

# **Sharing Knowledge for Community Development and Transformation: A Handbook**

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Printed by:  
DLR International in Canada for the Oxfam Horn of Africa Capacity Building Programme,  
with the support of the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA)

August 2004

Oxfam Canada is a non-profit, international development organization that works with community groups to help people attain better health and nutrition, more secure incomes and a stronger say in their future as well as responding in emergency situations. Oxfam Canada works in over 20 countries in Central and South America, the Caribbean, and Africa. In Canada, Oxfam educates people on issues of global poverty and advocates for positive changes in policies that directly affect the worlds poor ([www.oxfam.ca](http://www.oxfam.ca)). Oxfam Canada is one of the 12 Oxfam organizations around the world that form Oxfam International.

The Horn of Africa Capacity Building Programme (HOACBP) is a bilateral programme entirely funded by the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) and managed by Oxfam Canada and Oxfam Québec, from 1997 to 2002. HOACBP supports groups and organizations that are grounded at the local level, engaged in non-formal education, information and communications, gender equality and justice. It promotes the principles of equity and participatory development throughout the Horn of Africa and supports organizations that espouse and reinforce these principles.

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Second edition published in 2004 by Oxfam Canada.

ISBN 0-9694699-2-6

Printed and bound in Canada

## FOREWORD

*Sharing Knowledge* is about freedom. It is concerned, more specifically, with the five freedoms identified by economist Amartya Sen in *Development as Freedom*, as key for human and social development: *political freedoms*; *social opportunities* such as education; *transparency guarantees* as a right of every citizen; *protective security* against risks, such as ill health; and *economic facilities* leading to greater autonomy. This handbook is for women and men making use of information and knowledge for the realization of their freedoms and those of their communities.

*Sharing Knowledge* is essentially a process with deep roots in the experiences of rural people, striving to retain dignity, self-confidence and influence over their future. The concept draws from the work of the Cajamarca Rural Library Network in northern Peru and, in particular, from the production of a rural encyclopedia written by and for rural people of that area. The Cajamarca Network became a mentor for me and for Gwynneth Evans from the National Library of Canada. Its innovative work as a social movement inspired the Canadian NGO, CODE, in its support to post-literacy programs in countries, such as Mozambique, Tanzania and Ethiopia. In this work, our steps crossed with those of Dr. Kingo Mchombu, the author of *Sharing Knowledge*. Dr. Mchombu's research work on information and rural development in Africa echoed the concerns and the values of the Cajamarca Network.

Oxfam Canada—with CIDA's financial support—is collaborating with community-based organizations, in various parts of Ethiopia, engaged in providing information services to their fellow citizens. Dr. Mchombu travelled to Ethiopia several times to learn from their efforts and to share his ideas with groups active in Sidama, Illubabor and Dire Dawa.

This handbook is the result of the coming together of those community-based organizations and an academic with a passion for their work. The first edition of *Sharing Knowledge* was published in 2002 and translated in Amharic and Somali. A year later, UNESCO-Rabat translated it in Arabic and French for distribution in North Africa. *Sharing Knowledge* is one of the

most visited sites (<http://www.oxfam.ca/publications/SharingKnowledge.htm>) on Oxfam Canada's website. It is also attracting the interest of researchers, community librarians, and extension workers from different parts of Africa and Asia.

Dr. Mchombu and six groups from the Horn of Africa met in Addis Ababa in December 2003 to prepare the second edition of the handbook. The Illubabor Community Resource Centre Network, the Dire Dawa Community-based Organization Association, GAVO, HAVOYOCO, Sudan Development Association and Sudan Environmental Conservation Society shared their experience in applying *Sharing Knowledge* to their work and recommended a number of changes and additions. These have been incorporated in this second edition. The Canadian Embassy in Ethiopia provided financial support for the publication of the revised edition, its translation into Amharic and its dissemination in all regions of the country.

*Raymond Genesse*  
*Oxfam Canada*

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CHAPTER 1

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**Introduction**

## **What is the Origin of this Handbook?**

The handbook comes from hours of discussion and exchange during workshops and symposia on information, knowledge and community development in the Horn of Africa. Kingo Mchombu led these discussions. He introduced the Community Information Resource Centre (CIRC) as the tool that serves the purpose of development. Men and women responded to the training sessions and asked the Horn of Africa Capacity Building Programme (HOACBP) to provide a handbook that the partners could use in their local situations.

The second edition of the Handbook is the result of an evaluation of the first edition by HOACBP partners who had used it in their communities. Some minor editorial changes have been made to the original text. At their request, a few new sections and two chapters have been added. They expand the work to include the current state of development in Africa, the importance of HIV/AIDS information resource centres (chapter 6) and an assessment of the developments in Ethiopia (chapter 7). These additions bring the text up-to-date and increase its value as a community development tool.

## **Who are the Intended Users of this Handbook?**

We have prepared the handbook for men and women working in villages, towns, rural and disadvantaged urban areas to increase the speed and impact of community development. It is written for those who wish to transform their communities through knowledge sharing. It is aimed at those who want to start a Community Information Resource Centre (CIRC) to support the development process, and who would like to know how to go about this important task.

The handbook is not designed for librarians and those with information management skills. Rather, it is a tool for those at the grassroots. They will learn about information, knowledge and development. They will also learn

how to identify, collect and provide access to the information that assists and supports community transformation.

The handbook arises from shared experience in the Horn of Africa. We believe that it could also be useful to all those who would start a Community Information Resource Centre (CIRC), as a means of transforming their community.

## **Why is this Handbook Important?**

The handbook is based in experience. It is the product of training and discussion, of questions and answers, and of an evaluation of the first edition by those working in development. It is also something more. It is a statement of confidence in and support for rural people and the urban poor.

The handbook addresses a belief shared by the author and the Horn of Africa Capacity Building Programme staff. We believe that people everywhere are highly intelligent. We recognize the ability and the capacity of rural and urban people in different situations to find solutions to the struggle of everyday life. We have seen many examples that illustrate how people have found solutions to problems that face them at the community level.

We also believe that the intelligence of ordinary citizens is often underestimated and underfed. Limited access to information and knowledge prevents them from using their intelligence and potential for growth. The needed structures (systems and services) to support the information flow to rural areas and deprived urban areas are not usually in place. Those responsible for putting resources toward such structures have not considered it important to invest in and to set up information and knowledge systems and services.

We believe that the decision to involve local people in identifying their information needs for community development is worthwhile.

### **BOX 1.1: Unsatisfied information needs of rural people**

We can sum up the reality today by saying that there are no information services which really satisfy the information needs of rural people: the peasants, the plantations workers, the squatters, as well as the workers in rural industries and students. Although there are token services, these do not provide relevant information. To do so, they need to undertake investigations to decide on the form and content of information needed by rural people.

*Shiraz Durrani. "Rural Information in Kenya: Rural Information and Advice Services; and Information Services in the Eastern Pilbara" in *Information Development*, v. 1, no 3. July 1985, p. 155.*

This handbook is different from many that are already available. We have consulted the people about their information needs and developed a tool that reflects their needs and their use of the community information resource centre (CIRC). We also try to demonstrate that information is an important resource for human development. The handbook not only provides some ideas about development and how to create and maintain a community information resource centre. It first discusses some theories and ideas about development in a language aimed at ordinary people. To ensure that *Sharing Knowledge* has met these goals, the text has been revised in consultation with our partners in the Horn of Africa Capacity Building Programme. Chapter seven (7) reflects their case studies and the lessons we have learned.

We consider that those who work to increase the impact of information and knowledge on community development will want to link up with local people to form a grassroots social movement. This movement will take responsibility for the creation and ongoing support (sustainability) of CIRCs in the thousands and thousands of communities and urban neighbourhoods of Africa and the Developing World.

On the recommendation of the Advisory Reference Group, the handbook has been produced as a learning tool. At the end of each chapter, the users will find discussion questions and activities.

CHAPTER 2

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**Information and Human Development**

# What is the Meaning of Information and Knowledge in the Context of Development?

Scholars define information as a set of data, facts, and figures that have been processed in such a way that they become meaningful. They make sense. When information is applied to doing something and is globally applicable, it is said to have become knowledge. These definitions serve a useful purpose, when we consider information and knowledge from the point of view of formal education. Teachers ask school children to master a fixed body of knowledge, in order to pass examinations.

Such definitions, however, have one major weakness. They indicate the self-evident nature of information and knowledge, based on an expert source. This process does not allow the community to tell its own stories and to arrive at its own sense of what is meant by a set of figures, facts and data.

In discussing information and knowledge, it is useful to start by observing that both are human creations (or social constructs). They are designed to explain and meet some of the challenges that individuals or groups face at a particular time and place. No one fully can understand the meaning of knowledge and information without recognizing that they can be a double-edged sword. They can be used to empower the individual or the group. They can also be used to continue relations of power and control. When a ruling group uses information and knowledge to dominate or control people, those people are led to despair, powerlessness, and unsustainable lifestyles.

As human creations, people naturally use information and knowledge to organize their view of history and culture. These elements are grounded in their world view. When Community Information Resource Centres (CIRCs) become a tool for human development, community users of information are urged to cultivate and adopt a critical attitude towards the information. By questioning the information source they may evaluate, analyse and adapt information and knowledge to their own material, political and social

conditions. This regular process of questioning forms the basis for changing and transforming the community.

In other words, the development of knowledge becomes a process. In this case, the definition of knowledge as a process of questioning and reflection is different from knowledge as the finished product, ready to be taught, used and applied globally or in any situation.

To become critical users of information and knowledge, community members will want to analyse critically both the knowledge that comes from outside the community, and their own inherited knowledge. The community will want to study, for example, how cultural and elitist definitions of gender, race, tribe, class, and poverty are developed as both historical and social constructs. In most cases, these definitions should be questioned and evaluated, so that citizens can add value to achieve more transformative knowledge and information for the community.

To understand the role that information plays in human development, we need to understand the concept of development. In the next section, we shall consider the various meanings of development.

## **What is Development?**

The concept of development has several different and opposing definitions. These definitions are based on the interests of different groups in the world. Each group defines development in a way that benefits its own interests.

### **Development as Economic Growth and Modernization**

The thinkers of the 1960s defined development as modernization. A country could achieve higher economic growth through industrialization, urbanization and increased use of technology and machinery.

These same thinkers thought that “underdeveloped countries” must transform their weak and culturally backward societies to become “developed”, like Western capitalist societies. It was believed that the

main cause of underdevelopment lay in the backward culture of societies in developing countries. The solution to underdevelopment, therefore, was to change the attitudes of people in underdeveloped countries. People should be forced to cast off their culture, which was believed to be fatalistic.

To produce the change from underdevelopment to development, information needed to be communicated to peasants and small farmers



through the mass media. It was believed that radio, newspapers, television and books would change their culture, attitudes, and the traditional way of life. The result would be a new type of people who would be interested in accepting modern Western ideas of development. They would let go of their own culture.

All traditional forms of information and communication (music, dance, poetry, theatre and indigenous knowledge) were condemned because they sustained cultural forms of social structure and authority. These traditions were considered to be a barrier or obstacle to modernization and development.

Modernization-driven information services provide direct access to information only to powerful groups in society. The information is then expected to trickle down to the majority at a later stage. Frequently, research centres, for example, do not establish direct contact with all the farmers. They talk only to a small group of farmers to whom they offer information. They expect other community members to learn from this chosen group (see box 2.1).

### **BOX 2.1: Trickle down information system**

In Malawi, extension information is usually carried to selected farmers, called pupil farmers. The farmers do not have the opportunity to

communicate their own needs to the extension system. One group of farmers living near a Rice Research Centre was interested in improving its rice growing techniques, but did not know how to approach the Centre for help. Another group of fishermen was disturbed by low fish catches from Lake Malawi. They believed that there were supernatural forces that had to be appeased. The sacrifice was a young bull, taken to the middle of the Lake. A nearby government unit had studied fish migration patterns. It knew why there were few fish. It did not, however, know that fishermen were concerned and did not therefore share its knowledge.

*Kingo J. Mchombu. Information Needs and Information Seeking Patterns for Rural People's Development in Africa. 1993.*

In this top-down model of development, information on development issues does not flow directly to everyone in the community. The information flow is a two-step process. It flows first from the media and extension workers to opinion leaders or influential individuals. From this small group, it flows to all the peasants and small farmers. During this process, it may be that essential information gets changed and distorted. It may also never reach the masses at all, because the information is kept by the powerful groups.

Although the modernization model of development has been rejected, it is still being used in some countries. The power of this model is sometimes even greater for information and mass media organizations than for opinion leaders. It is still common to hear radio announcers, journalists and politicians blaming the state of underdevelopment of their country on the traditional culture of their people.

Despite its overall lack of success, the modernization top-down development model has had some benefits in society. Advanced technology, such as use of the machinery for transport and agriculture, and modern farming techniques are now common in every country. In treating disease, we can see the effects of modern medicine, including big hospitals in cities. At the social level, the

introduction of democracy, civil society structures, and the expansion of the mass media are all elements of the modernization development model.

By the mid-1970s, it became clear that the economic growth and modernization model had failed to help underdeveloped countries achieve development. The majority of their people was still living in poverty and illiteracy. Many suffered from common and preventable diseases.

Since the 1980s, alternative approaches to development have been proposed. These approaches put the human being at the centre of the development process. The next section is devoted to describing the concept of human development.

### **Development as Human Development and Transformation**

By the 1980s, several United Nations departments had come to recognize that there was something terribly wrong with development models that looked only at economic growth. The primary indicator for this type of growth was the average national income of a country. Some thinkers pointed out that the growth of the national income alone was not an accurate way of indicating development. Quite often income did not reflect the well being of the majority of the people in a country. For example, in some countries rapid economic growth had been achieved. The growth had benefitted only a small percentage of the population, who normally lived in urban areas. The majority of the people had actually become poorer.

Economic growth is a poor indicator of development because it does not show the distribution of wealth. It also fails to identify the impact of this development on other social issues, such as health, education, and the quality of life.

An alternative development approach began to be used. This approach recognizes the importance of the well being of all the people. The name for this approach is human development or **people-centred development**.

In addition to economic growth and national income, the human development approach or people-centred approach takes into account the following factors:

- a) Life expectancy and the health situation of the population;
- b) Access to education and rates of literacy of the population;
- c) Gender equality and the opportunity to participate in government structures.

The role of information services in the people-centred or human development approach is very different from the role of information in the modernization or economic growth model of development. Some of the major differences are:

- a) Access to information is for all groups in the population (including women, youth, and rural and urban poor people);
- b) Information is a tool and access to information is a process for building self-reliance, empowerment, civil society, participation and gender equality;
- c) Indigenous or traditional knowledge and locally-generated information are given high status;
- d) Traditional channels of communication are respected and not regarded as a barrier to development.

A comparison of the two approaches shows that modernization was narrower than human development. It puts responsibility in the hands of a small elite in the country. This group often achieved its development at the expense of everyone else in society. On the other hand, human development is broader because it puts heavy responsibilities in the hands of people.

To be effective, people-centred development needs large amounts of useful information from the various sectors to reach the grassroots level. For the

community to take responsibility for the development process, it needs information on:

- a) Agriculture and live-stock raising;
- b) Primary health care;
- c) Education and literacy;
- d) Appropriate technology;
- e) Information and Communications Technologies (ICTs) to help access and manage the vast quantities of human knowledge;
- f) Democracy, gender, social and cultural organization and human rights (see box 2.2 on page 27).

### **Development in Africa in the 1990s and 2000s**

*In this section, I acknowledge Mkandwire Thandika and Joseph Stiglitz, whose works are cited in the list of references.*

In the late 1980s, the economies of many countries in the Developing World faced a crisis. The Gross Domestic Product (GDP) declined and the inflation rate rose from a single digit figure (less than 10%) to double digit figures. The crisis was caused by several factors: the stagnation of agricultural production, the falling prices of cash crops on the world market, frequent droughts, the deterioration of trade conditions, and poor financial policies. Many governments were forced to address the crisis by borrowing heavily from the International Monetary Fund (IMF). IMF approval was also required, if a country wished to borrow from the developed countries of the North. The IMF had strict rules for the countries which wanted access to its financial resources, including: the devaluation of the currency, the removal of subsidies and increased prices for farmers, the imposition of a wage freeze in the public sector, the abolition of price controls for essential commodities, the removal of import controls, and restrictions on government expenditure on health, education, social welfare, and other social sectors. Part of the policy was aimed at weakening and downsizing the State so that it would not play a dominant role in national economic and social

development. The IMF programme, known as the Structural Adjustment Programme, had many negative effects on countries in the Developing World. Generally, it did not improve economic development, particularly rural development.

The financial crises in Asia and Latin America in the mid 1990s clearly showed that the IMF policies, based on prescriptive financial policies and a dominant role for the private sector, could not be effected in developing countries, without reforming their major institutions. In fact, poverty and inequality increased throughout the Third World (Developing World) as a result of the IMF policies.

Since 2000, the world has seen some re-assessment of the roles of private capital and of the State, and the IMF approach to development for Third World countries. There is greater sensitivity towards the role of government and its social policies. The belief that non-governmental organizations (NGOs) alone could deliver social services has proved wrong. There have been many instances of fragmented and unsustainable development. However, recognition of the role of the NGO movement has led to a strengthening of civil society. There is also new thinking on human rights and rights-based development, that respects human rights, the rule of law and citizens' ability to strengthen their claim on the state. Concepts of accountability, transparency, and democratization have become popular.

Globalization is a concept which has gained ground during the same period. It is based on free trade, non-interference in market forces, the free flow of capital, and the movement of people with skills. Globalization has worked for those who have products, skills and resources to sell to the world market. It has not been successful in reducing poverty and supporting sustainable development. Integration with the world economy has not benefitted rural communities in Africa, because their primary agricultural products (coffee, cotton, for example) face continually falling prices on the world market. With the removal of government agricultural subsidies and the rising prices of agricultural inputs, farmers cannot improve their capacity and increase production. Farmers also cannot sell most of their products to developed

countries, because Northern governments continue to give their own farmers generous subsidies, which Third World governments have been forbidden to grant as part of the IMF conditions. Levels of education, literacy and health have also been falling because of the reduced ability of national governments to support the education and health sectors. The solution to all these issues (both positive and negative) is for African countries to negotiate better terms with the international financial institutions that take account of their individual situations.

From a knowledge sharing perspective, rural communities need to position themselves more strategically to benefit from whatever resources are available to them, both nationally and internationally. One possible strategy would be to constitute themselves into community-based NGOs so as to gain direct access to resources. They also need to speed up the acquisition of new skills and knowledge that will lead to better farming, management of the environment, and health practices to improve the quality of life. Such a plan calls for clear strategies to optimize use of all branches of the extension services in agriculture, health, small business development etc. Use of information and communication technologies, such as the Internet, community radio and video is vital to communicate both locally and with the global market. Communities may use these channels to announce the products and services, from coffee, honey, goat cheese, and spices, to community-based tourism and many others they can offer. Such access to communication may also enable rural communities to learn what new products they can grow that may find a market in both urban and international markets. In the global market-place, knowledge is one of the most important tools and factors of production. It can help rural communities fight for their own survival and sustainable development.

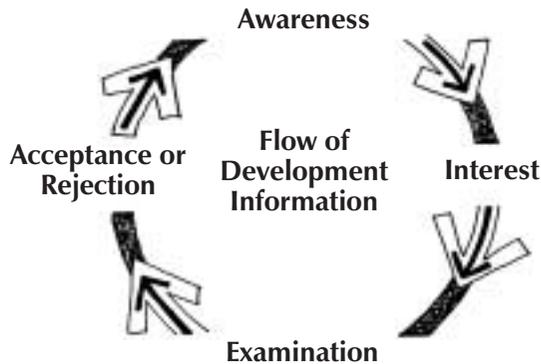
If everyone needs information in the people-centred development model, how does this information actually flow at the grassroots level to influence the development process? The next section of the handbook addresses this important issue. Since the late 1980s, those gains the rural sector has made can be attributed to a strong information base. Gains have been made, in

certain communities, despite the general reversals (deterioration) in the economies of many African countries, explained in the last section.

## The Flow of Development Information at the Grassroots Level

Rapid human development depends on the creation of a strong civil society. Community members build their capacity for integrating information and knowledge into their various development activities. Such capacity empowers people to solve intelligently the problems that exist in their community.

The spread of new information (also called innovative ideas) in society follows a four-step process: the awareness stage; the interest stage; the examination and testing stage; and the adoption/rejection stage.



### STEP 1: Awareness stage

In this first stage, individuals in the community get information on a new idea or useful practice. This new information creates an environment that allows people to start thinking about the new practice. Examples of such innovations may include, for example: a new hybrid seed, soil conservation, or use of condoms to combat HIV/AIDS. The first stage implies that the information is provided in such a way that people are able to understand the new idea/practice. They understand the

language, format, and the steps in adopting the idea/practice. It is easier for members of the community to receive new ideas, if they have access to a variety of information sources, such as newspapers, radio, books, the Internet, and training workshops. It is more difficult to receive new ideas, if the community does not have access to such information sources.

## **STEP 2: Interest stage**

Most information flow models show that a few individuals in every community are quick to take hold of new ideas. These people pass on these ideas to the rest of the community. These individuals are often called information gatekeepers or, sometimes, opinion leaders. They also act as role models by adopting new ideas quickly, so that other members of the community can imitate and learn from them. Many members of the community may be afraid to adopt new ideas/practices. They fear the risk involved. They may sense that they lack adequate information about the new idea/practice to feel confident about its value.

