

Zimbabwe

The new community publishing

Kathy Bond-Stewart

Kathy Bond-Stewart is a writer and co-ordinator with the Africa Community Publishing and Development Trust (ACPDT), a non-profit trust with a national network in all 58 districts in Zimbabwe. It has expertise in participatory development training, in research and in the production of training materials; and specialises in a range of development activities modestly grouped under the title of 'community publishing'. Put very simply, this is a combination of two concepts 'community development' and 'publishing' that builds the skills, confidence and creativity of community activists, by involving them in the collective production and distribution of publications and materials. However, it is much more complex and profound than that.

In this article, Kathy Bond-Stewart discusses the Chiyubunuzyo Programme with the Tonga people of Zimbabwe who were displaced from their traditional lands by a dam building scheme. They were moved to the centre of a game reserve, thus exposing them to dangerous wild animals ... and to tourists. The government of Zimbabwe has worked out an integrated development programme for them, in collaboration with a number of development agencies. ACPDT has been helping the Tongas to build up to a level of organisation that will allow them to negotiate for full participation in all aspects of this development plan. Similar processes also enabled Tonga people to negotiate the nature of their pre-school provision. For this they worked in partnership with the Federation of Kushanda Pre-schools.

The Chiyubunuzyo Programme

'Chiyubunuzyo' means 'Revelation' and the Chiyubunuzyo Programme is about revealing what people can do. It aims to transform poverty into prosperity in a remote and very poor area of Zimbabwe, through an integrated economic, environmental, social and organisational development process. One of its main strategies is community-based research and writing, and the stimulation of all forms of creativity. ACPDT designed and facilitated a leadership programme for Chiyubunuzyo. The idea was to build a new young leadership, drawn from the lowest income groups, with a majority of women participants. The nature and spirit of that training - and indeed of Chiyubunuzyo - is caught by a poem that is based on the evaluation comments of participants in the leadership programme.

Chiyubunuzyo is:
the Tonga word for Revelation;
the process of revealing what was
previously secret;
the reality of our poverty as well as our
creativity;
through research, the root of everything.

Chiyubunuzyo is:
a clear structure for uprooting poverty,
developing our area through
developing our minds,
creative effort
power in development
beauty.

Chiyubunuzyo is:
sharing leadership,
helping people with their problems,
meeting for a purpose,
without gossip or quarrels,
building strong groups,
loving each other,
having friendship with others in justice.

Chiyubunuzyo is:
our process of becoming leaders,
researchers, writers, artists,
teachers, producers and decision
makers;
feeling:
happy, proud, hopeful,
independent in mind and heart;
feeling freedom.

The setting

The general context in which we operate changed very much from the 1980s to the 1990s. A lot more people are experiencing very deep poverty, and structural adjustment is a major factor here now. Basically many of the hopes and dreams that people had fought for during the struggle for independence were lost and many citizens retreated into passivity – a sort of quiet despair. There is also a general cynicism about even NGOs, churches, and so on. It's much more difficult to work for change when people have already been through a process of change that has betrayed their hopes. However, there is a government policy and a programme for poverty reduction which at least is a recognition of the problem; and there is quite a lot of support from other agencies in dealing with poverty. There is also a general interest in capacity building, especially of local government.

We've discovered that the more marginalised and oppressed people have been, the stronger the potential for them to be really creative and

energetic and motivated afterwards. That's very hopeful. I think any human being in any situation, if given the right encouragement, can do far more than we can imagine. As an example of this, I can talk about the Chiyubunuzyo Programme that operates in the area of the worst poverty in Zimbabwe. The people there have been moved to make way for a lake, have had a very painful history and have been marginalised as a minority ethnic group. This actually made their motivation and determination very strong. Another factor is that, because they are overwhelmingly Tonga, they have a kind of gentleness which is very impressive, and which is not passivity, but a peaceful approach with real strength and determination behind it. That's been good, because we are very interested in encouraging non-violent ways of handling conflicts. I can imagine that if harder people had gone through the experiences the Tonga went through they would have become violent. There was every provocation because they survived very difficult circumstances.

The community publishing way

Community publishing as a methodology, is based profoundly on working creatively with the reality which is there. Everything is deeply influenced by the local situation. With this Tonga group, it was very important to encourage cultural wisdom and tradition and to promote the language, especially because people were very angry about their culture and language not being recognised. And there's no way that we could have done anything in the area without trying very hard to explore and encourage the best of what was there.

It's very important that local people lead themselves, teach themselves and organise themselves; and it's important that we, as a service organisation, don't hang on to the control and that communication is completely two-way, with both parties free to challenge each other on anything. So, although there's really widespread knowledge now that development programmes shouldn't be imposed and that local people should be consulted, it is actually very challenging to make that real.

