



USING EXISTING MASS MEDIA

Communities can make use of the mass media (newspapers, radio, TV, internet) to publicise their own information, opinions and concerns to a large audience, and to influence people in power. This may be achieved by approaching journalists with ideas for them to feature, or by producing material for them to broadcast or print.

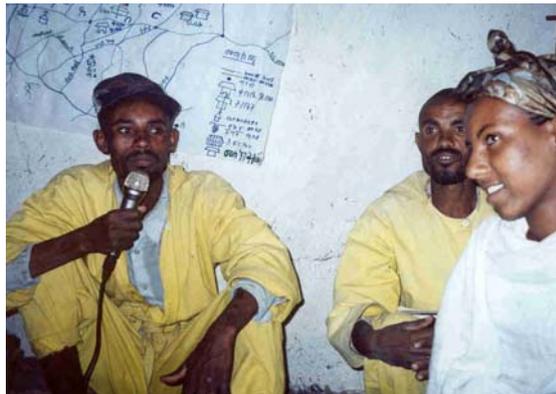
Advantages of Using Existing Mass Media

- Mass media reaches very large audiences and is therefore an efficient means by which community views and opinions can be widely publicised.
- It can be inexpensive for the community if the media companies wish to feature their story.

How to use Existing Mass Media

When approaching media companies to feature your community story, be very clear about what opinions or issues you want publicised. Be aware that professional journalists might misunderstand the issues or dramatise or exaggerate the story.

- **Consider using a press release.** This is a means by which to alert the media of an event or experience which you would like publicised. It should be a concise and informative written description of the issue. A press release can be sent out to several media organisations at once; some may choose to follow-up with media coverage.
- **Writing to Newspapers.** Local newspapers are often pleased to be invited to report on interesting issues or events, and will often send their own reporters to write the story. Newspapers will also accept letters for consideration for inclusion in their letters pages.
- **Radio (and TV).** Radio stations are keen to get feedback from their listeners and local or community stations are often actively looking for content to broadcast and are likely to welcome community contributions. To be featured by larger broadcasting organisations you will have to secure their interest in your idea. You can do this by submitting a written idea or ideas recorded on a cassette tape.



Recording material for radio, Woldia, Ethiopia

A tape does not have to be broadcast quality but you should prepare the tape carefully, either working from a script or to a prepared structure. Include interviews with relevant people if appropriate. The aim is to spark an interest in the listener at the station so that they will want to find out more.

Other Advice

- Address correspondence to the relevant person by name (you will need to find this out in advance) and include your contact details.
- Use a catchy title, put the most relevant information first and limit the length (one or two pages of text or two minutes of audio tape).
- The question prompts; What? Why? Who? When? Where? and How? May be used to help you structure your ideas.

Constraints of Using Existing Mass Media

Mass media professionals, such as reporters, and editors can misinterpret or manipulate the opinions and facts being expressed by community members. The resulting broadcast or article may misrepresent the views of the community to a greater or lesser extent. Take care to make sure that the media company has the correct information and will represent it accurately.

Real Life Story

Story of the Picos gets national coverage

When the Chief Executive Officer of Practical Action East Africa made a field visit to a successful small scale (or Pico) hydropower project in Kenya's Central Province, Practical Action invited a reporter from a national newspaper along to cover the story.

The reporter from the Daily Nation agreed to accompany the visitors and to write an article about the project and the local people. All that Practical Action had to do to secure this national press coverage was to make the reporter's travel and accommodation arrangements prior to the visit.

The article was subsequently published in the newspaper, and soon after the article appeared, numerous inquires about the project were received by Practical Action East Africa. Some inquiries focused on how the project could be replicated in other areas. These came mainly from communities that had a desire to access electricity and were living close to rivers.



An interesting request was also received from a local journalist John Njoroge. John had read about the hydro projects in the newspaper article and wanted to write a more detailed article for an international magazine; *Appropriate Technology*. 'I read with a lot of interest the story on small scale hydro-electricity generation and have now visited the project sites. I am now writing a story on these projects for the *Appropriate Technology Magazine* based in UK'.

As a result of the national coverage therefore, the project went on to reach an international audience.

Real Life Story, Practical Action East Africa 2003.

Further reading

Being Heard by People in Power Practical Action Technical Brief
Community / Amateur Radio Practical Action Technical Brief

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Practical Action is a development charity with a difference. We know the simplest ideas can have the most profound, life-changing effect on poor people across the world. For over 40 years, we have been working closely with some of the world's poorest people - using simple technology to fight poverty and transform their lives for the better. We currently work in 15 countries in Africa, South Asia and Latin America.

technical brief