If the new practice is attractive because it addresses a need in the life of an individual or community, people may start to develop an interest in it. They will try to find out more about the idea/practice. This may lead to a search for more information. Those seeking more information become excited and interested. They stimulate the rest of the community. Conversation and discussion play an important role at this stage, especially communication from relatives, neighbours, extension agents, and social networks. Together these groups raise interest in the innovation. This communication shapes and influences opinions on development issues in the community.

## **STEP 3: Examination and testing stage**

In this stage, the idea that passes the interest stage is tried out on a small scale. There is some evaluation and consultation to see whether the idea/practice is worth trying out. For example, in the case of certain agricultural practices, people may be taken to see a new plant at a research station, or to see what happens on a farm plot where manure has been applied.

They compare the state of the soil with a plot of land where manure has not been applied. This demonstration serves to answer worries about whether or not the idea works in practice.

#### **STEP 4: Adoption/rejection of the new practice**

After the three stages have been completed, a decision may be taken to adopt or reject the new idea/practice. Some of the factors to influence the decision are: income levels, risk and community priorities.

Self-confidence is important if individuals are to successfully adopt a new behaviour or implement a new practice. If self-confidence is lacking, it is hard to adopt a new idea/practice. Successful role models set a good example. People not only learn through their own experience, but also by imitating the behaviour of other individuals who have succeeded in doing something new. Good leaders, who encourage and reassure people about what they can achieve if they work together in the community, are extremely important in a community taking on challenging development tasks.

New ideas/practices are likely to be adopted if they have the following characteristics:

##### **a) Relative advantage**

This term is used to define the extent to which the new practice is seen as better than the one it is replacing. If the new idea is risky, harder to implement because it requires too much work, or expensive, it may not be acceptable for adoption by the community. Risks may be financial or may involve the lack of adequate information. The relative advantage of a new idea needs to be communicated within the community to create an environment that allows the rapid spread of new ideas.

##### **b) Compatibility/suitability**

This term is used to define the extent to which the new practice is in harmony with the needs, values, cultural system, and power system of the members of the community. If there are too many changes required to be made by members of the community, in order to accept the new

practice and make it compatible with the existing cultural and value system, people may resist adopting the new idea/practice.

c) **Complexity**

This factor refers to how difficult it is for people to apply the new practice. If applying the new practice is found to be too hard for members of the community, individuals may find it impossible to follow it. If the new practice has too many steps to follow, this may also limit its popularity in the community and hence its application.

d) **Observability**

This factor refers to a possibility of testing out the new idea/practice on a small scale at first. If the results can be seen and be proven (demonstrated) to potential adopters in the community, they will want to adopt it.

The process of adopting new ideas can be speeded up through the participation of members of the community. They will then know what to adopt. It will be easier to decide. They will feel free to express their knowledge and information needs, and other needs they have, to build capacity to deal with the expected social changes. Wider participation by members of the community may also help in identifying other structural limits that prevent the adoption of new practices. Examples of limits, for example, are the shortage of: land, financial resources, transport, and marketing information. The community can then address these problems in order to support the adoption of new ideas and practices.

People need both technical knowledge and awareness-raising information. These types of information/knowledge are not separate from other areas of life. They are part of the development process. In the process, information and knowledge become a development resource. This information resource gives the community power over their environment and life in general.

In some cases, the development of rural people is not a priority for experts, top politicians and civil servants working from the capital cities of Africa. It is, therefore, important for rural communities to take up the responsibility

of organizing themselves and ensuring that their community has access to adequate supplies of information and knowledge to support their development. In many cases in Africa, if rural people do not take up this challenge, there is no one else who will do it for them (see text in box 2.2).

### **BOX 2.2: Basic information needs**

When one looks at the average village of tropical Africa today, the lack of the most basic information in almost any area of development is astonishing.

Twenty years after independence, most villages of sub-Saharan Africa have neither latrines nor clean water. They ignore the most basic rules of hygiene, nutrition and child care; they do not know how to build a simple cart, a plough, or a simple millet grinder. If they are living in the Sahel, they waste more energy per inhabitant for their domestic needs (basically cooking) than the extraordinary profligate inhabitants of the West. On a typical open hearth, on which they cook their meals, 94–97% of the energy is wasted. Secondly, they ignore the most elementary facts concerning the functioning of their own bodies. Mothers of ten children have no information on the process of pregnancy or birth, or why, in the some cases, they lose half their children before the age of five.

In such a context, a non-negligible (major) improvement in the standard of living could be attained simply by disseminating basic knowledge in the field of hygiene, nutrition, health care, appropriate technology, work organization and a few other fields, and by encouraging small village investments financed by the villagers themselves.

*Pierre Pradervand. "Knowledge is Power" in International Development Review, v. 22, no. 1, 1980, p. 56.*



## Discussion Questions and Activities

- 1) Two newspaper articles indicate the following:
  - a) Poor people are poor because they are lazy.
  - b) Boys get better marks than girls because men are more intelligent than women.

Begin a discussion in the community to make people critical consumers of information/knowledge, based on these two beliefs. What reasons are there to explain these two situations?

- 2) The development model based on modernization has both bad and good outcomes for Africa. Which were the bad outcomes of the modernization model of development? Which were the good outcomes of the modernization model of development?
- 3) The development model based on people-centred development has greater requirements for information to reach the grassroots level. Can you explain why the need for information becomes greater at grassroots levels in people-centred development?
- 4) How has your community changed in the last fifteen years and what are the major issues that face it in the globalized economy?
- 5) How can your Community Information Resource Centre (CIRC) use the 4-step model of innovation adoption to provide information support that will speed up the adoption of new ideas or practices in your community? What issues in your community need new ideas or practices? How will you begin the process of studying how to identify new ideas/practices?

CHAPTER 3

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**The Content of Information and Knowledge  
in Community Information Resource Centres**

The aim of this chapter is to discuss the information sources of a Community Information Resource Centre (CIRC). We shall discuss how the content is created or changed to build an appropriate knowledge base. An appropriate knowledge base empowers the community to come to terms with and to address its present and future development challenges.

To build the content of information resources, people will want to work systematically and to involve community members. They will assist in addressing all the issues of concern to the development of the community.

We have already seen in chapter 2 that people-centred development has many more elements than top-down development. The many different elements of people-centred development require the exchange of a lot of information at the grassroots level. As rural development is not a priority at the national level for most countries, few resources are available to carry out this task. This limitation means that people must build their knowledge base carefully. They should not spend money that the community does not have. They should not collect unhelpful or misleading information materials, for the sake of filling up empty shelf space.

## **Community Participation in Defining the Needed Information Content**

It is important to involve as many community members as possible in the systematic identification of needed development information content. Such participation not only identifies people's information needs, but also serves to create awareness. Information gaps about their social problems and development issues may also be identified. Ideally, the consultations should allow members to discuss both the development problems facing their community and the information needed to support action to solve the problems.

To involve the community we suggest the following actions:

- a) **Public meetings/consultations** in which a facilitator helps community members to conduct discussions on the development priorities of the community and on the appropriate (suited to the needs of the people) information content to match the priorities.
- b) **Focus group meetings**, in which specific groups meet to discuss their own information needs. For example, women, young people, semi-literates, farmers, traders, and other groups may each be invited to a separate session. The groups meet to discuss their problems and the type of content that they believe would help them and members of the community to manage the issues. More importantly, they will discuss how the information should be formatted/presented so that it is easy to understand, suitable to the context, and applicable.
- c) **Participatory rapid appraisal methods**, in which the information facilitator uses dialogue (discussion rather than rigid interviews) to learn from and with the community about their life. Together they examine limitations and threats, as well as opportunities, to prepare for decisions about development projects. Through participation, ordinary people are enabled to conduct an analysis of their own reality. Through this process, the community learns about itself, sets priorities, and comes up with an action plan on how to meet its problems.

### **BOX 3.1 Information is the most basic human need**

In the village of Diana, Senegal, where, in May 1979, I discussed, with the assembled villagers, their basic needs in information, a woman had just been buried with her half-born baby stuck between her legs because the villagers lacked the elementary information in the field of pregnancy care which would have made such death unnecessary. "Our most basic need is information, knowledge", the village head stated. And in a neighbouring village, a village elder said, "if you give me a choice between money and information, I will

choose information"...Of course, as with all basic development problems, the challenge is primarily political. First defining the concept of information: is it to be the harmless aseptic, sterilized type usually dispensed by aid agencies and government departments, or will it be integrated in a more global understanding of the development process, i.e consciousness raising information?

*Pierre Pradervand. "Knowledge is Power" in International Development Review, v. 22, no. 1, 1980, p. 57.*

At the end of discussions, and the fact-finding exercise, a person or a small group should prepare a short and simple report on the range of information needs and the priority development issues in the community. The report will create a record for future consultations and decision-making (see text in box 3.1).

- d) **Listening survey.** This type of survey differs from traditional research in which the researcher decides beforehand what he/she is going to find out. In this latter case, the researcher works from a questionnaire or interview plan to meet the goal. In a listening survey, a team of people (not a single person) pays attention to unstructured conversations, when people are relaxed and talk about things they are most concerned about. Not only does the survey team listen for facts, but they also listen for the feelings of people on daily issues, on emotional issues, as well as on basic physical needs, safety and security, love and belonging, self-respect and personal growth. This type of survey is open and is carried out in places where people meet to talk together. Community members should know the purpose of developing an information centre (CIRC) before the process begins. The listening survey aims to provide a full and rich insight (view) into the life of the community.

## **Integrating Information Needs into the Community Development Process**

The Community Information Resource Centre (CIRC) is an integral part of the development struggle in the community. One of the challenges it faces is how to encourage and support the processing of knowledge by community members, so they may find solutions to the community's problems.

The community development process itself creates a large part of the information content needed by the community. Problem identification and learning (knowledge processing) are linked. Together they make up one process. This process is most effective, if it is a group effort rather than an individual undertaking. For example, some community members may discuss HIV/AIDS and how it is affecting everyone in their community. The discussion may raise the challenges of getting more accurate information about this disease and how it spreads, in order to counter rumours and superstitious explanations. After the information is gathered from different sources and shared by the group, the next step may include a programme of activities to fight against the spread of HIV/AIDS in the community. In the course of these activities, the community may learn more. For example, they may discover that the lack of financial security for young women leads them into sexually risky behaviour. This finding would lead to the need for further information gathering. In this case, the need for information on alternative economic activities for young women might lead to information seeking on micro-credit schemes, training opportunities, and empowerment programmes for women.

After this second round of action, people may identify the role of alcoholism in the community as the next line of attack. The community may see the need to be more informed on the harmful effects of alcohol and substance abuse on the human body. This will then be identified as the key information need, along with the role alcohol plays in the spread of the HIV/AIDS pandemic.

The community must identify and discuss their development problems, so that they express the need for further information. Then the group sets up an action programme. This linking of information needs with development activities allows the community to process and add value to the information and knowledge collected from different sources.

The CIRC will be made up of information content coming from two sources: internal sources within the community and external sources, such as books, newspapers, audio-visual materials, the Internet, and the advice of health and extension workers. Below we first discuss the local information content.

## **Local Content: Internal Information and Knowledge Sources**

In building information content, it is important to start with the information and knowledge that exist in the community itself. The internal information and knowledge content comes from two sources: namely, indigenous knowledge, and locally created information.

### **Indigenous Knowledge**

As we have already mentioned in chapter 2, knowledge is a product of human thought, action and experience. Each culture contains a knowledge base from which its members receive understanding and an interpretation of the world.

Indigenous knowledge is rich in cultural knowledge that provides identity to young people. It helps us answer the questions about who we are and what our history is, about appropriate technology, and useful medicinal plants for curing human and livestock diseases. It assists us with environmental and agricultural knowledge and knowledge of the human body, including sex education, and many other useful areas of knowledge (see text in box 3.2).

### **BOX 3.2: Indigenous knowledge**

One of the most interesting descriptions of indigenous knowledge was given in the American *Time Magazine* of September 23, 1991, in its cover story. The author, Eugene Linden, described how 1,600 years ago the wisdom of many centuries went up in flames when the great Alexandria library burned down. Today, with little notice, vast archives of knowledge and expertise are being lost, leaving humanity in danger of losing its past and perhaps endangering its future as well. He was referring to the knowledge stored in the memories of elders, healers, midwives, farmers, fishermen and hunters, throughout the world. This knowledge base is unrecorded, and includes: many technologies and arts, ways to farm deserts without irrigation, produce from the rain forests without destroying the delicate ecosystem, navigate seas using knowledge of currents and starts. These ancient cultures had explored the medical properties of plants and learned how to farm in mountainous regions without allowing the best soil to be washed away.

*Eugene Linden. "Lost Tribes, Lost Knowledge" in Time Magazine, September 23, 1991. p. 44–56.*

Indigenous knowledge forms part of the community's information and knowledge resources. In most communities, this knowledge has difficulty surviving. Difficulties arise because traditions and cultures are often the object of massive attacks and questions by the dominant culture. The group with power casts aside and disorganizes the knowledge and traditions that rural groups and groups without power use to define themselves and their view of the world. In decreasing the value of indigenous and local knowledge resources, the channels of traditional knowledge communication have been cut off. The younger generation has been de-linked from their own culture and traditions. This separation makes it difficult for the older generation to transfer this rich cultural heritage to the next generation. Young people, in turn, are estranged. They develop anti-social behaviours to attract attention and sympathy.

In the past, Western knowledge, with its powerful tools, was thought to have all the answers to humanity's problems. However, it has become clear that the industrialized countries have, for example, mismanaged the physical environment. They have discovered technologies that are very destructive to human life. They have failed to discover cures to some of the worst diseases of our century. These failures have forced scientists to recognize the value of the knowledge that is part of indigenous and traditional cultures.

Some of the reasons for the destruction of the indigenous knowledge base include:

- a) Young people turning away from their elders and breaking an ancient chain of orally communicated knowledge;
- b) An education system which is de-linked from the indigenous knowledge base and aimed at proving that external information is better than indigenous knowledge;
- c) The destruction of the homes of indigenous populations by urbanization, farming and commercial activities, such as logging and mining;
- d) Propaganda from the "modernization-oriented" mass media and political elite that traditional ways of doing things are never as good as external ways of doing things and should be rejected.

The production of knowledge is a natural human process. Ongoing production of knowledge is a critical element in the use of information and knowledge. However, if there is an attempt to prevent or destroy the growth of new indigenous knowledge, some parts of the knowledge base may become outdated or may die through lack of fresh input.

### **BOX 3.3: Mainstreaming indigenous knowledge in Peru**

The network of rural libraries in Cajamarca is concerned with the reinstatement, revitalization and reinforcement of the Andean indigenous knowledge base. When the available books were not found to be useful,

a separate project was set up to produce published materials based on the local culture. *The Rural Encyclopedia* is a series of books written by the people themselves, in their style and based on their experiences. Topics for the books are those agreed by the local communities. Examples are 'The family in Cajamarca'; 'Supernatural phenomena'; 'Dyes and fabrics'; 'The people of this land'. Forty titles have been published. The books are an alternative to schools. They empower people and promote self-training.

*Cajamarca, Acku Quinde, 1996.*

One of the key roles of the CIRC is to gather, preserve, and make available indigenous knowledge. This knowledge should be evaluated in the same way as external knowledge coming into the community. At the local level, vast quantities of knowledge exist, locked away in the collective memory of people as inherited knowledge and personal experience. These stories should be evaluated carefully and recorded so that they can be put to use. They should not be allowed to die out, as the older members of the community pass away (see text in box 3.3).

The task of reviving indigenous knowledge should go hand in hand with identifying negative traditional practices which make it difficult to achieve development for all groups in society. The negative traditional practices should be changed through public discussions and campaigns. Such practices may include, for example: Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), discrimination against women, abduction of women, discrimination or violence against other ethnic groups or tribes because of historical enmities, glorification of war with neighbouring tribes, violence against women, ill-treatment of people with disabilities. To address negative practices, the best approach is to create a committee which will list them and decide how to remove them from society.

## **Traditional Objects and Items like Photos**

The CIRC will want to organize a small collection of traditional objects and household items. This collection will consist of hand-made objects, depicting the history, culture and indigenous knowledge of the community and its traditional technologies.

In many cases, there are still a few old people in the community who remember how to make traditional objects, such as woven mats, baskets, traditional carrier bags, pottery, kitchen utensils, bows and arrows, spears, farming tools, and clothing from animal skins. Such “traditional experts” should be used as resource persons in the community to train young people and to pass on these skills before they disappear completely. With experience, some of these objects can be sold as tourist articles in urban areas or as part of the tourism activities to make a contribution to the community economy.

## **Other Locally Created Information**

A second type of internal information and knowledge is made up of information created through various development activities in the community.

A lot of information comes from the community, but few of the community members know about it. Various development agencies collect information to send it to higher officials as monthly, quarterly, and annual reports. A good example is the information collected at health centres. The reports show what diseases were present in the community during a certain period of



time. From such reports, the community can work out how many people were affected by preventable diseases. Then they can plan actions to improve the situation. A similar situation exists with the reports of agricultural extension workers, cooperative officers, community development officers, NGOs, visiting researchers, and school teachers. They all collect information for reporting to others, but they seldom report to the community structures. Yet the information they gather is useful knowledge for collective development action.

All this local information content should form the basis of critical discussion to raise awareness about development issues in the community (see *text in box 3.4*).

#### **BOX 3.4: Grassroots information requirements**

Few, if any, of the Third World countries...seem to have realized that the process (of development) implies extraordinary multiplication of information/knowledge at the grassroots level. Let us take a few examples:

- a) The functioning of a modern state is to a great extent based on the existence of a well-informed citizenry. Even the freest election is a hoax (cheat) as long as that information is lacking.
- b) The very premise of whole areas of and new approaches to development, such as primary health care, appropriate technology, etc. is based on making certain forms of information/knowledge available.
- c) The almost total cultural breakdown associated with massive and rapid urbanization has created an immense thirst for and need for intelligent information in the most basic areas of human behaviour. The field of sex education is a prime example. As late as 15–20 years ago (still today in some shrinking areas of Africa) young men and girls usually received some form of sex education (e.g. during initiation or at marriage). Girls were married very early, anywhere between 11 and 15 years old—lived in culturally homogeneous

societies, and were therefore only rarely exposed to premarital pregnancy. In only 15 years, the change has been phenomenal (great), due to the almost total disappearance of traditional forms of sex education, a steep rise in the average age of marriage of urban girls, tourism, the deleterious (harmful) impact of western movies... and the breakdown of communication between parents and their children. The results have been epidemic increases in sexually transmitted diseases, teenage abortions, and premarital pregnancy. In turn, these problems have economic, cultural and health problems one should not underestimate.

- d) Most African countries have adopted or are on the way to adopting new legislation in the field of family law. But these laws are rarely applied, not only due to cultural resistance, but due to a total ignorance of their rights by those concerned.
- e) All areas of technical innovation (e.g. agricultural methods) are largely dependent on massive and renewed inputs of information and education.

*Pierre Pradervand. "Knowledge is Power" in International Development Review, v. 22, no. 1, 1980, p. 56.*

## External Information and Knowledge Content

External information and knowledge sources are also vital because some human development problems are similar worldwide. By gaining access to information and knowledge sources that bring this experience to the community, members save valuable time and resources. They are able to learn and adapt good ideas from grassroots communities in other countries.

One barrier to accessing information from external sources is language. This barrier shows itself in various ways:

- a) Many printed materials are written by the elite for other elites, and are often unreadable by an ordinary person.

- b) Sometimes the materials are written in difficult language. An ordinary person looking for practical information cannot understand how to apply the information. In such a case, the document is available, but inaccessible at the same time.
- c) Most local languages have few written materials. It is, therefore, recommended that the CIRC identify useful materials that outline the experiences of other grassroots communities in the world. These can be translated directly to the local language, in order to make their valuable experience accessible to the community.

Despite the problems noted above, information, in the form of publications, audio-visual materials and the Internet, may bring ideas from outside the community. Sources include materials from:

a) **Government agencies**

Information comes from ministries and different governmental agencies, working in areas, such as agriculture and livestock, health and social services, education and adult education, and science and technology. In many countries, ministries of agriculture and health produce magazines, pamphlets, and posters. They also often have well-developed collections of video materials to support extension services.

b) **Educational institutions**

Educational institutions include universities, adult education institutes, and research centres.

c) **Development organizations (both national and international)**

These include non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and voluntary agencies (see box 3.5).

**BOX 3.5: Impact of information on development**

In the Sertao, a vast desert area in the north-east of Brazil, conditions of life are harsh. Some small holders have been advised by an NGO

called Caatinga. They have been given access to reliable information on how to store the small quantities of rainfall, basic irrigation, crops that flourish in desert conditions and economic foodstuffs for goats and chicken. Information on such low cost solutions has transformed their lives. For instance, a modest water storage tank on one small holding has saved the women of the family from walking five kilometers, several times a day, to fetch water from the nearest pump.

*David Spiller. "Segregation by information" in Library Association Record, v. 99, no. 4, April 1997, p. 204–206.*

d) **United Nations (UN) agencies**

These agencies, such as the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the World Health Organization (WHO), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) provide lots of development information in printed, electronic and audio-visual format.

e) **Donor communities**

These include the European Union (EU) and Embassy Development Agencies (Sweden, German, Canada, Finland, Norway, Denmark, The Netherlands, Japan and others).

f) **Networking**

In addition to getting information packages, some of the above organizations are also quite useful in suggesting and supporting partnerships and communication among persons and groups involved in similar projects throughout the world. Such information networks are important both as a source of information and also as a means of exchanging ideas and sharing experiences (*see text in box 3.6 for some examples*).