Another important attitude is honesty, even when it's quite painful or embarrassing. And we also like to encourage the people that we work with to have, express and share healthy doubts. And to use, give and receive criticism constructively. It's a very honest atmosphere. I think that's very important.

Approaches and processes that work ... and those that don't

For me as a development worker, it's extremely important in this kind of work to have a deep humility and openness, as well as a willingness to be deeply challenged and changed oneself, to be really turned upside down. A lot of people in Africa work in development for money. It's a multimillion dollar business. And even when they have rejected those temptations, sometimes they get a lot of power out of making huge decisions that affect millions of people. Often the attitude of agencies coming in – that they're highly educated specialists – is incredibly dehumanising. It absolutely shatters people's confidence. But it's so subtle. It's not just in how workers

consciously carry it out, it's also in how people sit, how they talk, how they travel, where they stay. There are all sorts of subtle controls and signs of superiority which local people find extremely discouraging, so they just close up or put on a different face and pretend to do it or just withdraw. So it's essential to come in with complete respect and openness, and to be able to completely hand over control of a process to local people.

At the practical level, you can't just take one approach and use it all over the country. You have to take a very specific and local approach. On the other hand, from the very beginning we like to work with a sense of doing something which is significant to the country as a whole and which we hope will have some significance internationally.

In the processes we have developed in the Chiyubunuzyo Programme, we have combined writing, research and organising. When people first expressed who they were, their stories and images were very painful and so despairing. But when we probed a bit further we

discovered that underneath there's a basic toughness that helps them to survive almost impossible situations. And gradually, through the whole process of stimulating people intellectually and giving them a new sense of themselves, they developed a strong confidence in their own abilities and discovered their own creativity. Having done that, there's very little work which we need to do to support the whole process of change. It's simply designing a framework that offers really strong support.

But it doesn't just happen. It's not simple to get everyone in a village to participate. We don't just start with a blank slate and ask 'What do you feel like doing and how do you feel like doing it?' I think that quite often creative initiatives are very weak on the organisational side. It is very important to combine developing strong creativity and intellectual skills, with a very strong organisational base. We have very strong principles and very detailed participatory organisational methods that we transfer to those we work with to make sure we get the quality of participation and change that we're

looking for. We encourage people to do their own workshops and train themselves, but they are highly structured workshops. That way, we teach people democratic ways of working which are effective. And practical skills: how to motivate people, how to build trust, communicate, run a meeting which actually achieves a purpose, do the kind of research which leads to change. I think these skills are very rare, although in a way they're very basic. Even people with far more education in Zimbabwe often lack many of these skills. So the combination of stimulating creativity and stimulating people intellectually at the same time as giving people strong organisational tools, is particularly useful.

For the last year we've been testing everything we know in extremely impoverished villages. What's happened is that our initial instincts have become strong convictions. When we developed our form of publishing as a tool for change we didn't realise why it was so important to begin with people's minds. It was only when we studied poverty deeply that we realised that the worst effect of it is inside people and in their self-image and relationships. So the best possible starting point is to work with people intellectually, to work with the human





spirit. One of the things we are setting up through a sister organisation, Africa Books Development Trust, is libraries in each village, so that people have information on whatever is their interest. We have a whole range, from novels to very practical 'how to' books, because they have very broad reading interests.

Working with women and young children

Although we haven't been working in a very specialised way with children at all, we want to do a lot more work with them in the future. In 1995 we carried out a study of community views on poverty with research assistants from a background of poverty. From this, it is very clear that children and the very old bear the worst brunt of poverty. So any real work to tackle poverty has to recognise and support children, and give them a central role. Participants in our programmes may develop into future leaders. They may be young parents. You see all the women in the programme with their toddlers around them. Babies are so visible at our meetings. All we have to do, in an organised way, is stimulate and support those look after babies to stimulate children before they go to pre-school, so that the support of young children doesn't become just something at pre-school. It must be much wider.

Collecting Stories



There is an acute book hunger among children in Zimbabwe. At the same time there is a wonderfully rich heritage of traditional stories, proverbs, riddles and songs, coupled to a participatory style of story telling. But all of this is rapidly disappearing: a survey has shown that it is only in the most remote areas that people can remember these creative, traditional ways of educating and entertaining young children. In response to this, ACPDT operates the Foundation-supported Documenting Traditional Stories project, an initiative that is responding to the hunger for books by rescuing traditional stories, songs and so on, and producing a series of books and cassettes that feature them. To ensure that the work can continue in the future, the books and cassettes are to be sold commercially to high-income families and are also exported. The resultant profits are to be used to distribute the books and cassettes non-commercially to low-income families.

Ephat Mujuru, a distinguished and popular musician is a storyteller in the Shona tradition, a tradition that blends story telling, songs and music. He has been collaborating with ACPDT in this work, not only collecting the stories and songs, but also photographing the now elderly storytellers and recording their life stories to be shared with children. Chiyubunuzyo participants are now also assisting with this work.

