth and self-respect. However, the message would be further refined after consulting with women who had managed to escape commercial sex work.

6. Identifying a medium

As the target audience had been identified as orphans and vulnerable children themselves, we identified that it was important that we make the media in a medium that would reach orphans and vulnerable children. The children said that they watched videos and listened to the radio, mainly. They wanted to make a DVD because they were familiar with acting in dramas at school, but the CBO workers felt that this would

not be an effective medium as most of the CBOs did not have a DVD player and nor did they have access to one. The orphans and vulnerable children then agreed that this would therefore be a limited medium, and suggested that they should make a radio drama, as they listened to radio dramas themselves and would feel comfortable acting in such a drama. One participant had come to the workshop as an observer, and she worked for the local radio station, so she said we could facilitate a radio production through them.

7. Brainstorming the message in more detail

As there was still a bit of time left before the end of the workshop, the participants spent some time brainstorming a possible story to develop into a radio drama as follows:

- i. A young girl (A) from a supportive (though poor family) manages to get an education in nursing and works at the local clinic
- ii. An OVC involved in commercial sex work (B), comes to the clinic for help after she has been badly beaten by a customer and is helped by A
- iii. A asks B why she is involved in commercial sex work, and asks her why she doesn't leave as the violence is severe
- iv. The two girls talk about their different backgrounds and that they are both poor; A talks about her supportive family
- v. B talks about being alone in the world

It was agreed that more research was needed on how to persuade B to quit commercial sex work, and the CBOs would investigate this.

8. The way forward

A plan of action for the way forward was developed as follows:

- i. Rebecca and Wilson Asibu would meet with the local radio station contact (Hilda Phiri) and discuss how the work could be taken forward.
- ii. The CBO members would contact women who had stopped commercial sex work to:
 - find out how they turned their lives around;
 - see if they would be interested in mentoring some orphans and vulnerable children about the dangers of commercial sex work and leaving it; and
 - see if they are prepared to be involved in helping to develop a radio drama on the subject.
- iii. With the local radio station, Country Minders would set up a script writing workshop and send the script to Rebecca (the script would be produced in Chichewa and translated in Cape Town).
- iv. Record and broadcast the show.
- v. Country Minders would hold a workshop with the CBOs and orphans and vulnerable children to evaluate the project.

9. Closing

Rebecca thanked the participants for allowing the workshop to go forward and for collaborating to develop a useful project. She thanked Kingsley for translating during the workshop. The participants expressed thanks for the workshop and asked for CMPD to work effectively with them in the future.

Appendix 1: Participants list

Name	Organisation or group	Contact details
Shylock G Banda	LCBO	Gome57@hotmail.com
George L Gomani	Mwalembe CBO	0999940397/0999631820
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Daniel Mwale	Monkey Bay UCM	0995782234
Alex Gulari	Chiwalo CBO	0993938218
Abel Kalulu	Nsumbi II Monkey Bay/School boy	
Shaston M Amweso	Nsumbi II Monkey Bay/School boy	P.O. 20, Mandine, Monkey Bay
Sella Gusto	School girl	
Sikeliet Robert	School girl	
Witness Mlaka	School girl	
Dorothy Majawa	CMPD	0999931314
Mrs Asibu	Volunteer	0881178603
Hilda Jambo Phiri	CMPD & Monkey Bay radio station	dzimweradio@gmail.com +265888523042
Rebecca Pointer	TARSC/ EQUINET	reb@webbedfeet.co.za ; rebecca@tarsc.org
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Harrison Katema	Luwi CBO	0995647077
Jones Chingoni	Community Development Office	0999443412

Appendix 2: Workshop programme

Participatory communications for orphans and vulnerable children (OVC) in Malawi



**Training and Research Support Centre (TARSC) and
Country Minders for People's Development (CMPD)
in the
Regional Network for Equity in Health in east and
southern Africa (EQUINET)**

Workshop agenda

Time	Item	Facilitator
9.00	Introduction	Rebecca
9.30	Identifying key issues	Kingsley
10.30	TEA	
10.45	Identifying the audience: Group work	Kingsley
11.45	Identifying the audience: Plenary report back	Kingsley
12.15	LUNCH	
1.15	Selecting the audience: Rank and score	Rebecca
1.30	Identifying the key message: Plenary discussion	Rebecca
2.30	Identifying the medium: Group work	Kingsley
3.00	Identifying the medium: Plenary report back	Kingsley
3.30	TEA	
3.45	Developing the message: Brainstorm	Rebecca
4.30	Way forward	Rebecca
4.45	Closing	Rebecca