### **BOX 3.6: Examples of materials produced by development organizations**

**CABI Crop Protection Compendium CD-ROM** is produced by the Commonwealth Agricultural Bureau International (CABI) and its international partners. The same information is also available from the Internet at the following address: [www.cabi.org/compendia/cpc](http://www.cabi.org/compendia/cpc). The Compendium is a multi-media tool which provides comprehensive information on harmful insects, weeds, and crop diseases and how farmers can control these problems. The tool gives information on pesticides, natural predators and parasites that destroy pests, cultural practices and seed selection. The compendium is divided into several modules:

- 1) Information on crops, pests, and natural enemies and countries where they are found;
- 2) A bibliographic database where one can search for references to any key word found in the CD-ROM;
- 3) A glossary which gives explanations on scientific, biological and agricultural terms as well as pesticides, and;
- 4) Taxonomic keys for insects, viruses and weeds.

The target users for this product are extension workers, researchers, lecturers and students, policy makers and agricultural NGOs involved in all aspects of agricultural crop production and rural development. The CD-ROM costs US \$500 for organizations in the Developing World.

*Source: Theo Mlaki. Tanzania Commission of Science and Technology, a partner of CABI.*

**CTA Spore Magazine** provides information on agricultural and rural development in ACP (African, Caribbean and Pacific) countries. It is produced by The Technical Centre for Agricultural and Rural Cooperation (CTA).

*Address: CTA, Postbus 380, 6700 AJ Wageningen, The Netherlands*

*Tel: 31 317 467 100*

*E-mail: [cta@cta.nl](mailto:cta@cta.nl)*

*Website: [www.cta.nl](http://www.cta.nl)*

***D+C Development and Cooperation Magazine*** is produced by the German Foundation for International Development (DSE), and focuses on general development and policy issues.

Address: *D+C, P.O. Box 100801, D-60268, Frankfurt, Germany*

Tel: *49-69-7501-4366*

E-mail: *HDBRAUER@ca.com*

***TVE (Television Trust for the Environment)*** is an independent television non-profit organization which focuses on the production and distribution of films and videos on environment, development, health and human rights issues. It is based in Britain but has branches throughout the world.

Address: *TVE, Prince Albert Road, London NW1 4RZ, UK*

Tel: *44 (0) 20 7586 5526*

E-mail: *TVE-UK@TVE.ORG.UK*

***SANASO*** is a newsletter of the Southern African Network of AIDS service organizations. It has lots of information on HIV/AIDS prevention.

Address: *SANASO, P.O. Box 6690, Harare, Zimbabwe*

Tel: *263-(0)4 74548*

E-mail: *sanaso@africaonline.co.zw*

Werner, David. ***Where There is No Doctor: A Village Health Care Manual***. Palo Alto, California: Macmillan Press, 1983.



## Discussion Questions and Activities

- 1) Which of the ways mentioned in this chapter for identifying community development information needs would work well in your community? Is there any one of these methods that would not work? What other ways can you use to find out what information is needed by your community?
- 2) In your community, are there elders who have knowledge in the following areas: storytelling, medicinal plants for humans and livestock, traditional technologies (for example: pottery, blacksmithing, wood carving, and basket making)? List them and their areas of expertise. What can be done to ensure this knowledge does not disappear?
- 3) If the example of Cajamarca could be followed by your community, what topics would first be written about?
- 4) Visit any one of the extension workers (agriculture, public health, or community development) and find out what data they have collected about the community? What patterns do these data reveal? What actions could the community take to address problems highlighted by the data?
- 5) Use a list of titles/references (a bibliography) or a publisher's catalogue to list a few titles (3 each) in the following rural development areas: agriculture, health, income generation, environment, appropriate technology, adult education, and primary school education. Why did you choose the titles you selected?



CHAPTER 4

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**Information Sharing and Processing  
in the Community**

If the mission of the information centre is to raise awareness of development and social issues and to encourage and support people to take action, the task of building an information and knowledge base is just the beginning of the story.

The Community Information Resource Centre (CIRC) model is that of an agency, actively involved in development goals. It serves as an information focal point for local projects, across a whole range of community development activities. Unlike many public libraries, the CIRC is not primarily a provider of external information sources to passive consumers.

The starting point of a good programme for information communication, processing and sharing in the community is an accurate idea of the information seeking patterns of community members. It is important to understand the use of information by different groups in the community. Such a base will ensure that every group has access, at the very least, to the basic minimum information it needs.

## **Community Information Seeking Patterns and Use**

The information seeking patterns of various groups in society differ. Information centre workers must be aware of these differences and why they exist, in order to support access to information for the whole community. Each of the groups needs slightly different communication strategies. The main groups that need special attention are:

### **Semi-literate and New Literate Community Members**

Communicating adequate information to this group is essential because they may constitute 30% or more of all the adult population. These members have a big contribution to make in the development process of the community.

At present, most of the information flow reaching them works through the oral information system. Some of the elders in this group will be “experts” and rich sources of indigenous knowledge. It is very important not to regard

the oral information system as separate or opposed to the print-based information system. A lot of the knowledge needed by the community will be found and taken (mined) from the oral information system.

### ***Useful communication strategies:***

#### **a) Reading clubs**

Reading clubs help the semi-literate people increase and strengthen their reading skills. They will read newspapers, literacy primers, and novels. The clubs should also include sharing new ideas and holding discussion forums to discuss social issues. The CIRC may invite a speaker to talk about a topic that the club members have read about. In this way, club members can share and contribute their own thinking on the topic.

#### **b) Radio and audio-cassette listening forums**

The CIRC will organize listening forums around radio programmes with interesting development content. Community radio is particularly useful for this purpose because its programmes have a lot of local content. The listening forums can also share their knowledge by producing their own programmes through the community radio. For example, health, agriculture extension programmes, and drama with community development themes are good topics. After the radio programme is finished, the participants can discuss the issues and develop action plans, whenever possible.

#### **c) Video viewing**

Video viewing can provide information access to all community members, including the group of semi-literate people. Video shows on development and entertainment themes, followed by discussions, will help raise awareness of development issues in the community.

#### **d) Internet services**

Community members can access vast quantities of information through the Internet. To use this tool, the community members need to become computer literate, so that they can search for the information they need

without major difficulties. An information worker can do the Internet search for those who are not computer literate.

## Women Members



Women play multiple roles in African society. As a result, they find it difficult, as a group, to participate fully in information sharing activities. Most women work on the farms with men. When they return from farming, women have to prepare food for the family, and quite often fetch water and firewood. They look after young children and do other household chores. These multiple social roles leave women with little time to participate in the structured information and knowledge exchange activities of a CIRC.

In some cases, women have additional problems because their activities outside the household are limited by husbands and by age-old customs. Women and girls may have to ask for permission to leave their own compound. It is assumed that 'a good woman does not wander around aimlessly in public'. In some places, young unmarried women walking to an information centre alone risk abduction, rape, and other forms of harassment by men in the community.

### **BOX 4.1: Finding out what women know and what they do not know**

Women's cultural conditioning lays strong emphasis on self-effacement, reticence and absolute obedience to authority. Such behaviour is appropriate for women of worth and virtue. These values have contributed to the conditioning of women to accept a second-class position to males, parents, and, in some cases, to adult male offspring. They have also engendered characteristics such as bashfulness about asking questions or seeking information outside the immediate family. Women, in the region, thus generally lack the confidence or courage and/or initiative to venture outside the acceptable domains in search of solutions to problems. Inculcated reticence about oneself

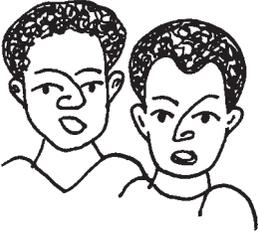
further discourages an outsider from assessing the needs of women accurately and encourages the community to undervalue the skills and knowledge which women possess. These culturally based constraints might, therefore, be the greatest barrier that has to be confronted by the information specialists. Fortunately, rapid change in traditional values may open up new and urgent demands for information, thus encouraging a faster process for the search of information for solutions of day to day problems.

*Kay Raseroka, "Constraints in the Provision of Information Services to Women in the Region" in Proceedings of SCECSAL XI, held in Kampala, Uganda, June 21-29, 1990. p. 140. The paper was published in 2000.*

### ***Useful communication strategies:***

- a) Finding space and time, when the workload of women allows them to participate in the activities of the information centre. Christian women may have some free time on Sundays; Moslem women on Fridays.
- b) Groups of women may form networks and clubs, so that they can hold meetings. During the meetings, they will read useful materials together and hold discussions. On such occasions, the CIRC can be closed to other members of the community to ensure there is adequate space for the women. Such social networks provide solidarity to individuals. The networks empower them to use some of the services of the information centre without breaking any social codes.
- c) Women's groups can meet in the house of one of their members on a rotational basis to hold discussions, watch a video or listen to a radio programme. In this way, they participate in the activities of the CIRC. Successful women from other parts of the country can also be invited to tell their stories on how to set up networks. These stories inspire other women and give them ideas on how to uplift themselves (see box 4.1).

## Young Community Members



Young people between the ages of 13 and 25 years are in a difficult position. They are neither children nor full adults. In most cultures, the young people do not get equal opportunities (occasions) to express their views or to participate fully in development activities, on their own terms.

With the outbreak of HIV/AIDS, Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs), and early pregnancies, this group is on the front line of many of the development issues in the community. The young people do not have many opportunities (occasions) to express their point of view towards finding solutions to problems that face them and their community.

Another serious issue is the cultural breakdown between generations in most communities. As a result of the modernization model of development, urbanization, and the effect of Western-oriented mass media, many young people are estranged from their own culture. They try hard to copy various forms of Western culture, but without success.

### ***Useful communication strategies:***

- a) This group has a great need for intelligent information on the basics of human behaviour, especially sexual behaviour. Information on sexual and reproductive health matters is crucial for young people, if they are to avoid the problems of Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs) and early pregnancy.
- b) Introducing young people to their own cultural heritage through folklore, songs, poetry, handicrafts, traditional agricultural and health practices helps to ensure that they do not grow up in a cultural void.

All these elements need to be critically examined to decide if they are suitable for today's social situation. Culture is living. It changes because culture is part of being human and social. Culture must evolve (change) and address new situations. Cultural knowledge, like all forms of

knowledge, cannot be allowed to be static (unchanging) or it will wither and die.

- c) Many young people will still be students, continuing their education. They need educational materials of all types, as well as a quiet place to study, so they can do their schoolwork successfully. It is difficult to find space and the right environment at home, because the house is crowded and there is no study area.

The next section looks at a wide range of information services that the CIRC can gradually put in place to serve the whole community.

## **Types of Information Services**

### **Information Campaigns**

The concept (idea) of campaigns refers to focused and intense information exchanges around a specific issue, for a specified period of time. This type of communication helps to create the needed social climate for the development and adoption of new ideas on a particular topic. Information campaigns may be organized around topics, such as family planning and the use of contraceptives, HIV/AIDS awareness, equal rights for girls, tree planting, environmental awareness, and literacy, to mention a few examples.

Campaigns may be also needed to support services being offered by some other agency or programme. The aim is to promote and use the services to the fullest extent. Child immunization is an example. Communication at the CIRC gives all the information about the event: when and where it is going to take place and why it is important. The communication raises the awareness of community members to the social problems that will arise, if the immunization is not carried out. In this way, community members can make a decision, based on the information they have received.

Campaigns can also be organized at the national or international level. There are usually some fixed dates for marking certain events each year. The information centre should note these dates and prepare the community

to participate in these events. The CIRC will contact all stakeholders, hold discussion forums, and follow up what is happening at national and international levels.

### **Training Workshops**

Structured training activities in the form of short workshops and seminars are important for the rapid acquisition of knowledge and skills. The CIRC should organize such training activities. For example, a group of small farmers can learn together how to grow tomatoes and other horticultural produce. Then they discuss how best to apply the ideas in their community. The small farmers can also carry out experiments (pilot projects) to test their learning. Experiments serve also to build confidence to enable the group to go beyond rote learning. They are empowered to defend and champion the spread and application of their new knowledge.

The CIRC may organize and support community workshops on topics of interest, such as: gender relations, growing drought resistant crops, forming credit societies, environmental awareness, control of soil erosion, preparing a simple business plan, community water management, schooling for girls and keeping dairy cattle.

Resource persons may be invited to participate from extension services, partner institutions, NGOs, donor agencies, government departments, educational institutions and farmers' groups.

### **Field Visits**

Throughout the country (and in neighbouring countries), other communities, NGOs, and government departments deal with problems similar to the ones the community is trying to address. A field visit to a nearby village can turn the community members into independent (self-reliant) knowledge seekers. Through the experience of a visit and exchange, they can look at what others have done, and decide which of the practices can be adapted in their community.

The role of the CIRC is first to identify potential places for field visits. Then, if it seems a good idea, the workers will discuss the goals of such a visit with the community. If the place is far off, raising some funds may be needed. After a field visit, several things should be done:

- a) The participants in the field visit should make a detailed report of what they saw and share their views on what can be usefully adapted in their situation with the rest of the community. A discussion should follow and some form of a decision made on an action plan;
- b) If applicable, experiments (pilot projects) can once again be carried out on a small scale, in order to test the idea and its possible adaptation in the community. During the pilot project, it is possible to find out if there are potential problems that were not evident during the short field visit.

The principle, in this type of activity, is to strengthen the community's capacity building to evaluate and adapt knowledge from the outside to suit its own social situation and values. This action places knowledge and learning in the hands of ordinary men and women. Taking ownership of the knowledge empowers them and builds their self-confidence.

### **Community Newsletter**

A newsletter serves to inform the community about what is going on and what is planned in information sharing and exchange activities. The newsletter could be issued every second month or more frequently when there is important news to share. We suggest that you choose a local name that means "news from the village". Put copies of the newsletter on notice boards at the information centre and in other public places, including churches, mosques, and shops.

### **Internet Services**

The most exciting tool for communicating information is the Internet. The Internet is a vast network of computers linked throughout the world through telephone lines or telecommunication satellites. It provides public access to

large stores of information. As a communication tool, the Internet allows communities and individuals to do the following:

- a) Exchange messages through electronic mail for which they need an e-mail address;
- b) Search information on the Internet, using the world wide web (www);
- c) Put up their own information on the Internet, provided they have a web address or home page. A few examples of information which a community can put on the Internet include: the newsletter, products they produce and want to sell throughout the world, and tourist information to attract visitors to the community (see box 4.2).

**BOX 4.2: Success story in use of ICT for development: Nguvukazi Partners, Sengerema, Mwanza, Tanzania**

The Nguvukazi Partners is small business enterprise and registered NGO with 13 members (10 men and 3 women), based in the small town of Sengerema, in northwest Tanzania. The group also has 20 part-time members who are hired, when more hands are needed. It was founded in 1992. Nguvukazi is a Swahili word, whose literal meaning is hard working. The activities of the small business group are: carpentry, construction, metal works, tailoring and making handicrafts.

The Nguvukazi Partners is one group who has learned how to successfully use the Sengerema Multi-Purpose Community Telecentre to do business. Here are some examples:

- 1) The group has an e-mail address (nguvupart@hotmail.com) that potential customers and suppliers use to contact the group. Once the group gets a government tender to build a building, members request quotes for timber, one of the most needed raw materials, for market prices from their suppliers via e-mail; they then order the quantity they need for the best price on e-mail;

- 2) The group uses the web page of the telecentre ([www.sengerema.or.tz](http://www.sengerema.or.tz)) to mount pictures that advertise their various products;
- 3) The group uses other services of the telecentre, such as: typesetting, scanning of documents, photocopying and printing;
- 4) The group also uses mobile phones, including use of SMS message, to do business.

Three members of the Nguvukazi group have received computer training at the telecentre, and use the Internet, secretarial services offered by the telecentre, and send e-mail messages to the community radio station.

Recognition for the group has come from other parts of Tanzania. Groups have come to study their low cost housing construction methods, funded by UNDP. Another UNDP Capacity 21 Project has recently placed an order, worth TSh 600,000, for beehives and honey processing equipment. The group has also won the prestigious Commonwealth Youth Gold Award 2003 for outstanding work among young people. The award comes with a sum of GBP 3,000. The way the award was won also illustrates the advantages of using ICT. The Chairperson heard about the award on the national radio and went to the Internet to search for further information. He found the information, downloaded the application form, filled it in and sent it to the appropriate ministry in Dar es Salaam. When the group received the application sent by postal mail, the deadline had already past. Had it not been for the use of the Internet, the group would have not won the award.

Joseph Shigulu, chairperson of Nguvukazi Partners, says he wishes that every community in Tanzania had such a telecentre to give people access to information. He calls the telecentre a miracle of modern technology.

*Sources: 1) Mona Dahms. The Sengerema Multi-Purpose Community Telecentre (MCT) Project. Follow-up Study, November 2003. (unpublished); 2) E-mail communication between Habby Bugalama, Sengerema Telecentre Manager, and the author, January 2004.*

# Choosing the Most Important Information for Distribution

The main focus of information distribution should follow the community development priorities. It is likely that information on topics such as agriculture, income generation, formal and adult education, environmental awareness, and health will be the priorities. Information on these topics can be made known in a number of ways, including the newsletter, information sessions, and notices.

## Video Shows

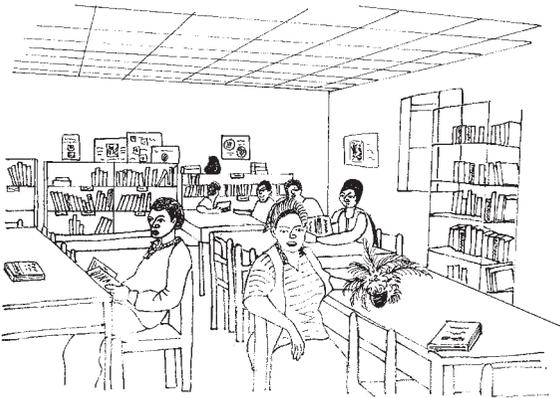
A popular activity is video shows at the information centre, if there is a video player. To promote the shows, the CIRC can put up posters on trees along the main road in the village and on community notice boards. The centre will have to depend on solar power or a generator, if there is no electricity.

## Reading and Borrowing: Using the Resource Centre Materials

A major activity at the CIRC will be to offer citizens access to its materials. These materials may be read at the centre or borrowed by members of the

community. Most of the borrowed materials will be for educational purposes, entertainment, economic development and income generation, and adult literacy. Each centre needs a system for recording the names of those who have borrowed materials, and a timetable for bringing them back (see Appendix 1).

Newspapers written in the local language are always popular. Both current and back issues are read at the centre.



## **Meetings**

Staff may wish to invite various development committees to meet in the centre. If a meeting takes place, it is advisable to close the library to the public, but a notice should be put up in advance to announce the hours of closing.

## **Support for Extension Services**

The CIRC may wish to support joint activities with other extension services. For example, agricultural and health workers may be invited to give talks at the information centre on topics identified by the community. Literacy groups may also hold meetings at the centre to discuss the progress of literacy activities, hold classes and perform graduation ceremonies.

## **Games and Cultural Activities**

Another popular activity for the CIRC is the provision of table games. These may include drafts, cards, and other popular local games, snakes and ladders, monopoly, and traditional chess. This type of activity can help to fill the gap, especially for young people, if the community lacks recreational and entertainment facilities. A football and netball may also be possible. In many rural communities, the only form of recreation is drinking alcohol or chewing chat. These pastimes have severe economic and health consequences.

## **Knowledge Production and Evaluation**

Most information systems serving rural people assume that all scientific and technical knowledge is the property of educated people, including extension workers, government officials, nurses, and teachers. The CIRCs, however, must foster a different outlook, if they are to succeed in their mission. The CIRC manages and offers access to development knowledge for empowerment, not for continued control by the educated group. This control through the knowledge system is harmful, because it can lead to a spirit of helplessness.

ness. It is thought that only educated people know all the answers to development problems. This is not true at all. It is just a myth.

***Two of the key challenges of the CIRC are to convince the community that:***

- a) Knowledge is not only produced by experts, but is the product of human creation. Since the beginning, human beings have been making discoveries. They learned to make and use the first stone tools, to tame animals, and to grow plants for their needs.
- b) Evaluating every piece of information is necessary, because the meaning of most pieces of information is not fixed. Information is subjective. Its meaning is decided by the historical, cultural, and social conditions, that users bring to bear on it. In addition, knowing the aims and background of the communicator often helps in interpreting the meaning of the information. For example, a nurse in a health centre may tell a group of mothers with underfed babies to feed the babies healthy foods that have the necessary nutrients. The nurse may indicate what foods are nutritious: eggs, meat, carrots, and bread, for example. Each mother must process this information to fit her social situation. In other words, she will get further information on what other foods the family can afford to grow, in order to bring back the baby's health.

Mothers with this critical knowledge become communicators. They share their own value-added knowledge with others in the community, through one-to-one conversations and visits to families with children suffering from malnutrition.

## **Facilities and Equipment**

In an information centre, where the physical space is just a small part of a broader community development information strategy, some basic facilities and equipment are necessary (essential).

To implement the information strategy, the CIRC should have a large room to hold public meetings, talks, discussion forums and committee meetings. The same room could be used for video shows and films. If the CIRC does not have its own large room, arrangements can be made with schools and religious groups, to use their facilities.

In the CIRC, some carefully selected printed materials, posters, maps, and pamphlets are needed. The storage of these materials requires shelves, pamphlet boxes, and cupboards. A few tables and chairs are also needed.

Space should also be found in the building to store cultural objects and items of cultural value. A permanent display of bows, arrows, quivers, hoes, pots, traditional cloths, baskets and gourds, and other tools should be displayed beside the books and pamphlets from the external world. Historical maps, old and current photographs need to be carefully looked after and put on display to give the community its own identity.