When we look at children in the villages, we want to begin with the relationships and families they are born into; how children are planned, thought about even before birth. And the conditions of birth: there are no maternity facilities for hundreds of kilometres and women died because facilities are inadequate. Any complications means that women would have to walk a long way because bus stops are very far, and use a lot of money to go on a journey over a hundred kilometres. Can you imagine women with a complicated labour, having the money, even being able to go that distance?

Fortunately, through writing, researching and organising about the issues, people are getting maternity facilities at a new clinic in a nearby village. It seems that with a lot of organisation and documentation, people can claim improved health services and get what they need. It is just not automatic, they have to work for these things.

In the Chiyubunuzyo Programme, we plan to work with babyinders and families. We want to look at the place of the child in the family and – in the pre-schools – we want to bring grandmothers in by pairing them with the trained teachers. The people in these

villages are very concerned about the situation of children and so they have done their own survey and report on that. And again we were very moved because in the children's survey that they did – with very small children, often literally naked, under-nourished and out of school – they were so articulate about their situation. They often used very creative images to express things, like: 'Going to school would be like visiting the moon'. We are also building a lot of research and documentation into the development of schools, and will, hopefully, transform the existing schools in the future.

Another survey and report has been done by participants in the Chiyubunuzyo Programme, on children in difficult circumstances. This includes every child in 12 villages who is out of school, orphaned, disabled or abused. A special programme is being planned for these children. We're complete beginners in working with children but we'll be looking at the child very broadly. Children are very central in terms of what we believe in and we guess that children are far more capable than anyone imagines them to be. Working seriously with children in a context where they are highly valued will be very exciting.

Africa Community Publishing and Development Trust (Zimbabwe)

A story-telling session

Photo: Fiona McDougall/One world Photo





Africa Community Publishing and Development Trust (Zimbabwe)
What community research reveals



Community-based research

Community-based research is carried out by the village people and it looks at all aspects of life. We don't give them any deep training, only a continuous very light guidance in research and writing, and very simple frameworks as starting points for their research. Parents, for instance, might be interested in the lack of health and education services. Then there are questions about the realities for children in very difficult circumstances; and the place of the child in the family and in relationships. It's very funny because some men talk very elaborately about children as their treasure, and then the research uncovers the fact that they have maybe spent two minutes in the last six months playing with their own children. A very crucial point is for the researchers to respect children as the most important informants, and even encourage very young children to give information. They have to start with building trust through play, and then get children into expressing their views in drawings or just chatting. Village researchers get quite startled when tiny children – often three year olds – turn out to be so vocal and articulate in expressing themselves.

For work on two reports on young children in communal and farming areas, village researchers knew about children but were new to research. We matched them with experienced community publishing researchers for experiential learning. Then we got them to do a third report with only minor guidance, so they could prove to themselves that they could do it. We have also enabled another study, this time on children in mining communities. The words, drawings and statements of the young children there were so moving that even hardened managers from international companies started doing things to improve the situation even before the research was finished and published. It's delightful how forceful that can be and how it can really motivate agencies to wake up and do something quickly.

What people build on

In the areas where we work, people only have their collective strength and their individual talents. Community publishing processes somehow really challenge individuals and really encourage the uniqueness of each individual. There's also a lot of collective support. Getting back to context – temporal context you might call it – if you look at the twentieth century, there's been a mindless collectivism that swamps our individual uniqueness and, at the same time, there's been

a sort of very insane individualism that has completely forgotten about collective concerns. Our approach tries to balance these and I'm always delighted that, in a movement of a few hundred people, each person is such a definite and unique individual. You get to know them as completely different strong individuals, but collectively very supportive of each other.

The intelligence, creativity and energy of the village people make it hard for us to keep up: basically, we are running after the people who we are meant to be supporting. We believe that children's abilities are also astonishing and we look forward to involving children of all ages in community publishing. Although it's been difficult because the material situation is terrible, it's been a much more joyful process than we'd ever anticipated. I think it's very important for people to know that: this kind of work is difficult, challenging and risky, but it's very joyful. ○

Publications from ACPDT

The following publications are available from Africa Community Publishing and Development Trust:

The Suffering are the cornerstones in building a nation
Details community views on poverty and wealth creation.
(produced for UNDP and the Government of Zimbabwe)

Inside our world
A situational analysis of women and children in Zimbabwe's mining sector. (produced for the National Plan for Children, UNICEF and the Association of Mine Workers Union of Zimbabwe)

*Value children for a better future; and
Treasure children: our hope for the future*
The first of these two books is a situational analysis of women and children in the Muzarabani area. The second is a situational analysis of women and children on commercial farms in the Norton Selous area. (produced for the Kushanda Pre-schools and the Bernard van Leer Foundation)

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