***The basic equipment the CIRC should try to include is:***

- a) A typewriter for the newsletter, letters, and other forms of correspondence. In situations where there are several CIRCs working together, one typewriter could be shared by several communities. Community notice boards at meeting places would be useful for pinning up notices and the newsletter.
- b) A video player is very useful for video shows on various development themes. A tape recorder-radio cassette for radio listening clubs and for recording indigenous knowledge from elders in the community is also useful. This equipment can be shared by several communities or among several partners.
- c) A computer is a useful tool to access the Internet and e-mail, to create databases, and to carry out typing and other forms of word processing. With the computer, it is easy to keep statistics that will be useful in reporting the CIRC's activities to the community.

## CIRC Dialogue with the Community

Some of the information communication must be a two-way process. The CIRC information facilitators and volunteers need to be informed by community members. They learn to listen and to be humble in front of the people. What are the issues on which the community has strong feelings? Discussions of these issues and what causes them can lead the CIRC and the people to see the possibility of change in their situation. Some of the issues, such as drought, lack of firewood, crime, a new road, famine, and lack of money, may be easy to discuss. But other issues, such as the sexual abuse of children, alcoholism, and the HIV/AIDS epidemic may be more difficult to bring to the surface, because their public discussion is taboo. Through discussions, the information facilitators can help people find new hope, as they confront their problems together and build up their energy stores together. Channelling the energy into action is an important step in the struggle.

### **BOX 4.3: Community self-confidence**

Freedom and development are as completely linked together as are chickens and eggs! Without chickens you get no eggs; and without eggs you soon have no chickens. Similarly, without freedom you get no development, and without development you very soon lose your freedom...Development brings freedom, provided it is the development of people. But people cannot be developed; they can only develop themselves. While it is possible for an outsider to build a person's house, an outsider cannot give the person pride and self-confidence in themselves as human beings. Those things people have to create in themselves by their own actions. They develop themselves by what they do; they develop themselves by their own decisions, by increasing their own knowledge and ability and by their own full participation—as equals—in the life of the community they live in...

*Julius K Nyerere, Freedom and Development. p. 58.*

Whenever groups suggest something concrete that they can do to address one of their problems, the CIRC must try to encourage and support the action. The CIRC can participate as much as possible and help the groups to evaluate the result. This form of self-reliance helps people rediscover how much stronger they can be, when they work together (cooperate). Such projects, however, are not ends in themselves. They are the first steps towards critical awareness, and may be the platform from which additional programmes are launched in the community to address other development issues (see box 4.3 for some ideas).

By supporting the community, the CIRC supports participatory learning and transformation (see box 4.4).

#### **BOX 4.4: Dialogue-driven information centres**

Dialogue requires patience, humility and a deep belief that the information facilitators and volunteers can learn from ordinary people in the community. Some of the characteristics required are openness to new ideas, a willingness to engage in discussion on an equal footing, and a deep belief and hope that change in rural communities is possible and indeed overdue.

Dialogue also requires an intense faith in human beings; their power to make and remake, to create and recreate, faith that the vocation to be fully human is the birth right of all people, not the privilege of the elite. Founded on love, humility and faith, dialogue becomes a horizontal relationship of mutual trust. Trust is established by dialogue; it cannot exist unless the words of both parties coincide with their actions.

Nor can dialogue exist without hope. Hope is rooted in our human incompleteness, from which we move out in constant search, a search which can be carried out only in communion with other people. As long as I fight, then I am moved by hope, and if I fight with hope, then I can wait.

Finally, true dialogue cannot exist unless it involves critical thinking, thinking which sees reality as a process, in transformation, thinking which does not separate itself from action, but constantly involves itself in the real struggle, without fear of the risks involved.

*Adapted from Paulo Freire. Pedagogy of the Oppressed, p. 62.*



## Discussion Questions and Activities

- 1) Invite semi-literate persons in the community to a discussion and find out:
  - a) How they get information to solve problems;
  - b) How they feel about not knowing how to read and write;
  - c) What knowledge they have that can benefit other members of the community.
- 2) Hold discussions with a group of women and a group of men, separately, concerning limits placed on women in the community. Do the views of the two groups differ? (Sometimes men are unaware of the oppressive limits placed on women in their community). Have a joint discussion in which the views of the two groups are reported to the meeting. Ask for solutions to enable the women to participate fully in the information exchange activities.
- 3) Discuss with a group of young people how they view the development of their community and their future in it? How and where do they exchange information in the community? How would they like the information services and activities to be organized to reach all the young people in the community?
- 4) Draw a list of all the dates that are celebrated in your country. Which ones do you think should be celebrated in your community? How can the community prepare to participate fully in these activities?



CHAPTER 5

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**Keeping the Community Information  
Resource Centre Alive**

## Sustainability

A CIRC is born when a group of activists in a community or NGO, an extension worker, librarian, adult literacy worker, teacher or religious leader recognizes that there is real need. The CIRC's role is to distribute appropriate information in a systematic way, in order to speed up community development. The need is usually felt, when there are major problems in the fields of hygiene, nutrition, health care, appropriate technology, adult literacy, formal education, or agriculture. Such crises require the distribution of an increased quantity of basic knowledge to the community as a whole.

The driving force in setting up a CIRC is the realization that the community has limited access to the information that allows its members to make decisions, and to take action to direct and control their own future. However, what is often not realized is that starting an information resource centre is easier than ensuring that the resource centre survives. To survive, it must become a sustainable and an integral force in the struggle for development in the community. Quite often, the end of a funding cycle from an external funding agency marks the end of the CIRC activities in the community. If an information resource centre is to continue, several issues need to be addressed.

## Participation and Governance



One of the key elements in achieving sustainability is the participation of the whole community in the full range of the CIRC's activities. A CIRC will not survive, if it is imposed on a community that is not aware of

what is being done on behalf of the citizens.

***Some of the steps we suggest include:***

- a) The individuals who begin the CIRC form a steering committee. Its role is to develop a document that states: why an information resource centre is needed by the community; what type of CIRC it will be; and what its key objectives will be.
- b) Having done that work, the steering committee will look for an opportunity to report to the community. Before the meeting, the steering committee members will want to speak about the CIRC to the well-known community and political leaders, as well as other leaders of the civil society, such as religious leaders and elders in the community. The aim of these discussions will be to seek support for their plan.
- c) The ideal place for putting the CIRC on the community agenda is during a public meeting. However, some communities do not hold regular public meetings for the whole population. Instead, they have a council or village development committee, which holds meetings of representatives of the community. These groups make decisions on behalf of every citizen. The steering committee should talk to whatever structure exists, as long as it is regarded as a legitimate forum for discussing community affairs.
- d) Approval from the community governing structure should be followed by the creation of sub-committees to address specific matters. These issues include:
  - finding a room;
  - raising funds and other resources;
  - identifying the information needs of the community;
  - marketing the information centre to everyone in the community.



Each sub-committee will develop an action plan to ensure that approved actions are done on time. The action plan will list all the tasks and the names of persons who are responsible for them.

The date for reporting back to the committee (deadline) will also be indicated. The steering committee or the chair will be responsible for ensuring that the actions take place on time.

## **Accountability and Reporting Back to the Community**

It is important for the community to get regular progress reports. After the first series of activities, when meetings are more frequent, the CIRC committee will want to report back to the community three times a year. The chairperson of the CIRC steering committee, with members of the various sub-committees, will make this public report. In some cases, it may be wise to choose a well-known person in the community to become a patron of the CIRC.

## **Management and Coordination**

Each year, the community should elect a steering committee to manage the information centre. The committee will have a chairperson who ensures that everything runs smoothly. Ideally, there will be a set of rules (constitution or a set of bylaws) that governs the business of the information centre.

Volunteers will apply many of the information communication strategies. The person in charge of the CIRC could be given the title of Information Facilitator. This person's main task is to develop the exchange and flow of information to support community development activities. The Information Facilitator and volunteers are not bosses. In carrying out their tasks, they will be guided by the goals of the information resource centre (*see box 5.1 for an example*).

### **BOX 5.1: Goals of an information centre**

What are the goals? Though all local information systems do not share identical goals, there seem to be several general categories that can be identified. These include: linking goals, educational goals, and action-oriented goals.

#### **a) Linking Goals**

In addition to bringing together and documenting local experiences, resource centres may aim to establish coordination and exchange with other information centres at various levels, in order to link local people with experiences and knowledge being created elsewhere.

#### **b) Educational Goals**

These may consist of encouraging people to learn about themselves and others; to learn what their own problems are; and to understand the relationship of these to the existing social, political, and cultural structures. They may also aim to provide a forum for people to express their need for further information and education.

#### **c) Action Goals**

Local information centres can serve as focal points for community action by helping people acquire information resources for decision-making, planning, and constructive action in relation to their environments.

*Michigan State University. The NFE Exchange, issue no. 21, 1981, p. 4.*

## **Training**



It is important that the people who run the information resource centre receive training, so that all of them have the same understanding of the CIRC's role in the community. It is also important that everyone working in the CIRC use the same systems (procedures) for keeping records, organizing the information materials, and planning activities for CIRC.

## Mission and Vision

A mission statement for the CIRC helps to identify and promote its long-term vision. It is a strong statement on why the centre exists. It inspires and gives strength to all those who are giving their time and resources to the project. The CIRC could have the following mission statement: **The CIRC's mission is to speed the rate of community development and transformation, to capture indigenous knowledge, and to strengthen community participation and empowerment, by providing access to a basic stock of information and knowledge for the whole community.**

## Impact of the CIRC on the Development of the Community

The purpose of the CIRC is to stimulate community development by offering access to information that raises awareness about urgent development issues. If the majority of people associate or identify changes that have taken place in their lives with the information and knowledge gained through the CIRC programmes, the will to continue will be strong.

To make an impact on community development, the CIRC may have to be very strategic in the choice of the type and range of information it makes available. For example, if the CIRC tries to do too much, too quickly, it may not succeed. It is best to build up experience and resources in a slow and orderly way. It is, therefore, important to choose information sources on a few important topics by asking the whole community about their greatest information needs. Then the CIRC should offer information on these topics. Likely choices may include:

- a) Education and literacy;
- b) Agriculture and the environment;
- c) Health;
- d) Leisure and entertainment;

- e) Indigenous and local knowledge;
- f) Income generation.

### **BOX 5.2: Objectives of the rural library service in Uganda**

The development objectives of the proposed rural library service in Uganda emphasized improvements in standards of living:

- a) To stimulate creativity and economic production of rural people through exposing them to information on modern methods of production e.g. Farming and animal husbandry;
- b) To promote better living standards by availing rural people of information on hygienic living conditions, improved diet, appropriate technology etc.;
- c) To improve the well being of rural women, by availing them of information on small scale income generation, home economics and family planning;
- d) To contribute to government efforts to raise living standards of rural people through increased awareness.

*K. Krogh. Uganda: Pilot Project for Rural Library Services, 1992.*

During the regular workshops held for the community, it should be possible to work out priority areas in each of the above sectors. At the end of each year, a meeting should be called to receive comments from the community on how the activities of the CIRC affected their lives. The suggestions and comments of the community should form the basis of the next year's action plan.

## Local Fundraising and Budgeting

Learning to fundraise and prepare a budget are very important tasks for a CIRC that wishes to have a strong information programme for the community.

The starting point for raising funds is local. Ideas include:

- a) Asking for contributions from members of the community;
- b) Selling cakes, buns, other foodstuffs and small livestock;
- c) Working with other local organizations, such as churches/mosques, women's organizations, and youth clubs to raise funds. Local fundraising has an advantage. It assists the whole community in gaining a sense of ownership of the CIRC.

## Raising Funds from Donors and Funding Agencies

The CIRC committee will also want to learn how to raise funds from funding agencies. Most of these agencies ask for a funding proposal from the committee. The agency usually has a form on which to present the proposal. The proposal must clearly state how the funds will be used. A bank account is a requirement for the proper management of funds. Funding agencies also require regular progress reports that identify what has been spent on the various activities. At the end of the funding period, a final report is required. A CIRC can also attach photos of its activities. The funding agencies like to use such photos to make the case for more resources from their parent organization (*see box 5.3 for example*).

### **BOX 5.3: Funding proposal**

We wanted to show funders why they should give us money, so we gave them a lot of information. We attached the following information about our resource centre to the budget:

- 1) The name and address of the resource centre.

- 2) A short profile and history of the Ulwazi community and environment.
- 3) A history of how the resource centre was started.
- 4) The overall aims with short and long term objectives.
- 5) A short progress report from the start of the project to the present.
- 6) How we administer, supervise and account for our finances and our reporting procedures.
- 7) A motivation outlining why we needed the funds we asked for and how we would use them.
- 8) A working plan for the coming year showing how we would use the budget.
- 9) Details of the staff working in the resource centre.

*Libby Dreyer and Jenni Karlsson, Ulwazi for Power and Courage: Guide to Starting a Resource Centre, p. 44.*

## Payment for the Information Facilitator



It is hard work to run a busy information resource centre. At the start, the Information Facilitator will work on a voluntary basis. As the activities of the centre grow, however, the community may have to decide what payment can be given for the work of the Information Facilitator. If the person is already receiving a salary from some government agency (for example, as an extension worker, teacher, adult education teacher, or community development worker), the person may volunteer rather than ask for a salary. In this case, the success of the information centre is seen as part of the person's work.

If the Information Facilitator is not paid by an agency, the community should decide how to pay the person for the work of managing the CIRC. The community may decide, for example, that a small fee could be raised as part of the income generation activities of the CIRC. This fee would help pay a small salary to the Information Facilitator. People in the community could also decide to pay the person through in-kind work. For example, the community members might regularly help in the Information Facilitator's garden.

It may also be possible to submit a project proposal to a funding agency for the payment of the salary of the Information Facilitator. This type of arrangement will only last until the end of a project.

The majority of people working for the information centre will have to work on a voluntary basis, because there will not be money to pay all of them regular salaries.

## **The Will of the People**

The richest resource is not the money raised from government or donor agencies. The most important resource is the will of the people for starting and sustaining an information centre.

If the community decides to wait until the community is rich and has enough money, it will never be able to start an information centre, or a good road, or a school, or any other development project. It is necessary to build with what the community has.

Because Africans have lived through long periods of dependency during the national development strategies, most of our people have forgotten their true strength. They underestimate what they are capable of achieving (see *box 5.4 for a story on courage*).

#### **BOX 5.4: The story of a courageous woman**



There once was a woman who was married to the strongest man in a village. She felt content and well-protected from all those who could harm her in the village. One day a lion found its way to their house at night. Her husband, seeing that the lion was already in the house, and he had no weapon in his hands, ran out of the house through a tiny window at the back to save himself. For he said to himself, “I can always get another wife, but where can I get another life, if the lion kills me?” The woman, who was cooking at the time, could not run away and leave her young baby asleep on a mat on the floor. She took a pot of boiling water and poured it over the head of the lion. Before the lion had got over the pain, she took a burning stick out of the fire place and stuck it into the lion’s open mouth. The lion ran away screaming with pain. The woman and her baby were thus saved. The lesson of the story: we all underestimate what we can do until there is nowhere to run and then we discover an inner strength we never thought we had.

It is important to work with the community towards the rediscovery of its own strength, wisdom, and humanity. The community can, for example, volunteer to make bricks, clear the building site, and adopt a self-reliant approach to the development of its information centre.

To illustrate the importance of this section, let’s learn from the good practical example of what has been achieved by two determined communities in Ethiopia.

## Building a Local Resource Base

More than seven thousand (7000) reading rooms were set up across Ethiopia during the mass literacy campaigns of the mid-1980s. The vast majority of those reading rooms became inactive after the literacy campaigns. Twelve (12) of the reading rooms in Illubabor (Western Ethiopia) survived, thanks largely to the support of the local education officers and individuals. They were committed to the provision of information services in those rural communities.

Illubabor is a rural area located 600 km. from Addis Ababa. Its economy is based largely on coffee. In 1998, the representatives of those 12 reading rooms set up an informal forum to share their experiences and strengthen their capacity to manage and deliver information services more useful to their communities. The reading rooms began a process to transform themselves into *community information resource centres*.

Six capacity building needs were identified through a series of consultations with each reading room management committee, the Illubabor Education Office and Oxfam Canada. The six (6) skills were:

- a) To be able to increase the understanding of the role of libraries in rural areas;
- b) To be able to plan strategically;
- c) To be able to organize a forum/network with other Library Committees in Illubabor;
- d) To be able to develop accountability systems;
- e) To be able to advocate for reading materials in Oromiffa;
- f) To be able to secure financial resources for efficient operations of the libraries.

A major concern for all participants proved to be how to sustain the services provided by each reading room. Two of the six capacities addressed the issue of sustainability for the community information centres. The first one

was “the capacity to secure financial resources for efficient operations of the reading rooms”. The second one was “the capacity to develop accountability systems”.

Two special funds were developed with the financial support of Oxfam Canada and the Canadian government. The *Book Procurement Fund* enabled the twelve (12) committees to merge the purchase of reading and reference materials and secure a 5% discount from publishers in Addis Ababa on bulk purchasing. The Rehabilitation Fund provided financial support to upgrade the physical structure of the reading rooms. The Forum realized, from the start, that it had to look beyond access to temporary external funding, provided by Oxfam Canada during the Horn of Africa Capacity Building Programme (HOACBP). Hence, the Forum decided to use those two funds as an opportunity to engage local authorities, local businesses and community members in supporting the services provided by each reading room. Its members developed a set of measures to access the resources in both funds. This plan included the raising of local resources, in order to match monies available in each fund. This approach helped the reading room management committees to discuss the usefulness of the services with local authorities and communities. They also had to listen to the concerns and interests of their fellow citizens and to learn the information needs of citizens and their children.

The reading room management committees found municipal support for their work. The Forum invited local authorities to join their committees and finally succeeded in securing grants from their municipalities. In smaller communities, teachers, small traders and ordinary people gave donations, according to their means. The monies collected were used to match the resources made available in each fund. Those contributing their monies started noticing visible changes. There were more reading materials available in the library and more users. Physical facilities improved and created an environment more appealing for library users. The reading room management committees decided to move beyond reading materials and to provide audio-visual services and other information to the communities.

Two of those committees achieved remarkable results in finding support from their communities. The members of the management committees of two small rural communities, Uka and Sibbu, spent three months visiting each family in their community to explain the services of the community information centre and the benefits for all. At the same time, they asked for financial support from each family. People were convinced of the usefulness of those services and responded generously. The contribution varied from three (3) to twenty (20) Birr. At the end of the promotion campaign, Uka and Sibbu had raised more than 4500 Birr each. This is a very large amount of money for rural populations. The forum was able to build a local resource base in each of the twelve (12) communities. This base will ensure a regular source of income for the services offered through the community information resource centres. Community members, small traders and local authorities have shown a willingness to support the community information centres, as long as their committees are able and willing to account for what they do with the money.

## **What Should the CIRC Look Like?**

We would like to summarize all the ideas expressed in this chapter by answering a number of questions: What will the functioning CIRC look like? What will it contain? What services and benefits will our community get from of it?

Each CIRC will vary in the way it develops and operates, because the decisions of the various communities will differ. All CIRCs, however, are part of a broader community capacity building and social empowerment programme. The general principle of the programme is that access to information and knowledge is a basic resource to drive community self-reliance, food security and sustainable development. Relevant information and knowledge are as valuable as water, land, finances and other resources, essential for survival and human progress.

As an integral part of the community, most of the major CIRC activities will be managed by democratically-elected committees, which are accountable to the community. We can envision the following activities, each led by a committee of committed men, women and young people.

### **Communication**

Information and knowledge must be communicated and marketed actively, if they are to benefit the community. Each information centre will have an active communication programme to ensure that information is reaching everyone in the community. A newsletter may be produced to highlight upcoming events and celebrate past achievements. When the CIRC acquires a computer and access to the Internet, the issues of the newsletter can be put on the web home page of the CIRC. Other communication channels may include community radio, television and video, mini-media, and discussion forums. Demand-led information services respond to the feedback and suggestions of community members. The Communication Committee will organize frequent talks by agriculture extension workers, health workers, community development workers and adult education officials, on topics for which the community needs more information. Another activity might be to find out from the nearby agricultural research centre (or one further away) what innovations it has discovered and to try out (experiment or do pilot projects) these ideas to increase productivity and food security. There are many such centres within each country and others working for the whole of Africa and even globally. *Spore Magazine*, produced by CTA, usually has a lot of stories on new agricultural developments, with contact addresses (see page 43). *Spore Magazine* will also accept questions on agricultural topics from communities or individuals and will send answers.

Table games and recreational activities will also form part of the CIRC. In addition to the recreational value of such activities, particularly for young people, games also support networking. The informal exchange of information leads young people to play an active part in the CIRC's activities.

## **Library Service**

The collection will provide access to development books, pamphlets, textbooks, past examination papers and model answers for students, literacy materials, agricultural extension materials, health books, practical manuals, posters, and story books for both children and adults. Most of these information materials provide stable (static) information that does not change frequently.

Newspapers and magazines, on the other hand, provide current (dynamic) or changing information. Other materials may include: historical/museum items and handicrafts that are part of the cultural heritage of the community.

Agreements should be made with institutions providing distance education to deposit their materials in the library. These should be kept together for easy access by those who want to further their education. In fact, everyone with ability should be encouraged to learn more and improve their level of education. By showing the benefits of education, the community becomes a learning community.

The district development plans, produced by government, should be acquired and studied closely to see how the community is going to benefit. If the plans are not implemented, community members can ask their representatives for an explanation. In this way, the local community (civil society) holds the leaders accountable for their plans.

Audio-visual materials, such as video, audio (sound) cassettes, maps and posters on different development themes should also be made available.

## **Indigenous Knowledge (IK) Resources**

Most communities have vast amounts of indigenous knowledge, although it is not always valued. Knowledge is contained in stories, songs and poems, and historical narratives. There is also a lot of IK in the areas of traditional medicine (medicinal herbs) for both human and livestock use. Plants need to be identified, listed, and their various uses described. Other plants may be useful as spices, for cooking, use during famine, and so on. Plants which

are harmful to animals and human beings also need to be listed, so that they are recognized and their harm is minimized. Sometimes plants harmful to human beings can be used to fight pests. We must take care to wash our hands after their use and not eat food, while we handle poisonous plants. Elders in the community with knowledge and skills to use these plants should be asked to pass on their experience to young people. In this way, knowledge is preserved. Some of the most useful plants may need protection because they can be over used. If the bark is stripped off or the leaves over-harvested, the plant dies. One solution might be to start a community botanical garden of useful plants, so that these specimens do not disappear.

If there are herbalists, traditional birth attendants, medicine men/women in the community, they should form part of the committee to revive indigenous knowledge. Stories, songs, poems, sayings, proverbs and other forms of oral literature should be written down to form a section of the written materials in the library. The knowledge can be preserved, if schools take an interest and teach it. Teachers would invite elders to talk to students, and then give them assignments to do research on this form of community knowledge. People in the community with indigenous knowledge can be identified, and a list kept of their names and expertise. They can be asked from time to time to give talks and demonstrations to the rest of the community. Some of the IK is spiritual in nature. We should not dismiss it out of hand or call it witchcraft. It may be helpful in cases, where psychiatric medicine is required, but unavailable in the community.

IK can be used as the foundation for starting small businesses, innovations and income generation activities to increase citizens' income and fight poverty. For example, ancient skills can be revived to create handicrafts, textiles, pottery, metal works to produce agricultural implements, works of art, and woodwork to create household utensils and other implements. Animal skins (and other animal products) may be used to create clothes, handbags, and other useful and practical items. By studying its own IK, the community can also come up with creative innovations and discoveries on

how to solve current problems. By recording indigenous knowledge, we also safeguard it from being stolen by foreigners. They may, for example, be looking for plants to create new drugs and pharmaceutical products. The record will be evidence that the community owns this knowledge. UNESCO, through the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, has asked countries to pass laws to protect their indigenous knowledge, artistic works and folklore, because they are very precious, although communities may not yet realize their value.

### **Telecentres**

Telecentres contain computers and other electronic equipment, such as photocopiers, printers, and telephones. The Telecentre is linked to the outside world, so that people can receive and get access to information and communicate their own information through the Internet and world space radio. In the step-by-step approach to developing the CIRC, the telecentres will come last in the development cycle. It is better to start with simple, appropriate technologies and gradually move up the technology ladder, in the same way that the skills, capacity and empowerment of the community are increased. The bottom up and participatory approach allows all community members to benefit from the CIRC strategies.

If properly used, the Telecentre can be a powerful tool to supply current and dynamic information (information that changes all the time). One example of dynamic information is the market prices from the nearby towns and international markets. Knowing the prices allows community members to learn if they are being underpaid for their agricultural products, when they sell to buyers. Farmers may decide to take their crops to a nearby town, if the price for the product is higher. A second example of dynamic information is the weather forecast, including seasonal weather information. This information informs farmers about the likelihood of a long or short rainfall season. Depending on the news, they will then decide which crops are suitable to plant and which crops are unsuitable. A long rainfall season may also result in water-borne diseases that cause diarrhoea in children,

malaria and fevers. By knowing the forecast, individual farmers, their families and the community can prepare for possible problems.

Information, such as that contained in the examples cited above, is normally prepared by the central hub of the Information Network or Forum in each country. Each group, responsible for market prices and weather, for example, would gather and interpret the incoming information and provide value-added information and advisory services to the rest of the community. In addition, agricultural extension workers, health workers and teachers can be used to provide local interpretation of the information and value-added services. In each of the CIRCs, the information that has been made locally specific can be printed and displayed on community notice boards. Local language newspapers can also be downloaded from the Internet and displayed in the same way. If a community radio or mini-media is available, the same information could also be broadcast in the form of a news bulletin.

The creation of databases is another useful function of computer technology. Such databases can be used for storing, for example, the IK information mentioned above, the records of the collection and the borrowing of materials from the library, and health and agricultural statistics from the community. All these sources serve the basic goal of the CIRC: to provide information for planning and development purposes.

A lot of information is now available on CD-ROMs. These should also form part of the library collection, if there are computers to read and print the information from the disc.

A big challenge for the Telecentres is to avoid being top down and of benefit only to the educated people in the community. To avoid this possibility, training needs to be given on a wide scale. Those being trained should include women, young people, and those who are disadvantaged. The extension workers and teachers should also be given ICT training, so that they can obtain information from the Internet, add value to it and provide a better advisory service to the community, as part of their work and contribution. The training would include: how to use ICT equipment, how

to receive and send e-mail messages, and how to search for information on the Internet quickly and effectively.

Many of the facilities in the Telecentre can be used to generate income for the CIRC. There can, for example, be charges for: photocopying, word processing (typing), training in computer use, telephone use, and receiving and sending e-mails. Other forms of ICT skills training can be given at a small fee, for those who want to use such skills for employment purposes.

When all these services are in place, the CIRC will truly serve as a community knowledge centre. The community will have access to various forms of information and knowledge that will serve as tools and support for development, food security, and community empowerment. The knowledge centre becomes the engine to drive human progress for all members of the community.



## Discussion Questions and Activities

- 1) Is there a development project in your community that failed to achieve its goals? If yes, try to find out as much as you can about why the project closed down? What lessons can we learn from these failed projects to ensure the mistakes are not repeated in the information centre project?
- 2) List all projects currently going on in your community. Select a few, and try to find out:
  - a) How they are governed;
  - b) How people participate in running the projects;
  - c) How the project manager/coordinator was appointed;
  - d) How sustainability of the project is assured;
  - e) What lessons (both good and bad) we can learn from these projects for creating strong and sustainable CIRCs.



CHAPTER 6

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**Why Do We Need HIV/AIDS  
Resource Centres?**

## **What is HIV/AIDS?**

AIDS is the short form of Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome. It is caused by a virus called Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV). HIV/AIDS is a disease which now affects large sections of the population of the world. Africa is the most affected continent with the highest number of annual HIV infections. In some African countries, approximately 40 per cent of the population is infected, while in others, approximately 10 per cent is infected. The immune system of a person infected with HIV is weakened. The body then finds it difficult to fight off other diseases, such as tuberculosis (TB), pneumonia, malaria and other common infections.

## **What is the Main Cause of HIV/AIDS in Africa?**

HIV is mainly transmitted through sexual contact. If someone has a sexually transmitted disease (STD), it is easier to contract HIV because the person has been practising risky sexual behaviour. Quite often, STDs cause lesions, wounds and bruises which may further expose the body to HIV infection. About 23 per cent of the population of Namibia is estimated to be infected with HIV. In a few years, many of the people who have contracted HIV will develop AIDS. In many African countries, AIDS is now the leading cause of death.

## **What Kind of Information is Needed and Available?**

As AIDS has no cure, it is important to change risky sexual behaviours. Risky sexual behaviours include: multiple sexual partners, unprotected sex, and alcohol and drug abuse. These activities lead to irresponsible behaviours, prostitution, and possible infection from widows whose husbands have died from AIDS. Individuals and communities need to build up their stock of knowledge on how and why HIV infections take place in the community and on how prevention programmes can be carried out for the different groups who are at risk.

More knowledge is also required on how to take care of those who are already infected and need to be cared for, either at home or in the hospital. In some places, the government, working with donor agencies, is providing drugs to prevent mother-to-child infection. More knowledge is required at the individual and the community levels to learn how the drugs, called anti-retroviral (ARV) drugs, should be taken to ensure that they are effective in preventing mother-to-child infection and also in prolonging the lives of the parents.

It is important to eat healthy and nutritious foods to ensure the body is strong enough to resist infections and to cope with the strong doses of medication which infected people must take on a continuing basis. In the face of the epidemic, more knowledge of nutrition, specifically about foodstuffs which build up the body's resistance to disease, is important for the community.

In many communities and organizations, there is blind fear of HIV and AIDS because people have inaccurate and insufficient information. Such irrational fear leads to myths, misconceptions, and the stigmatization of people with HIV and AIDS. To address these issues, people need accurate information available at the local level. The HIV and AIDS information flow is hampered by the fact that most people do not feel free to discuss or exchange information on sexuality and sexual behaviour. They are culturally sensitive, ashamed, and afraid of death.

Behavioural change is now the main hope in the fight against HIV/AIDS. However, behavioural change depends on the whole community and on individuals. Everyone must become aware of the behaviours which put them at risk of contracting HIV. If people are knowledgeable, they can make the decision to change their behaviour. There are many examples of behaviours which need to change.

In many communities, the first sexual experience starts at a very early age. Neither girls nor boys are mature enough to make decisions about their own safety. Information on abstinence and delayed first sexual experience would be very useful. The sense of male identity and the definitions of

manhood hold that a male must have multiple sex partners. As well, the belief is that women are inferior to men. These concepts of masculinity lead to behaviours which fuel the spread of HIV. The belief that women are inferior also leads to gender-based violence and causes various forms of female disempowerment. Negotiation during sexual relations, for example, becomes male-dominated and may lead to unsafe sexual behaviour. Women may not feel comfortable in asking a man to use a condom.

Women are socialized to accept gifts and other favours from men, as an expression of love. The acceptance of favours leads young women to have sexual relations with older males, “sugar daddies”, who can afford to offer gifts. This practice is responsible for fuelling the rapid spread of HIV in society.

The emphasis on male and female identities is often heightened by peer pressure. Both females and males are pressured by their peers to behave in certain ways. They then may put their lives in danger. This negative pressure is thus another area which needs to be well understood. Through the exchange of information, young people can resist and counter harmful behaviours by creating positive peer pressure. Using condoms (and femidoms) during sex can reduce the chances of contracting HIV. Condoms must be used correctly and all the time. Information is needed on the correct use of condoms/femidoms. The myths and misconceptions about them need to be addressed, through the appropriate and timely supply of useful information.

The lack of open discussion of sexual matters and of communication between parents and children presents a social barrier to fighting HIV/AIDS. To a large extent, this social discomfort explains why the subject of HIV/AIDS is still not well understood. Most men and women do not know how their own bodies function, nor how their partner’s body functions. Adequate information is thus needed on how the male and female bodies function and how to take steps to protect them from sexual infections.

In conclusion, timely, relevant and accurate information is a key tool in the fight against HIV and AIDS. Such information supports decisions by individuals, communities and organizations. Actions to prevent HIV transmission, raise informed young people, and care for the infected and affected will follow from the sharing of information and knowledge. Behavioural changes in these areas will limit the impact of the epidemic. Information is also a key resource in ensuring that communities and organizations have a coordinated and harmonized response to the epidemic.

## **Setting up an HIV and AIDS Information Resource Centre: Key Functions**

The best response to meeting the information needs of people faced with the pandemic is to set up information resource centres at community, organization and NGO levels. There should also be national and district level HIV and AIDS resource centres, but this chapter will focus on the establishment of centres at the local level.

### **Four Key Functions of the Resource Centre**

#### **a) Gathering data and information**

Gathering information entails the collection of data from the community. To do so, the resource centre will work closely with health centres, religious institutions, schools, and community and social workers to build up a comprehensive data base on the HIV situation and profile of the community. Data on other associated problems such as TB, alcoholism, and Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs) should also be kept with the data, as they provide an indicator on the spread of HIV in the community. A comparison between the community data and the national data will reveal the seriousness of the epidemic in a particular community. The collection of such data annually (from one year to the next) will help to reveal trends and track the movement of the epidemic in the community. Such data should not only be kept in the files of the

resource centre but should also be shared with the leaders of the community in order to mobilize the community to action.

## b) **Acquiring and processing information materials**

There are many organizations, including the government, that produce information materials on HIV and AIDS. Some of the materials are created through research, statistical and surveillance systems, campaigns, and IEC (Information, Education and Communication) units in the Ministry of Health and Social Services, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, and the United Nations System (UNICEF, UNAIDS, WHO, UNFPA), NGOs, and other organizations both within and outside the country.

The format of the materials is varied and includes videos, audio-cassettes, posters, flyers, stickers, T-shirts, condom packages, pamphlets, postcards, newsletters, fact sheets, newspapers (clippings and inserts) and reports.

There are two key problems with the current materials. First, most of these materials cannot be easily identified and accessed from the usual sources (a catalogue or a bookstore). Secondly, most materials are not well documented and packaged to promote the sharing of experience and learning. The first problem can only be solved, if there is a national documentation system in place to identify and list all materials produced on the subject of HIV and AIDS. The second problem can be addressed through repackaging and simplifying the existing materials, if they are too complex. They may be translated into local languages, and repackaged to promote learning and the sharing of experiences at the community level.

To acquire the materials on HIV and AIDS, it is first necessary to identify the materials and to locate them by finding out who produced them. If the material is suitable, a staff member has to write the organization a letter and place an order. If no payment is required, the materials can either be picked up or mailed to the post office. As HIV/AIDS information materials are poorly documented, it may even be necessary to visit the

different organizations in person. It is then possible to check what is in stock and to see whether it is relevant to the needs of the community.

After receiving the materials, one must check to see that the order is correct. Write to acknowledge and thank the organization for the materials. The materials then need to be processed to ensure they are accessible to members of the community. It is important that they be used and kept, as long as necessary. The first step is to classify the materials (divide into broad groups), based on where they will be most useful and easily found. For example, the classification might be: General (HIV and AIDS), Prevention, Home-based Care, Medication, Nutrition, Myths and Misconceptions, Counselling, and so on. It is also possible to use an existing classification system. Each of the materials also needs to be described (catalogued) in a card form to indicate the following: author, title, place of publication and publisher, year of publication, page numbers or format, and location in the resource centre.

The materials need physical storage in the resource centre, so that they can be easily located and used, when required. The physical facilities required are: shelves, tables, pamphlet boxes, files, and filing boxes. Display boards and tables are also useful to exhibit materials with the message in pictorial, story board and poster format. This allows people to understand the information easily. (More details on the library unit is available in Appendix 1.)

### c) **Sharing and disseminating information**

There are two ways of disseminating information to users. One is through the “push process” aimed at providing consistent messages at one time to many people or to specific target groups. The second delivery mechanism is the “pull process”. This method recognizes individual and organizational information needs. It chooses the appropriate information and delivers it on demand to individuals, groups and organizations.

*The following are examples of the “push process” of information dissemination:*

**Campaigns** — intense information exchanges on a particular topic or problem (e.g. stigmatization, good nutrition, alcohol abuse) are offered for a specific period of time.

**Drama** — drama groups take up a problem of the community and perform a play to raise awareness and help people see its different sides. Drama becomes more powerful if the groups in need of change participate in the acting and subsequent discussions.

**Choral performance** — musical performance works in a similar way to drama. The performance becomes more powerful if the groups in need of change take part.

*The following are examples of the pull process of information exchanges:*

**Lecturers and discussion forums** — members of the community come together to debate issues affecting them. The event may include invited service providers, such as health workers, social workers, and counsellors to provide a situation analysis of the problem that the community may then debate.

**Video viewing and radio listening forums** — viewing a video and listening to specific radio programmes developed to address a HIV/AIDS problem is followed by a discussion of the issue to raise awareness.

**Talks by people who are most affected** — persons living with AIDS (PLWA) and relatives of someone who has died of AIDS share experience, give information on how to cope with the disease and create a sense of compassion in the community.

**Lending HIV/AIDS materials** — the community members may borrow materials for reading and discussion at home, in group meetings, youth clubs and at school.

**Creating materials** — the resource centre can also contribute to the exchange of HIV prevention information by creating information products. These may be created by analyzing the data collected from the community and by drawing story boards, manila sheets and posters which can be put on display. Additional examples of the production of useful materials for the community include: translations of pertinent information into the local language, simplified texts of more complex reports, booklets from newspaper clippings on relevant stories, and taping radio and television programmes for use in the resource centre.

d) **Mobilizing the community**

Increasing community knowledge on HIV and AIDS is only a means to an end, not the goal itself. The goal is to successfully fight the pandemic at the community level and to have effective HIV prevention programmes. Knowledge must therefore lead to action. The successful prevention of HIV will only take place, if there is open discussion with all the community members about the realities of the epidemic and its consequences on the community. These consequences include, but are not limited to: reduced production, the needs of care-givers, medical costs, early deaths of young people, care for orphans, the use of condoms and femidoms, and alcohol and drug abuse.

Fighting the HIV epidemic will only be successful if the whole community takes ownership of the HIV prevention programmes. To do this, everyone must be well-informed about the real situation, have participated in coming up with a solution and be emotionally involved. Local efforts need to be coordinated with national and district efforts and with other agencies, working locally and internationally.

It is important to recognize that community efforts are also supported at other levels, nationally and internationally. For example, certain days have been set aside to hold campaigns and mobilization events. They are, for example:

<i>National AIDS Day</i>	December 1
<i>World Tuberculosis Day</i>	March 24
<i>International Day of Families</i>	May 15
<i>International Women’s Day</i>	March 8
<i>World Health Day</i>	April 8
<i>Universal Children’s Day</i>	November 20
<i>Orphans’ Day</i>	May 7

All these days can be used to disseminate information and remind everyone of the issues. These anniversaries help to increase awareness about what individuals and groups can and should do to fight the pandemic.

## **Location and Administration of the Resource Centre**

The HIV/AIDS information resource centre can be started in a number of places: as part of a library/community information resource centre, in a church, school or mosque, as a stand-alone community facility, or in an organization, where HIV prevention programmes take place.

### **HIV/AIDS Resource Centres in CIRCs or Libraries**

HIV/AIDS resource centres located in community information resource centres (CIRCs) or libraries require space for a separate HIV/AIDS collection to ensure it is accessible. Scattering HIV/AIDS information through the collection according to the general classification system or format will make the materials difficult to find for use and sharing.

A table or tables and a display facility are required to put posters, charts, cartoons and leaflets on permanent exhibit. The aim is to make the material stand out and attract attention. As part of the display, a notice board would be valuable to put up announcements about HIV/AIDS related events in the community. Information should include the addresses of service providers, youth clubs, and time-schedules for radio and TV programmes which focus on HIV/AIDS prevention. The notice board can also be made to look fresh with newspaper and magazine clippings. A video-cassette player and audio-cassette player would be extremely useful to disseminate information, because they capture the power of visual and oral messages. Although many information centres have lost staff to HIV/AIDS, they seem reluctant to get involved in taking an active role in the fight against HIV/AIDS.

### **HIV/AIDS Resource Centre in a Church, School or Mosque**

If the HIV prevention resource centre is part of a church, school or mosque, it requires a Committee or Forum to guide its activities. The centre would play a part in the HIV and AIDS prevention programme of the community. A major challenge is to incorporate the value system of the parent institution into the activities of the centre. For example, the church or mosque may decide, as part of its spiritual mission, to focus on information which

promotes abstinence, faithfulness, and condom use, as part of a broader strategy of family planning and educating the members on sexual relations among married adults. There is nothing wrong with this approach, because many people in the community also believe in these values. The Forum or Committee will advise the information centre volunteers on the centre's operation and will raise funds, if required. Members may also help out in the centre from time to time. All the practical items identified for resource centres based in community information resource centres (CIRCs) apply. The basic facilities required would include display facilities, a video player and audio-cassette player, a display table, and a notice board.

### **The HIV/AIDS Resource Centre in an Organization**

The HIV/AIDS resource centre can be started as part of an organization working with HIV/AIDS prevention programmes. It should be placed in a department or section spearheading that prevention programme, if there is no existing information centre. The focus on information provision activities should promote the whole range of HIV prevention strategies of abstinence, faithfulness, and condom use, as well as family planning and how to deal with infections. All the practical items identified in HIV resource centres, based in community information resource centres, are also relevant. The basic facilities required would include display facilities, a video player and audio-cassette player, display table, and a notice board for a permanent display of information and announcement of events.

### **A Stand-alone HIV/AIDS Resource Centre**

If the HIV prevention resource centre is a stand-alone facility, the two major challenges are to include all stakeholders in its activities and to establish a mechanism for democratic decision-making. Meeting the challenges requires a Committee or Forum to guide the centre's activities, as part of the HIV and AIDS prevention programme of the community. For example, youth, women, older men and women, as well as political and church/mosque leaders and health services providers should be included on the Committee. All these groups may approach HIV prevention from different angles. The Forum or Committee will advise the information

centre volunteers on the centre's operation, raise funds, if required, and help out from time to time. All the practical items raised in the section on resource centres based in community information resource centres are also needed. The basic facilities required would include: display facilities, a video player and audio-cassette player, display table, and a notice board. However, it is not necessary to have all these things before the centre is started.



## Discussion Questions and Activities

Discussions on how people get infected with HIV are important to raise awareness and help people work out what they can do to prevent further infection. However, discussing sexual topics is difficult in communities where they are taboo, especially among mixed gender or age groups. It may, therefore, be easier to first discuss these questions separately among males and females. When everyone is comfortable with discussing sexual topics in public, it may be possible to discuss them in mixed gender groups. Ultimately, the community has to come together to make an action plan to counter the rapid spread of HIV, if the young generation is to survive the epidemic.

- 1) Who are the most vulnerable groups of people in your community to contract HIV? What makes them vulnerable?
- 2) What are the reasons people get infected with HIV in your community?
- 3) Which organizations provide health services to people in your community? Which of these organizations are doing a good job and which ones are not doing a good job in providing health services related to HIV/AIDS?
- 4) What are the main influences on sexual behaviour in your community?
- 5) Over a lifetime, how many sexual partners would a person have? First discuss males and then females?
- 6) Which sexual behaviours put people at risk in contracting HIV? How can such sexual behaviours be changed?
- 7) Which cultural traditions in the community contribute to the spread of HIV?

- 8) Which cultural traditions could be harnessed to help in the fight against HIV/AIDS?
- 9) What organizations produce information materials on HIV/AIDS, malaria, and TB in the country?
- 10) What can different groups in the community do to fight the spread of HIV?



CHAPTER 7

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**Case Studies and Lessons Learned:  
Experiences from the Grassroots on  
Setting up Community Information  
Resource Centres (CIRCs)**

## Introduction

This chapter presents the case studies of four Ethiopian communities which have set up Community Information Resource Centres (CIRCs), as part of the Horn of Africa Capacity Building Programme (HOACBP). The case studies come from Illubabor, Bure, Dire Dawa and Sidama in Ethiopia. Each community started from a different reality and is at a different stage of development in establishing its community information resource centre. In the final section of the chapter, we discuss the lessons we can learn from the different case studies.

## CASE STUDY: Illubabor Community Libraries and Information Centres

### Background

*In this section, I acknowledge the 2002 work of Lishan Adam in an unpublished report, entitled, An Information-driven Community Paradigm and an Organic Growth towards Adoption of Information and Communication Technologies: the Case of Illubabor Community Libraries in Ethiopia.*

Illubabor is a district in southwest Ethiopia, on the road from Addis Ababa towards the border with Sudan. The Illubabor Community Information Resource Centres (CIRCs) developed as part of a broader strategy of Oxfam Canada's Horn of Africa Capacity Building Programme. Its aims were community empowerment, popular participation and the encouragement of a sense of ownership of the development process among ordinary people.

Although the people of Illubabor are poor, they have rich agricultural land. They grow maize, teff, sorghum, barley, wheat, pulses and coffee. The chat leaf is also grown. Soil erosion, environmental degradation, the low price of coffee and high illiteracy are some of the challenges facing the community. In developing capacity among the people, the CIRCs were used as building blocks for the creation of a civil society movement. This approach aimed at

harnessing information and knowledge, learning and reading to support community development. The specific objectives were to:

- a) Increase the use of new information and knowledge to help rural people manage social changes, improve their agricultural production, and learn better health practices to protect themselves and their families from disease;
- b) Nurture the ability of people to innovate and spread the innovations locally;
- c) Support rural people to become increasingly independent and regain their dignity;
- d) Increase the capacities of rural people to identify, evaluate and use their deep and rich indigenous knowledge that had become marginalized.

In developing the CIRCAs, the partners wanted to avoid imposing technologies on rural people. They started with the structures that were already familiar and in place, including their own information system. They gradually introduced more complex systems and technologies in a people-centred approach to development. This approach gave people space to create their own options, by genuinely facilitating their search for alternative tools that would help them access information and knowledge relevant to their development needs.

Most of the libraries in Illubabor were started in the 1980s to provide reading materials during the literacy campaigns launched by the Ethiopian government. Many of these early libraries disappeared, when the literacy campaigns ended. They continued in Illubabor, supported by CODE, a Canadian NGO. CODE provided resources to buy books and upgrade the buildings and furniture. When Oxfam Canada began its HOACBP in 1998, it worked with CODE but used a different approach. Oxfam Canada launched a dialogue among community libraries, public authorities and external bodies.

The HOACBP approach was based on four major premises, referred to as “the four rings”:

- 1) Building the skills capacity of key players based on the needs identified by the community;
- 2) Creating a vibrant civil society around community information resource centres;
- 3) Progressively diversifying information services to cater to all members of the community;
- 4) Introducing a step-by-step approach to information and communication technologies (ICTs).

### **Skills and Capacity Building Strategy**

Initially, the libraries were run by Library Management Committees (LMCs), composed of members from the district education and administration bureaus, teachers, students, pensioners and businessmen. The first HOACBP support focused on analyzing the difficulties faced by the LMCs. Oxfam adopted a guiding and mentoring approach that enabled the LMCs to identify their own problems and to design and control their own development.

#### ***The process had three steps:***

- 1) Identification of their problems and their root causes;
- 2) Development of skills building strategies to address the root causes;
- 3) Creation of structures and incentives to support the skills and capacity building process.

The philosophical basis of this capacity and skills building programme was helping people to help themselves. For example, the members of the Library Management Committees were encouraged to learn to articulate their problems and come up with solutions, rather than looking towards external agencies to find solutions for them.

The first meeting of the group identified several key problems that needed solutions to strengthen the libraries. These were:

- a) A lack of clarity in the ownership of the libraries among three institutions, namely the Ministry of Education, the municipalities and the communities;
- b) The need to establish membership criteria to balance the requirements of the three stakeholders;
- c) The frequent turnover of public authorities made good working relationships with the LMCs difficult;
- d) The lack of plans to involve the public and mobilize resources to sustain the libraries;
- e) The lack of recognition of the part-time librarians who work as information managers in running the libraries but also serve as teachers.

Confronted with all these challenges, the LMCs realized the solution to the problems lay within the communities, not elsewhere. Specifically, the six capacities to solve the problems were identified as: skills development, networking, creation of a civil society, resource mobilization, accountability, and strategic planning.

### **Skills Development and Networking**

The LMCs decided to address the issues of skills development and networking first to empower themselves and enable them to address the other problems. Six areas were identified for skills development and networking:

- a) **Development of the Forum to promote networking, interaction and resource sharing among libraries**

The Library Management Committees recognized that the Forum would create a platform for engagement and negotiation with the public networks, the private sector and government officials. The HOACBP

provided resources for training in networking skills to support this stage of conversion from the Library Management Committees to a Forum;

#### b) **The role of libraries in rural development**

As most of the library use in 1998 was by teachers and students for reference and home work purposes, the skill required was the systematic understanding of the role of libraries in development. The purpose of this skill was to support the diversification of library resources to different groups within the community, including the semi-illiterate. This skill also enabled the LMCs to explore and consolidate a direct link between information, knowledge and development. They recognized the need to be able to address pressing social problems, such as family planning, HIV/AIDS, agricultural production, and broad socio-economic development. The HOACBP provided resources for training on the role of information and knowledge for development, including an exploration of the links between community development and knowledge.

The handbook, *Sharing Knowledge for Community Development and Transformation*, was one of the products of this stage. As a result of the training, the libraries were able to identify additional areas of need and demand for information to support development. These included indigenous knowledge (IK), local information and culture in the information system, and strategies to reach out to males and females of all age groups. The training also involved local policy makers. In reaching a common understanding of the role of information in development, the local authorities became advocates for the development of better libraries. Their new understanding helped the LMCs realize that information for development goes beyond traditional libraries. As a result, they changed their name to community information resource centres.

#### c) **Strategic planning**

The move from ad hoc plans to strategic planning and implementation was considered critical for sustainability. As long term planning was not part of the local culture, a workshop was held on strategic planning. The workshop included the identification of community needs, community

information seeking behaviours and budgeting. Gathering statistics, based on gender and age, was also part of the training.

The evaluation of strategic plans was built into the semi-annual Network meetings. Issues identified during later meetings were incorporated into the strategic plans. For example, issues of resource mobilization, the redesign of libraries to meet the needs of users, the marketing of library and information services, and the integration of audio, video and electronic technologies were all identified and incorporated into the strategic plans.

To discourage a culture of dependence on external agencies and to foster a sense of community ownership, the HOACBP introduced a book procurement and rehabilitation fund. Access to the fund was based on the capacity of the community information centres to raise funds locally. The HOACBP agreed to match what they raised. For each Birr raised from the local community, Oxfam would put in two Birrs.

The Forum members themselves decided on the eligibility criteria and how the funds would be managed. This arrangement created a sense of competition, as each community tried to raise as much as possible, so as not to be left behind. The innovative formula of matching funds was a big success. Each member of the Forum built structures to address the expanding user base and range of information sharing activities. The communities of Gore and Mettu have both built multi-storey buildings. All the CIRCS have learned to raise resources locally and to engage their communities in the development debate. This strategic approach to meeting the information needs of the community is unique. The intention is that this approach will be transferred to other aspects of development in the communities.

#### **d) Developing systems of accountability**

The information centres have a number of stakeholders, ranging from the local government (Kebeles), the Ministry of Education, the municipalities, CODE and all their respective communities. The municipalities provide

some annual funding, the education bureau seconds teachers to work in the information centres, while CODE and Oxfam Canada have continued to support to the libraries. All of these stakeholders receive regular reports on the progress of the information centres.

The community members, who support the information centres, demand better services. They compare the performance of their information centre with those in the neighbouring communities. There is a strong feeling of ownership and pride. This aspect of accountability has developed well but more still needs to be done. Future plans include workshops on financial management, public accountability, transparency and good governance.

e) **Advocacy for local language reading materials (Oromiffa)**

As the use of the information centres expands, demand for reading materials in the local language, Oromiffa, has also grown. This need is tied to the preservation of the Oromo culture and the dissemination of development information in a form that can be easily understood by local people. The solutions to address these issues have been:

- a) The creation of funds to encourage skilled people to publish in Oromiffa;
- b) The organization of contests to publish in Oromiffa;
- c) Oromiffa writing skills development;
- d) Distribution of locally available materials to maximize use of the scarce literature. The problem is a major one, however, and both audio and video materials are now being used to bridge the gap.

f) **Resource mobilization**

Skills development in resource mobilization was considered to be critical to enabling the individual LMCs to mobilize financial and other resources for the sustainable provision of services. Several workshops were held in which the whole community participated. They learned what their information centres provide and why they should support them with resources. Many local resource mobilization strategies have been designed, according to the circumstances of each Forum member.

They range from planting trees, serving coffee to patrons, fees for watching video and soccer matches, to celebrating a reading week, and other fundraising schemes. There has been considerable success in mobilizing local resources. Most Forum members believe that more can be achieved, particularly with income generation activities.

## **Civil Society Building**

The HOACBP aimed at positioning the libraries and information centres as building blocks for the development of a civil society movement. The movement focused on nurturing interaction between vertical and horizontal groups in society. These groups include:

- a) Members of the community;
- b) Library Management Committees (LMCs) and local authorities;
- c) Communities and public authorities;
- d) Communities and libraries/information centres.

The interactions of these groups were partly responsible for facilitating the evolution from traditional public libraries to community information resource centres, at the heart of the development process.

### **BOX 7.1: Civic public space**

The guiding principle behind these energizing interactions is Goran Hyden's concept of "Civic Public Realm". Hyden maintains that development cannot be done for people, nor even with them. Development is only effective if it is done by people themselves. They are the primary stakeholders and must own the activity. Development is the outcome of local micro action, often taking place on an informal basis by individuals, groups or communities. Following this principle, growth of the civic public space takes place organically to support sustainable livelihood.

*Hyden, Goran. Governance and Sustainable Livelihoods, Changes and Opportunities. ([http://www.undp.org/sl/Documents/Strategy\\_papers/Governance\\_and\\_SL.htm/Govern\\_and\\_SL.htm](http://www.undp.org/sl/Documents/Strategy_papers/Governance_and_SL.htm/Govern_and_SL.htm))*

The story of the Ilubabor community information resource centres is one of participatory institutions grounded in real life situations. Individual actors are willing to act in their own self interest. The community and their representatives have learned to engage, negotiate and work with both public authorities and different donor agencies, as equal partners in development.

The information centres and libraries have become platforms of encounter, local action, and dialogue, where learning and the exchange of ideas and knowledge continually take place. The information resource centres have become a tool for the creation of communities of learning. Meetings are held for diverse community organizations, such as savings associations and funeral associations. The CIRC compound is used to discuss many public issues. Workshops are held on subjects as diverse as HIV and AIDS, domestic violence, and environmental awareness for everyone willing to attend. People will often just sit and watch television, read books, see a drama or poetry performance, or participate in a quiz competition. In one town, Darrimu, for example, the LMCs created three sub-committees responsible for the collection of indigenous knowledge. They will focus on stories and proverbs, traditional medicine, and traditional artifacts and handicrafts.

The growth in the use of information centres grounded in the reality of the people and directed towards capacity building has been astounding. The growth in membership ranges from 3% to 321% since the HOACBP introduced the concepts discussed in this section. All the information resource centres are involved in expanding their services to respond to community needs and demands. The services are designed for all members of the community. Outreach programmes for remote areas and satellite libraries are common strategies for extending library services to civil servants and even prisoners. A strong link with extension workers has been developed, so that the latter now give regular talks in the information centres.

## **The Step-by-Step Introduction of New Technology**

The HOACBP wanted to avoid imposing technologies on rural people, when there was no capacity and readiness to operate and adopt them. At the start, the communities had already established traditional libraries, used almost exclusively by teachers and students. Converting these libraries to community information resource centres was the first of a series of innovations that the community embarked upon. Recognizing that only those with high education could make use of books, the next step was provide audio and video materials so that the information centres could serve more inclusively all groups in the community. These steps were taken at the same time that the CIRC also strengthened the traditional oral communication channels that were already working within the community.

At the symposium on community information centres for development, held in Addis Ababa, May 2001, the communities were introduced to other tools, such as community radio and computer technologies. The aim was to mix and match the technologies to ensure these tools are relevant to the needs of the community and the community is ready for them. Essentially, the community was made aware of the Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) and how they could be blended with the technologies already in place. The decision to introduce ICT or community radio was left entirely in the hands of the respective communities.

Four of the information centres were ready to introduce computers into their information services. They were also ready to use World Space Radio to download information, and translate and distribute it in their communities. Other potentials have already been discovered by the information centres. Gore and Bedele information centres have moved a step further and are planning to provide new services such as: word processing, fax, photo-copying, telephony, and other computer-based services, such as email and Internet.

This style of introducing ICTs takes the opposite approach to that favoured by many international organizations which have given grants to communities in Africa and the Third World for telecentres. For many of these organizations, ICT technology is “parachuted” into a community without taking into account the existing information and knowledge sharing systems, the capacity of the community or its information seeking behaviour. Given the strong civic movement, and the awareness of the role of information in development, the Illubabor community is likely to handle the introduction and adoption of the ICTs in the same systematic approach that we have already seen. Considerable local information already exists that addresses good governance, health, food security, agriculture, education, business, and indigenous knowledge. This information should form the backbone of the local content that can be disseminated by the new technologies. The ICTs offer the Illubabor communities one more tool, to be integrated with other information and knowledge management tools, in their quest to harness information and knowledge to achieve people-centred development.

The training of the LMCs, librarians and other community stakeholders in the use of ICT will be essential to build their capacity to make full use of this tool. Technologies such as CD-ROMs, fax, telephony, photocopying, Internet and email offer additional opportunities for income generation. The Internet would also help the people of Illubabor to communicate with the outside world. Through their website, they may also make their local products (coffee, honey, and animal products) available to the global market.

## **CASE STUDY: Bure Library and Information Centre**

### **Introduction**

*I have benefitted from the report of Zena Tadesse of the Bure Library and Information Centre for this case study. The study describes what has happened, since the formation of the Illubabor Library Forum Network, in 2001. The Forum provides a platform for the implementation of strategies elaborated in and through the strategic planning session at the annual meeting of the Forum.*

Bure is a community of about 4500 people. Its library and information centre is a founding member of the Illubabor Library Network Forum. The Bure experience described in this case study took place over the last two years. Last year, in particular, the services of the library and information centre developed very rapidly.

### **Management of the Library and Information Centre**

An elected community-based committee oversees the management of the library and information centre. Before the application of strategic planning, the committee was big and difficult to manage. It had seventeen (17) members representing different government departments. The changes have resulted in the reduction of the membership from seventeen (17) to seven (7). The new committee represents different grassroots groups in the community and government. The present members come from the following groups: religious groups (2), municipality, Education Bureau, funeral society, and civil servants.

The small committee has been effective in giving advice and in managing the operations of the library and information centre. It also promotes the CIRC to the community, government and the municipality. Both the government and municipality now understand the importance of libraries and they provide support, whenever requested. For example, the government has hired two people to be paid by the Education Bureau to work in the library and information centre to meet the increased demand for information services by the Bure community. Another example of

increased support comes from Gore, where the Government is funding the building of a fence around the premises, and has hired a guard to look after the library and information centre property. Previously it was very difficult to get such government support.

The HOACBP puts emphasis on the need to create a sense of community ownership of the information centre. Before the formation of the Forum, the community did not have a sense of ownership of the library. Many thought the library was the property of government or CODE. But through representation in the committee, frequent consultation, and promotion, many in the community now believe that the information facility belongs to them and is their responsibility.

Several examples illustrate this development. Members of the community are ready to make contributions for information services, whenever requested, even though the economy is in a poor state, because of low world coffee prices, the main cash crop of the Illubabor area. A local contractor was hired to build a hall for the centre for meetings and television viewing. He took the money and disappeared before the work was finished. The matter was reported to the community, who agreed to make contributions to finish the hall and hunt down the culprit. With the contributions from the community, the hall has been finished as planned and is now in use. Similar stories of community ownership have also happened at other centres of the Illubabor Library Network Forum. At Uka, the community contributed 4,000 Birr and all the materials required to build a big hall for the library to show videos and television programmes.

### **Physical Facilities**

In Bure, the facilities are: a small room which houses the library and a multi-purpose hall. The hall is used for television and video shows, public meetings, meetings with extension workers, and youth activities. The facilities follow the guidelines of the Handbook. It recommends the creation of facilities that support various communication strategies designed to help citizens access development information, in oral, audio-visual, and printed formats.

## **Types of Information Materials**

The main types of information materials are: development materials from NGOs and government departments, videos, school books, newspapers, fiction, and children's books.

## **Community Information Services**

The services are provided by volunteers and full time staff. Members of the committee supervise the volunteers on a rotational basis. The Bure information centre provides the following services:

- a) Extension workers hold meetings in the information centre on agricultural, health and community development themes and discussions follow their presentations.
- b) Television and video viewing are provided by the centre. Video viewing takes up to 3 hours each day. It is very popular with children. Television viewing is popular within the community because there is no other television in Bure.
- c) Mini libraries have been opened in six schools around Bure. They are run by volunteers. A book box service, with up to 300 books, is provided to each of the schools. Fewer books are provided for elementary schools with a small student population.
- d) Readers clubs have been formed in four (4) government offices. Each of them regularly sends a person to collect reading materials for club members.
- e) Teachers regularly bring students to the library to use the reference materials.
- f) Youth associations bring members to use the information centre and its facilities on a regular basis.
- g) Reading is promoted twice a year (January and July) through a reading day, which includes dramas on the use of the library and access to information.

- h) Services to women are provided by women volunteers who take books to the community for discussion; meetings organized through the Women Affairs Bureau provide talks on the use of the library.

Promotion is also done through brochures, posters, and talks during funeral association meetings.

Statistics of use of the information centre show a growth from 5066 users annually in 1998 to 8725 by 2002. The figures for those who attend other CIRC activities, such as meetings with extension workers and television and video viewing, are not included in these statistics.

### **Challenges**

The Bure Library and Information Centre faces a number of challenges:

- a) The library room is too small. Moreover, the Education Office needs the space for an office. The community has asked the Education Office for time to raise funds to build a bigger room for the library.
- b) The CIRC cannot be opened at night, because it is in government premises which close at 5 p.m., when offices close.

### **Success Indicators on Stimulating Community Development**

The Library and Information Centre is able to report progress in linking information, knowledge and community development. Examples are as follows:

- a) Farmers have become aware of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) and its effects. Cases have been reported to the police when members in the community practice FGM secretly.
- b) Many teachers have enrolled in distance education courses, because the environment provided by the library is suitable for study. Forty (40) teachers have already enrolled in distance learning courses.
- c) People have become aware of deforestation problems and are now replanting trees. As a result of watching videos and holding discussions on environmental issues, citizens are caring for the environment.

# CASE STUDY: Dire Dawa Community-Based Organizations & Associations (CBOA) Community Information Resource Centres

## Introduction

*I have benefitted from the reports of the Chairpersons and Secretaries of the CBOAs and volunteer “librarians” in the information centres for this case study. The names of the communities and of the reporters (in brackets) follow: Addis Alem (Alganesh Alemu), Filweha (Paulus and Netsanet), Police Meret (Tsege Agaze), Sabian (Manalebish G/Kiristos), Mebrat Hail (Tsehay Wole), Goro (Debitu Belayneh), and Gende Gerada.*

Dire Dawa is a town of about 250,000 people, located in the eastern part of Ethiopia near the border with Djibouti and Somalia. The CIRC programme started in the community after Oxfam Canada and Agency for Cooperation and Research in Development (ACORD) signed an agreement in 2001 to work together. ACORD had a credit and savings scheme in Dire Dawa’s poor communities.

By the end of 2003, the CBOAs had set up seven CIRCs, all within a one-year period. All the CIRCs have been located in the poor communities participating in the credit and savings scheme.

## Managing the Information Resource Centres

Each community information resource centre operates under a committee. The committee reports to the General Assembly of the community. The committee oversees the operations of the CIRC, and supervises the volunteers and staff running the centre’s various activities. In some cases, the office bearers of the credit society double up as staff in the information centre to save money. The number of volunteers varies, depending on the range of activities. The highest number was thirty (30) in Addis Alem but most centres have fewer volunteers.

Each of the CBOAs has its own bylaws, under which the resource centre operates. The union of all the CBOAs has its bylaws to bind all its members.

## Physical Premises and Facilities

The various CBOAs did not previously have any meeting place. They held meetings under a tree. However, when ACORD and Oxfam Canada came together, they provided funding for a building and furniture.

In most of the CBOAs, the facilities consist of a multi-purpose hall, which also houses:

- a) **A library unit** — all but Mebrat Hail has a library unit but it was in the process of building one;
- b) **Television and video machines** — all but Police Meret CBOA have a television and video machine;
- c) **An amplifier, public address system, and radio/CD/cassette player unit** — all CIRCs but Sebian CBOA has this mini-media equipment but it has plans to install the unit;
- d) **Indoor games** — most of the CBOAs have games but Police Meret and Gende Gerada have chosen not to buy them because they have no space and they would disturb readers. On the other hand, Garo intends to purchase indoor games soon to attract more youth.

The multi-purpose meeting hall is used for public meetings, by both the community and local government offices, television and video viewing, and as a reading room. In addition, several of the CBOAs have a computer and printer. The plan is that the computers will be linked to the World Space Radio for the downloading of information from its database.

## Types of Information Materials

The CIRCs are at different stages in building their collections of information materials as the base for providing a community information service. To address community development and to meet the citizens' needs for education and recreation, the collection should have skill-based materials of books, videos, and other items. In the case of the Addis Alem CIRC, the collection of information materials has books on health issues (for example, *My Own Doctor*), nutrition, education, and specialized trades (e.g. carpentry,

masonry) and some children's and fiction books. Most of the other CIRCs, however, have collections which are predominantly school textbooks.

The videos of most of the centres are on development themes, with emphasis on health, the environment and documentary videos for children and youth.

### **Information Services**

The CBOAs have two programmes: the savings and credit scheme and the community information resource centres. Each of the information centres has several cupboards full of files on member organizations of the savings and credit scheme. The following information services are common among most of the CIRCs:

- a) **Television and video services** — two distinct information services are being offered. One is video shows at fixed times for specific target groups, such as children, youth and adults. These are said to be popular with all the groups and have proved to be an effective channel for disseminating information. The second service is community television viewing, where members of the community come to watch national television programmes at the centre. News is said to be popular with adults, while children and the youth watch specific programmes aimed at them. For example, Saturday shows enable children to watch a children's programme on Ethiopian Television.
- b) **Indoor games** — these are offered as a form of recreation. Several indoor games are available in most information resource centres. They are: table tennis, drafts, cards, dominoes, chess, to mention a few. Some centres have computer keyboard games to familiarize children with the operations of a computer keyboard.
- c) **Mini-media** — this term refers to the community broadcasting which uses an amplifier, radio cassette, and a public address system, with several loud speakers placed on top of the tallest structure in the vicinity. In most centres, there are two broadcasting slots, one in the morning between 6:30 and 7:30 a.m. and the second, later afternoon between 5:00 and

7:00 p.m. The topics broadcast are on health (working with HIV/AIDS clubs in the community), popular songs, family planning, quizzes, and live broadcasts. Each of the mini media stations ensures community participation by placing a suggestion box, practically at its door step. This facility is used by community members to write letters to identify topics for future sessions and to provide feedback on previous broadcasts.

- d) **Reading room service** — all the information resource centres offer a reading room service in which the collection is used only for reference purposes. Given the small collection, there is no borrowing service. Some of the young people crowding into the reading room say it was a very useful service because they have books to do their school work. Many come from over-crowded homes and they find the atmosphere conducive to learning.

The shortage of books particularly ones on development themes and books for children was one problem experienced by all the centres. In one community the youth addressed the problem by collecting all the books they could find to add on the library unit collection. At Gende Gerada, they were negotiating with a nearby school to borrow some books from its library. Teachers and the Education Bureau officials have also been asked to help with the selection of good books. The library units keep some records of users to demonstrate how much the collections have been used, since opening less than a year ago. The average number of users was between seven (7) and thirty (30) at Addis Alem, while Sebian had an average of twenty-five (25) users per day, a few of whom were girls and women.

Clearly fewer females than males made use of the information centres in the first year. The volunteer librarians and CBOA chairpersons explained that the reason why fewer females were visiting the information centres was because of cultural restrictions. These traditions made it difficult for women to move freely in the community. The problem was more pronounced among the Somali community who were Moslems than among the other non-Moslem communities in Dire Dawa.

- e) **Drama and music** — these activities are also popular in most of the information resource centres. Drama and songs are used for conveying messages on societal problems, such as HIV/AIDS, chewing chat, and Female Genital Mutilation (FGM).
- f) **Public meetings** — public meetings are held regularly in the multi-purpose halls of the information resource centres. Some are on the savings and credit schemes, while others are on local government issues. Extension workers are also said to use the facilities to meet with the communities from time to time.
- g) **Other outreach activities** — other activities held in the information resource centres include: dancing, debates, quiz competitions, and poetry.

Each of the information centres has a suggestion box which allows them to keep in touch with their community on an ongoing basis. They receive suggestions for improvements and future activities.

### **Income Generation Activities**

In each of the CBOAs, there are several income generation activities to raise funds in support of resource centre. The following provide examples:

- a) **Selling water** — using a lower rate than other water sellers, the CBOA is able to attract many people to buy water.
- b) **Communal shower service** — a small fee is levied to use the communal shower facilities.
- c) **Selling drinks** — most of the CBOAs have a fridge, where soft drinks, ice, and cold water are sold.
- d) **Room rental** — One of the CBOAs (Filweha) has built a room which they rent out to raise additional funds.

## **Successes**

As the information resource centres are not yet a year old, the communities are still learning. However, most of them felt that they have been successful in mobilizing their communities for support, using bottom up approaches. Respondents believed that many groups in the community have quickly learned how to use the communication facilities to reach their constituencies.

The respondents also reported that the Dire Dawa communities have also learned the use of information and knowledge to improve their lives. The presence of the information resource centres in the community has had a positive impact on the school work of children and youth. The centres have also provided a constructive way for the young people and adults to spend their leisure time. Many of them would otherwise be chewing the habit-forming drug, chat.

Some of the information resource centres have started to conduct debates on developmental and social issues, such as the causes of poverty, gender relations, chewing chat and Female Genital Mutilation (FGM).

## **Challenges**

Two challenges face the Dire Dawa information resource centres. The first is the need to raise resources to expand services. The second is the need to encourage more women to use the information centres. According to the CIRC managers, the solution to the first challenge lies in raising more financial resources through income generating activities and community contributions. The solution to the second challenge is to work with the religious leaders to encourage use of the information centres by women.

## CASE STUDY: Sidama Community Information Resource Centres

### Introduction

*I am grateful to Tigist Hailu, Information Manager, Sidama Community Resource Centres Network for the information in this case study.*

Sidama Development Corporation (SDC) and Oxfam Canada's Horn of Africa Capacity Building Programme (HOACBP) have worked on capacity building of the community at the grass roots level since 1998. One aspect of the partners' agreement related to information dissemination services for the community, in order to enable them to address their daily social and survival problems. In the Sidama Zone, there are now three CIRC's at three Woredas (Shebedino, Dale and Arbegona).

After a workshop and some preparatory work, community information resource centres were started in 1999. They were initially equipped with a generator, TV, video deck, radio tape, and video cassettes. The strategy of first introducing audio-visual media for oral information exchanges was to ensure that semi-literate community members and those not familiar with published information would have an equal opportunity to participate in the information sharing activities. As the majority of the community is semi-literate, it was important that this group felt included. Later on, the following furniture and collections were added: book shelves, chairs, tables, books, pamphlets, maps and posters. These materials can be used by those who have higher levels of education and by those who are able to learn how to use print materials.

### Information Services

The Sidama CIRC's offer different types of community information services. The most important include:

- a) **Drama, poetry and songs** — this is a very popular activity, well received by the community. A play can attract an audience of more than two thousand (2000) people. The themes of the different edutainments

include: HIV/AIDS, abduction of girls, family planning, and gender equality.

- b) **Public lectures and discussion forums** — this activity is organized around the presentations of resource persons from different organizations who talk on topics of interest to the community. After the lecture, a discussion includes suggestions for action.
- c) **Video show and video production** — the video shows take place in the CIRC and its compound. The Information Unit, in collaboration with Sidama Zone Culture Bureau, also produces different video cassettes which are shown to the community.
- d) **Community library service** — the library unit in the CIRC is open five days a week for the community to use the materials. These include books, pamphlets, maps, posters and some translated materials.
- e) **Monthly meetings** — the Kebele Development Committees (KDCs) hold monthly meetings in the CIRCs. During the meeting, they discuss issues brought forward by the representatives of different Kebeles in the network. They also discuss the operational and management problems of the information resource centre.

### **Community Participation**

The Kebele Development Committees (KDCs) are the representatives of the community and they have direct contact with the community. The community participates in activities like information needs assessment, problem identification, project prioritization, and group discussions after the dramas or public lectures. They participate in almost every activity undertaken by the information resource centres.

### **Management Committees**

In the three CIRCs, there are a total of forty-five (45) members. Each Kebele has fifteen (15) members. Of the ten (10) women members of the Management Committees, Dale KDC has four (4) and Shebedino and Arbegona each have three (3).

## **Challenges**

The CIRCS in Sidama have experienced a number of challenges. They are as follows:

- a) The CIRCS are located in areas where there is no electricity. Small capacity generators are used but they are not working well. This lack means that the electronic media can not be used.
- b) The KDC networks have grinding mills from which they earn some money for the management of the CIRCS. More training on fundraising and financial management is needed to improve this aspect of the management of the CIRCS.
- c) Transportation is a problem. As a result, the staff are not able to use the recording equipment to gather information about indigenous knowledge from the community.

## **Solutions**

The problem of improved local resource mobilization is being discussed by the KDC network. A program to train the community in financial management has been put in place.

## Lessons Learned

The four case studies have all been supported by the Oxfam Canada Horn of Africa Capacity Building Programme (HOACBP). Each community has adopted the capacity building program to its own realities, because it has ownership of the programme. Each case study thus provides valuable lessons about how community information resource centres can be strategically positioned to enable the community to move towards community development.

The four case studies are all concerned with a concept of community development that relies on the development of a knowledge base, the use of the communication infrastructure, and access to external knowledge resources and technologies, as starting points for community engagement. Each community approaches the process from its own realities. Whereas Illubabor and Bure had the CODE Ethiopia libraries as a starting point, both Sidama and Dire Dawa were in a position to design their information centres from the bottom up. Both Sidama and Dire Dawa used the existing community information exchange culture to set up their information centres. For example, Sidama deliberately chose to introduce first the video and audio shows and used the oral information system as a base to set up its resource centres. Dire Dawa was inspired by the communication system found in the culture of the Islamic and Orthodox traditions. This was the basis of the mini-media communication strategy, with a public address system, mimicking the call to prayers from the mosques and Orthodox churches.

Beneath this first layer of community action, there are two other layers. The second layer involves using the community knowledge structure as a building block for civil society to engage the State, the community and other organizations available to assist in the quest for development. To support development in a sustainable manner, each community has to learn to work within its environment, with its own community, institutions, and political and economic system. This calls for engaging the State structures within the framework of “civic public space”, where both the role and

space of each actor are recognized. There is constant engagement and interaction towards creating a positive relationship. The financial and material support that all the information centres have been able to gain from the government and municipalities is the result of successful engagement. The ability to raise funds from their own community is likewise a sign of success. Engagement comes with accountability and transparency.

The third level in the process of capacity building enables each of the respective communities to position itself, organize itself and build the skills and self confidence to take destiny in its own hands. The community chooses to be independent rather than being forever dependent on others to determine its fate. Capacity building includes making mistakes and learning from one's mistakes in the long journey towards human development. It also includes the gradual introduction of innovations, starting with appropriate technologies and gradually moving towards more complex technologies. The step-by-step introduction of communication technologies illustrates this point very well. Wherever possible, each community started with its own information system, before moving to information technologies coming from external sources. Each identified the appropriate technologies to address its needs.

It is apparent that the Illubabor network of CIRC's is ready for information and communication technologies (ICTs). It has built the capacity to use them profitably. Several communities have already moved in that direction. This demystification of ICT will allow everyone greater use of the technologies, not only the minority with higher levels of education and exposure. The possibility of anchoring the ICT in the existing knowledge and communication systems will facilitate the adding of value to existing information products and services. They can add these products and services in an organic way and connect them with other community knowledge and communication structures. *(See box 7.2 for an example taken from Lugoba, Tanzania. It has both positive and negative lessons on how to introduce ICT into a community.)*

### **BOX 7.2: Lugoba's rural ICT project**

Lugoba is a rural community located 125 kms from Dar es Salaam, on the main highway to the northern towns of Tanga, Moshi and Arusha. The community is composed of small farmers, growing cashewnuts and fruits as cash crops, and maize, rice, bananas, cassava and beans as food crops. The village keeps livestock, mainly cattle and goats. There are two primary schools and one secondary school, one government health centre and a private health centre.

The ICT project was established early in 2003 with the help of the Tanzania Commission of Science and Technology and funding from UNESCO's Informatics Division. The project is managed by a Computer Project Committee which reports to the Lugoba Village Government.

The initial target groups of the project were village functionaries, political party leaders and government officers working in the community, including: agriculture and livestock extension workers, health workers, school teachers, and the local magistrate court.

The overall aim of the project is to contribute to good governance in rural areas and to facilitate access to knowledge for rural development.

#### **The specific objectives are to:**

- a) Use the village information system outputs for electronic governance;
- b) Increase the efficiency and effectiveness in capturing and processing information obtained in the village;
- c) Provide electronic information for good village governance at the grassroots level;
- d) Provide access to knowledge through a computerized information system;

The project was designed to carry out three main activities. First, the government officers would get information from electronic sources and pass it on to the community to support the development process. Secondly, they would keep copies of the data they send to their supervisors at district headquarters, in order to help the village government

improve the planning, implementation and monitoring mechanisms in place. Thirdly, it was expected that the government workers and village functionaries would promote the project to the rest of the community, in order to expand the use of the ICT facilities. After one year, most of the expectations have not been fully met. Most of the village leaders and government officers were not using the ICT facilities. They still send out their data without keeping a copy in the community for use by the village government.

The project has five computers which are linked to the Internet. The Internet is accessed through a broadband (VSAT) dish procured from Afri-SAT at a cost of Tsh 4.5 million and a monthly payment of Tsh one hundred thousand (equivalent to US \$4500 and \$150 respectively).

Several services are provided at the Lugoba ICT centre. Some of the services are provided for a fee to ensure sustainability.

**Fee-paying services include:**

- a) Internet and email services (Internet use that is work related is not charged a fee);
- b) Word processing, including typing and printing;
- c) Training in computer literacy, mainly to primary and secondary school pupils.

**Free services include:**

- a) A website being developed for the Lugoba community will incorporate a community newsletter.
- b) A community health database is under development to store information on diseases in the community, treatment, and patient payments.
- c) Crop protection information is based on the CD-ROM *CABI Crop Protection Compendium*. This interactive CD from CAB International is a rich source of agricultural crop information giving details of various crops and their diseases, and how to cure them.

After learning that most of the village functionaries and government officers are not using the ICT facilities at all and are unable to provide information to the community on a wide scale, steps are now being taken to involve the community directly in accessing the information they need from the Internet and other electronic sources. The village government has also asked the Tanzania Commission of Science and Technology to strengthen the project ,by providing a photocopying machine and telephone facilities. Both will be operated at a fee for cost recovery.

*Toflo Mlaki. Information provided by Director of Information and Documentation Services, Tanzania Commission of Science and Technology and from a site visit to Lugoba on 6/1/2004 by the author.*

The final lesson is that the regular semi-annual meetings of the Illubabor Resource Centre Network have served a useful purpose. They have allowed the members to discuss their strategic plans, to exchange experience and information and to make revisions and changes. The Network has also gained official status in Ethiopia.

The members have taken the first step in the thousand mile journey towards community development, civil society building and capacity building. There is still a long way to go for knowledge to become a strong pillar of the community development process. When knowledge is a central part of the process, its presence will lead to a transfer of the skills needed for other areas of development. A thousand mile journey has begun in Ethiopia with the first few steps that four communities have shared with us. They are to be congratulated for the example they set for all of us.

## GLOSSARY

We have tried to use language that people at the community level can understand. We realize that some of the words and phrases used by those who discuss information and development are difficult. For this reason, we are adding a section on words and phrases that appear in the text. Their meaning is related to this handbook. Many of the words have been used several times in the text.

### A

**Abolish, abolition** — to bring to an end, undo, stop, cancel or disallow a law, construct or action.

**Account, accountable, accountability, accountant** — these words refer to the system in place to ensure the proper use of the resources that the CIRC is responsible for. The funds are put into an account at the bank; a system is put in place (a set of rules that are public), so that the CIRC can report to the community on its use of funds, its activities and also the use of space, collections, equipment etc.; an accountant has training in managing and assessing resources, especially financial resources, but also other resources like equipment.

**Acquire, acquisition** — to add, get, achieve, reach something.

**Adapt, adaptable, adaptation** — to make fit or to adjust to one's situation; if an idea/practice can be made to fit the community context, it is adaptable; the community changes the idea/practice and adapts it to the local situation.

**Adopt, adoption** — to make one's own or to take for one's own; if a community takes an idea/practice from another community, it adopts the idea/practice for use by the community.

**Advocate, advocacy** — to support, promote, make a case for and defend.

**Agent, agency** — these words refer to organizations and people that are responsible for certain activities. For example, the health centre is the agency responsible for the public health issues of the community; the library is the agency responsible for organizing the information collection.

**AIDS** — the short form of Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome.

**Analyse, analytical, analysis** — to break an idea or a practice into its parts and to study each part and its relation to the whole. The analysis allows the community to decide if an idea/practice can be adapted to the situation and adopted by the group.

**Apply, applicable, application** — to set about doing something, to take on a task, to use; if an idea or a practice can be used by others, it is applicable.

**Appraise, appraisal, appraiser** — to examine or to study the value of an item, an idea or a practice.

**Appropriate** — something that is useful, that suits a situation, and will work for the person or community. Appropriate technology is a phrase used to suggest that a community uses the technology that works best for them, given the situation (conditions). For example, if there is no electricity, solar panels may work.

**Assess, assessment, assessor** — these words are similar in meaning to appraise and to evaluate and evaluation.

**Aware, awareness, awareness-raising** — these terms are used to describe those who know and are informed about an idea or a practice; those who assist others in coming to know raise awareness.

## B

**Behave, behaviour** — these words refer to a persons (or a groups) way of acting and presenting themselves to others.

**Bylaws** — a set of rules by which the CIRC will manage its business.

## C

**Capacity, capable** — the skills and practice to allow (enable) a person or a group to do something with confidence.

**Capitalist, Western** — these terms are used to describe the systems of countries that emphasize the importance of the private sector, the economy, trade and investment of financial resources to create wealth.

**Civil society** — this phrase refers to people, coming together in groups or organizations, to address certain issues in their society; citizens have an opportunity to organize activities together outside the private sector and the public sector (the state or government). The Library Management Committee is an example of civil society.

**Clipping** — a piece taken from a newspaper or magazine.

**Collect, collection, collector, collectivity** — these words refer to the act of bringing things together in one place and of giving them order. For example, the books in an information resource centre, when organized for access, make up a collection.

**Compatible, compatibility** — these words refer to the fit of an idea or practice with the traditions and culture of a community; when the analysis is done by community members, they will decide if the idea/practice is a good one to adopt.

**Complex, complexity** — these words refer to ideas and practices that have many related parts. The words suggest that the idea/practice is difficult (difficulty), as opposed to simple or easy (ease).

**Conserve, conservation** — these words refer to the planned care and protection of precious resources like water, the environment, and wood, soil and minerals.

**Constitute, constitution** — these words refer to making the whole or important part of a body; a set of rules or laws by which a country governs itself or a CIRC manages itself is called a constitution.

**Coordinate, coordinator** — to bring together various elements of a project or a group and to find agreement on actions/decisions so that progress can be made; the person who brings together the elements of the project and the people.

**Critical, critique** — these words are used beside analyse and analysis. An idea or practice is broken into its parts and studied for its origin, its meaning, its value, its usefulness and ability to help or hinder development and transformation.

**Cultivate, cultural, culture** — these terms come from farming; they suggest the idea of sowing seeds and looking after them so that they grow into healthy plants. These terms also refer to our ideas, beliefs and practices that have grown and been cared for over many generations.

## D

**Data** — facts, observations, figures, information gathered as a result of an orderly or systematic study of a practice.

**Demonstrate, demonstration** — to show, display, prove or give proof.

**Demystify, demystification** — to make clear or explain something that is a puzzle, difficult to understand.

**Deteriorate, deterioration** — to pass from a higher to a lower state or condition, worsen, lessen and experience loss.

**Diffuse, diffusion** — to spread, expand, extend an idea of information; the result of spreading far and wide.

**Disseminate, dissemination** — to spread, expand, extend and idea or information (similar to diffuse)

**Dominate, dominant** — these words refer to the act of ruling, of claiming power or of controlling the thoughts and actions of people.

## E

**Effect, effective** — to have an impact or influence. If the influence is positive, the result is effective.

**Eligible, eligibility** — the characteristics of being qualified, suitable or worthy of choice or selection.

**Elite, elitist** — a group or class in society who because of wealth, birth, education or some other reason think they are better than other members of the community.

**Empower, empowered, empowerment** — to feel strong (powerful) and able to take control into ones own hands; to share the work of community development among the local people so they feel ownership of the process.

**Enmity** — dislike or ill-will or demonstration of such a feeling.

**Environment, environmental** — these terms can be used to mean the physical space (nature) in which human beings live; it can also mean the social and cultural space (context) a group occupies.

**Estrange** — to cause one to break a bond or tie of affection or loyalty.

**Evaluate, evaluation** — these words refer to the process of giving value or worth to an idea or a practice or the work of a person or group; these terms are used in planning to ensure that the group knows what its goals are and how they will judge the results (see also appraise and assess).

**Expert, expertise** — the person and condition of having the knowledge, skills and experience to do something well.

**Explain, explanation** — to make clear, to define, to interpret and give meaning.

## F

**Facilitate, facilitator, facilities** — to ease, enable and support; one who leads a group but remains part of the group, not above the group; and facilities are the space, materials and equipment that allow a group to create a CIRC.

**Fate, fateful, fatalistic** — words used to describe the destiny or end of something or someone where the outcome will be chosen not by the individual or group but by an outside force or being.

**Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)** — Female genital mutilation (FGM) is the term used to refer to the removal of part, or all, of the female genitalia.

**Focus, focused, focal** — these words refer to the need to look at the central or most important question and issue facing the community, in order to ensure that the resources and energies are being used to the full and in a clear and orderly way.

## G

**Globe, global, globalize, globalization** — universal, worldwide; through the information and communications technologies, the world has become more interconnected. Decisions made internationally have greater influence on the social, economic and cultural lives of individual states and societies.

**Gross Domestic Product (GDP)** — Gross domestic product or GDP is the broadest measure of the health of a nation's economy. Real GDP is defined as the output of goods and services produced by labour and property located in the country.

## H

**HIV** — the short form of Human Immunodeficiency Virus.

## I

**Identify, identity** — to find the quality of something or somebody; to know how its parts make up its meaning, its sense of being.

**Immunize, immunization, immune, immunity** — to make a person free of a disease or poison; with treatment the person is given anti-bodies to fight a disease and to try to lessen its impact.

**Impose, imposition** — to order, demand, force, require, oblige someone or group to do something. Industrialize, industrialization, industrialist, industry to make economic progress through the organization and use of heavy machinery and advanced technology.

**Incorporate, incorporation** — to take in and make part of, to embody. The non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and community-based organizations and associations (CBOAs) that are recognized by their governments have been officially incorporated and have particular privileges and responsibilities.

**Indigenous, indigenous knowledge** — the customs, beliefs and practices of a group; together these elements work to give the group its identity, its knowledge base, its culture, its way of life.

**Information and Communications Technology (ICT) and Information and Communications Technologies (ICTs)** — these phrases refer to the wide range of technologies that are based on computer and networked systems and processes. The growth and development of information and communication technologies (ICTs) has led to their wide diffusion and application, thus increasing their economic and social impact.

**Integral, integrate, integrity** — these terms mean to unify, join, bring things together into a whole, so that the parts are linked and related.

**Interpret, interpreter, interpretation** — to explain the meaning of an idea or practice; to translate from one language to another; to explain an idea/practice by using a different level of language or communication (for example, to tell a story to make the point).

## L

**Legitimate, lawful, legal, legalize** — words used to indicate that an idea or practice is acceptable, normal, according to custom or law. To make something formally acceptable in a society, a law is passed and the practice is legalized.

## M

**Material, materials** — something (an object or item) that is physical, actual, concrete and tangible. This term is used for all the information in the CIRC, including the books, newspapers, reports, videos, writing pads etc.

**Mobile, mobilize** — to move, to bring a group to collective action.

**Modernize, modernization, modern** — to make new; to use methods based on machines and technology, that use energy of different types (for example, electricity). The terms are often similar to industrialize.

## N

**Negotiate, negotiator, negotiation** — to bring about by mutual agreement, to arrange or settle a situation to the benefit or agreement of all parties.

**Network, networks** — these are the groups with whom a CIRC will want to work; some are formal groups and other are less formal a group of young people, for example. Another term used is forum.

**NGO (Non-Governmental Organization)** — a legal body or organization that is made up of citizens who wish to take action to address some of the issues in society, so they can improve and develop the community. The organization is recognized by the state and may have specific interests, like water and sanitation services, or might work in general areas like health or social services.

**Nutrient, nutritious, nutrition** — these terms are used to describe food and the study of its properties and preparation that give health and strength to a living body (human or animal).

## O

**Observe, observer, observable, observability** — words meaning to look at something (an idea, a practice, a living thing) closely, to analyse its parts and to see what is happening to it.

**Oppress, oppressive, oppression, oppressor** — words used to identify actions that torment, control and take away the power and independence from persons or groups.

**Optimize, optimum** — to take advantage of a situation and make as good as possible.

## P

**Pamphlet** — a small book or a short book on one subject (topic).

**Present, presentation** — to give a report, to show and tell others about ideas/plans.

**Pandemic** — general or global spread of a disease.

**Prescribe, prescriptive, prescription** — to lay down, define, dictate that something be followed.

**Preserve, preservation** — to keep something and look after it so that it remains, as far as possible, as it was made.

**Priority** — the idea/practice that is most important or most urgent, when one has to choose among several ideas/practices that could be useful.

**Propaganda, propagandist** — the promotion/advance of a particular set of ideas/practices, beliefs or viewpoints usually by someone who believes them strongly.

## R

**Reject, rejection** — to cast away or aside, to not accept or adopt, to turn down, to refuse; the idea/practice that is not accepted.

**Represent, representative** — these terms are used when one or more people are chosen to speak on behalf of the whole group.

**Research, researcher** — the results of study and examination of a particular idea/practice; one who studies, tests, analyses ideas/practices and usually makes reports on the work.

**Resource, resources, resourceful** — these terms describe the types of materials or elements that the community needs to build and sustain a CIRC. For example, the room, books, equipment, like shelves, are resources. If a group is good at finding its own resources, it is thought to be resourceful.

**Rotate, rotation, rotational** — these terms are used to describe movement in a circle in a systematic way. For example, we can go from one persons house to anothers so that all take turns in greeting the neighbours.

**Rote, routine** — these terms are used when we do something over and over again, repeating what we are doing each time.

## S

**Scholar, scholarly, scholarship** — a wise person, a person recognized for the breadth and depth of study, research and knowledge.

**Science, scientific, scientist** — the body of knowledge that can be studied, examined, learned by observation; a particular field of knowledge (for example, the study of medicine, agriculture, or law).

**Source** — the place where something begins, is born, the origin.

**Specimen** — a type or variety of an object or living being, a sample or example of a species.

**Stakeholders** — these are the various individuals and groups who have a major interest in what the CIRC is doing with and for the community; they may be the users, the local government officials, the small businesses, the teachers, the students. Representatives of these groups will be on the CIRC committees.

**Structure, structural** — the term used to identify the formal organization or system that provides the basis on which plans and decisions for action are made to build and sustain the CIRC; it is used both to suggest a physical building but also and, more importantly, a social building, movement. The opposite is unstructured, without structure.

**Subsidize, subsidy** — to finance, fund, furnish with capital; the grant of money given formally for a particular use.

**Survey, surveyor** — to assess the value of something, or to study, examine, analyse; the results of study are a report (analysis) of the situation and the one who completes the study is a surveyor

**Sustain, sustainable, sustainability** — words used to support, prolong, make enduring and lasting a practice or structure that is used and valued by the community as its own.

**System, systematize, systematic** — these terms are used to indicate order and organization. It is the whole made up of its different but linked parts. For example, the primary school system.

## T

**Tradition, traditional** — words that refer to the customs, beliefs and practices of a group, a people.

**Transform, transformation, transformative** — these terms are used to describe the change that takes place when people take into their own hands (take control of) their community issues and development for themselves.

**Transparent, transparency** — to be clear, see-through, plain for all to understand.

## U

**U.N. (United Nations)** — the world body, in which most nations are members and have representatives, that tries to find approaches and solutions to social problems and challenges. There are special bodies (agencies) for different problems. For example, there are U.N. agencies for health, agriculture, women and refugees.

**Urbanize, urbanization, urban** — these terms are used to indicate the development of cities and large towns where many people live. Urban is opposite to rural.

## V

**Volunteer, voluntary** — these terms are used to describe people who work together on a project without being paid.



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\* *This book and others like it may be obtained from the Hesperian Foundation, 1919 Addison Street, Suite 304, Berkeley, CA, U.S.A. 94704. <http://www.hesperian.org>.*

## **Additional Resources**

**CABI Crop Protection Compendium CD-ROM** is produced by the Commonwealth Agricultural Bureau International (CABI) and its international partners. The Compendium is a multi-media tool which provides comprehensive information on harmful insects, weeds, and crop diseases and how farmers can control these problems. The tool gives information on pesticides, natural predators and parasites that destroy pests, cultural practices and seed selection. CABI also publishes compendia on forestry and animal health and protection.

*Website:* [www.cabi.org/compendia/cpc](http://www.cabi.org/compendia/cpc)

**CTA Spore Magazine** provides information on agricultural and rural development in ACP (African, Caribbean and Pacific) countries. It is produced by The Technical Centre for Agricultural and Rural Cooperation (CTA).

*Address:* CTA, Postbus 380, 6700 AJ Wageningen, The Netherlands

*Tel:* 31 317 467 100

*E-mail:* [cta@cta.nl](mailto:cta@cta.nl)

*Website:* [www.cta.nl](http://www.cta.nl)

**D+C Development and Cooperation Magazine** is produced by the German Foundation for International Development (DSE), and focuses on general development and policy issues.

*Address:* D+C, P.O. Box 100801, D-60268, Frankfurt, Germany

*Tel:* 49-69-7501-4366

*E-mail:* [HDBRAUER@ca.com](mailto:HDBRAUER@ca.com)

**HIV and AIDS information** can be found on many sites, including those maintained by national governments. Two international sites are:

<http://www.unaids.org/en/default.asp>

<http://www.thebody.com/index.shtml>

**SANASO** is a newsletter of the Southern African Network of AIDS service organizations. It has lots of information on HIV/AIDS prevention.

*Address:* SANASO, P.O. Box 6690, Harare, Zimbabwe

*Tel:* 263-(0) 4 74548

*E-mail:* [sanaso@africaonline.co.zw](mailto:sanaso@africaonline.co.zw)

**TVE (Television Trust for the Environment)** is an independent television non-profit organization which focuses on the production and distribution of films and videos on environment, development, health and human rights issues. It is based in Britain but has branches throughout the world.

*Address:* TVE, Prince Albert Road, London NW1 4RZ, United Kingdom

*Tel:* 44 (0) 20 7586 5526

*E-mail:* [TVE-UK@TVE.ORG.UK](mailto:TVE-UK@TVE.ORG.UK)



A P P E N D I X 1

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# Library Unit Operations in the CIRC

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The Community Information Resource Centre (CIRC) will have a small and focused collection of publications to provide a development information service. The collection will enhance (complement) other information and knowledge processing and sharing activities in the community. As this is not a procedures manual, detailed operations cannot be provided. This section gives some general ideas on how the library unit in the CIRC works.

## **Selection of Materials: Guidelines**

The library unit, working under a sub-committee of the CIRC, will be responsible for setting up guidelines on how materials are to be selected. The guidelines should include the following:

- a) What type of materials are to be ordered and where the materials are to be ordered from. For example, books, newspapers, videos and periodicals will be wanted and they may come from a variety of sources.
- b) A statement on how materials will be removed from the collection, when there is a need to review the collection for its relevance in meeting the information needs of the community. For example, worn and out-of-date materials are no longer useful. The materials and the records should be removed.
- c) Guidelines for using available funds for the collection. For example, 50% of budget may go to buy books; 20% of the budget may be used for magazines (periodicals) and newspapers; and 30% may go to videos and tapes. Please note that this is just an example of the use of funds; it is not suggested that every CIRC should follow this example.
- d) How donations will be handled. As it is unwise to fill the library unit with unsuitable materials it is important to evaluate gifts and donations to see if they fit the goals of the CIRC.

Such guidelines are important. They reduce uncertainty and promote a system (standards) on how materials will be selected. This information will assist in budgetary control and accountability to the community.

## Ordering of Materials

There are four activities involved in ordering of materials:

### 1) **Selecting a supplier**

For example, a bookshop, a publisher, government department, research centre, NGO, or agent can be the source from which materials will be ordered. We can select different suppliers for different types of materials.

### 2) **Identifying the funds that will pay for the order**

For example, it is necessary to decide which vote will be used to pay for books or videos, if the materials are not available free of charge.

### 3) **Preparing the orders**

The order slip can be a simple piece of paper (in duplicate) with the following information: author, title, publisher, number of copies to be ordered, price of the material per unit, ISBN or ISSN, format (video or audio-tape) and budget vote number. The original order will be sent to the supplier and the copy will be filed.

### 4) **Maintaining files and records of items on order**

It is very important to keep a file of purchase orders for the materials which have not been received. Such records help to prevent the ordering of duplicates.

## Processing of Materials

When materials are received at the information centre, they need to be checked to make sure that each received item is the exact item that was ordered. In addition, the physical condition of materials should be examined. Damaged and incorrectly sent materials should be returned to the supplier for replacement (for purchased materials, not for gifts and donations).

All materials need to be recorded and need to be stamped with an ownership stamp which every resource centre should have. The stamp has information on:

- a) The name of the resource centre;
- b) The address of the community.

In addition, other things like date labels will need to be put on, if the materials are going to be borrowed from the resource centre.

Materials need to be recorded in a register book, so everyone knows what the centre has received. In most cases, it is useful to give a unique number to each book received in the centre because such a number will help to identify lost copies in future. For borrowing purposes, a date label, book pocket and issue card are important. Book pockets are placed in the bottom left-hand corner of the inside back cover. A date label is placed in the top left corner of the opposite page. Lastly, the issue card is inserted into the book pocket. The issue card will contain the following information: author, title, class number and accession (the number given when an item is received) number.

After the materials have been processed, the next stage will be classification and cataloguing.

## **Classification**

Classification is the arrangement of materials (books, videos, newspapers, periodicals) in a systematic order that helps users find the materials they need. In other words, it is a technique involving the grouping of materials according to their similarities (for example, subject or author). Its aim is to provide access and to make easy the full use of information stored in the materials housed by the centre. In an information centre, classification is very important because it will help the staff and users to find materials quickly.

There are different ways of arranging materials, from the simplest order to a more complex order. We usually place a small label on the spine of the books and videos to show the subject of the item. We find that it is not easy to write the full subject of a book or video on a small label. Thus the subject content of the material can be represented by colour, numbers, alphabet or code that can fit easily on the spine of the material. For example, materials dealing with womens issues can be given a yellow colour; materials dealing with agriculture can be given green; children and youth can be pink and livestock can be brown.

Classification can also be done by assigning numbers to each category, instead of colours. For example:

- Women . . . . . 001
- Children and youth . . . . . 002
- Men . . . . . 003
- Agriculture . . . . . 004
- Livestock . . . . . 005

This means a book or video with information on women will be given number 001 which then will be marked on the spine of the item. Each subject will be given a number or colour and all the numbers/colours will be put in a register or notebook to remind the staff and also the users of the different subjects. It is not easy for the information worker to memorize all the colours and their subject representation. If one needs to be detailed, each subject can have sub-divisions. In such cases, a more detailed system will be needed. One can have colours with numbers like yellow, then numbers (1, 2, 3, etc.) for the subject sub-divisions. For example:

- Subject:** Women
- Spine Colour:** Yellow
- Sub-divisions:** Yellow 001 Women in politics
- Yellow 002 Abused women
- Yellow 003 Family planning

This means all books dealing with women in politics will have a yellow spine label with number 001. Those dealing with family planning will be yellow with number 003 etc.

All the details need to be put down in the register book, so that those who are working in the information centre will have something to remind them of the items on the shelves or in the cupboards. In addition, the users will need the information in order to know where to find materials on the different subjects in the information centre. This means a big label can be put up near the shelves with all the main colours and their subject presentation.

It is useful to note the code must be simple and clear. It must be able to adapt to new subjects and be easy to remember.

## Cataloguing

Users of the information centre need to locate materials in the centre. In order to achieve this, the information worker/volunteers need to develop a list of materials arranged by subject or author or title in the collection. This list or index is called a catalogue. In cataloguing materials, the Information Facilitator and volunteers provide the following information:

- a) Author of the book;
- b) Title of the book or video;
- c) Code or colour of the material;
- d) Year of publication, place of publication;
- e) Number of copies available in the centre.

There are different types of catalogues, such as a book catalogue, card catalogue and computer catalogue. For a small library unit, a card catalogue or book catalogue is good. An entry in the catalogue will look as follows:

<b>Katele, Hawa</b>	<b>001</b>
Introduction to Child Care.	
Addis Ababa: Oxfam, 2000.	
2 copies	

This card can be arranged alphabetically by author starting from A–Z or in a sequential order by numbers starting from 001–009. A card catalogue is better than a book catalogue because the cards can be removed and sorted, if staff adds or removes materials from the centre.

Cataloguing materials is necessary, when a collection grows too large to remember each of the items in the collection.

Cataloguing is the act of describing materials, which are available in the centre. The purposes of cataloguing the materials are:

- a) To provide information necessary to describe the materials, that is: author, title and subject;
- b) To guide users to the location of the item in the collection.

## Handling Audio-visual Materials

Audio-visual materials (videos, audio-cassettes, and posters) need to be registered like other materials in a separate register. They can be arranged by subject or alphabetically by title. The videos need to be locked in a secure place, for safety and away from dust, moisture, and direct sunlight. Users who want to use the videos need to ask the volunteers or Information Facilitator for help. Audio-visual materials should be viewed in the library, in order to protect them from damage.

## Reference Collection

As the collection of the library unit grows, there will be materials that are useful for the staff and users to consult on a regular basis. These may be directories, catalogues, dictionaries, encyclopedias, maps and atlases and books with lots of factual information, such as statistical reports and studies. These materials are generally considered reference materials. They are consulted for particular information. These materials have to be available at all times. They are not borrowed or taken from the library.

## Lending Service

### Membership Registration

Users of the resource centre will be able to borrow most of the materials in the collection for a specific period of time. Normally users can borrow materials for not more than two weeks so that other users also have a chance to use them. Not all materials can be borrowed, because some are reference books. Other materials are very expensive and the resource centre would not like to lose them or allow them to get damaged through poor handling. Video and audio cassettes should not be lent to individuals, except in certain circumstances. For instance, school teachers may want to use them for a special assignment or project, as a means of demonstration. An extension worker may need to use the materials to show to a group of people in the community.

Before materials may be borrowed, the staff member must make sure that the person is a registered member of the resource centre. This allows them to follow up, if the materials are not returned. The following individual information is kept up-to-date:

- 1) Full name;
- 2) Physical address;
- 3) Work address;
- 4) Identity number.

Some information centres require that a person, registering for the first time, bring someone who is already registered. The companion acts as a witness to prove that the information given is correct.

The staff must make sure that the materials that can be borrowed have a label or a paper glued to the book to show the date when materials should come back to the information centre (date due) . This date shown on the label of the book needs to correspond with the date due which will be shown against the name of the person who borrowed the material.

This latter information will remain at the register of the centre. Staff members will then know when certain materials are to be returned. To ensure that the process works, the register will have the following information:

In one column the name of the person borrowing the book will be written. In the other columns, the following information is required:

- 1) Title of the book borrowed
- 2) Author;
- 3) Class number;
- 4) Date borrowed;
- 5) Date due (when book is to be returned);
- 6) Accession number.

The challenge of the lending service is that users sometimes return the materials late. They may also return the material damaged or fail to return it at all. The centre may decide to establish rules and regulations in order to deal with such problems. For example, the centre may introduce penalties (e.g. fines) for people who have lost, damaged or brought the materials back late.

The staff members must check the register daily in order to identify the overdue materials and to send reminders to the users. The reminder letter can be a simple standard letter, which indicates that the materials are

overdue and need to be returned to the centre. The list of members who have materials due can also put outside in the notice board to save paper and costs.

If the resource centre is able to issue tickets or membership cards, there will be no need of a book register. The ticket will contain the name of the member, the member's full address and other contact details on it.

### **Book Card**

A book card is a card that is kept in the pocket of a book. When a book is out on loan, it is kept with the borrower's ticket in the issue tray/box. Each book that can be borrowed will need to have a book card in the back pocket. The book card can get lost easily if it is kept loosely in the book, rather than in its pocket. For this reason, a book pocket is pasted (glued) on the inside of the book cover in the lower left hand corner. The book pocket is merely an envelope of a suitable size to hold the book card firmly, without covering it completely.

The book card has the following information:

- 1) Accession number;
- 2) Author of the book;
- 3) Title of the book;
- 4) Date due.

The book will also have a glued page on the other side to show the date when it is due or when it should be returned. This information serves as a reminder to the users.

The details in this section have been prepared to ensure that materials taken out of the library are returned on time and in good order. Such a system allows many to benefit from reading and using the same book. This service supports the sharing of information and knowledge, so important to community development.

community, CIRC, the community, resource centres, HIV prevention, Development, Oxfam Canada, handbook, community information resource, government officers, participatory development, Canada, Community Participation, Illubabor Community Resource Centre Network, Human Development, Community Information Resource Centres, Horn of Africa, international development, KingoMchombu, Community Development Process, Africa, the Horn of Africa, financial support, Canadian International Development Agency, Information Centres, information resource centre, information centre, village government, appropriate technologies, community information resource centre, community efforts, Oxfam International, community-based organizations, Sharing Knowledge for Community Development, Sharing Knowledge, resource centre, community facility

Sharing knowledge for community development and transformation: A handbook