

***Practitioner's Notes: Analysing expected and unexpected changes when F2F training and mentoring goes online- a Caribbean view***

**Abstract**

In 2009, Transformative Communication Partners –Caribbean (TCPC) started working with the Commonwealth of Learning (COL) and the Caribbean Institute of Media and Communication (CARIMAC) to develop and demonstrate a cost effective model for the creation of non-formal education radio programmes about local community issues for specific target groups. The partners had several deliberate intentions: 1) to move away from the conventional practice of making communication programmes on behalf of communities towards communities making programmes for themselves, 2) to focus on learning and related change outcomes, and 3) to keep in mind issues of scale and sustainability of the model. The community learning programme (CLP) model draws primarily on participatory communication and social and behaviour change communication theories. The approach to CLP implementation in the Caribbean leads groups from analysis and planning, through design, development and delivery to evaluation.

TCPC/COL's work followed a "predictable" process in which programmes were developed in a small number of pilot sites, using the "tried and proven format" of face-to-face workshops and sharing of profiles and case studies.

The main challenges to this model were:

- ***"....that was a great 4day workshop – now what?"***  
Although workshops resulted in one programme episode, participants found it difficult to navigate follow-up episodes on their own. There was a clear need for consistent mentoring in order to sustain production.
- **Cost**  
Considering airfare, accommodation, workshop and associated costs, face-to face mentoring for just two programmes could cost CAD25,000

In 2012, TCP and COL in association with CARIMAC tried a distance training/mentoring approach. In the initial pilot, eight participants representing six groups from Jamaica and Belize participated in a four month activity. During this

period two separate modules were covered: 1) the basics of scriptwriting and 2) sustaining CLPs. This resulted in groups writing sponsorship proposals to local businesses and scripts for the production of three programmes.

In 2013 the approach was expanded to include five mentors and two e-facilitators. This time 42 participants from sixteen groups in Jamaica, Trinidad and St. Lucia participated. 32 participants completed the programme and 8 programmes are in the production phase at less than half the cost of the initial F2F meetings.

## **Full Paper:**

### ***Practitioner's Notes: Analysing expected and unexpected changes when F2F training and mentoring goes online- a Caribbean view***

## **Introduction**

A key aspect of community development work in developing countries involves building capacities among local level organizations – non government, community based and faith-based groups - to evolve solutions to their own unique needs and in so doing, determine their own destinies. In the English speaking Caribbean to date, this empowerment work has been done largely through face-to-face training and workshops. This format has proven relatively successful in providing useable human resource development tools for many groups. However given the magnitude of the needs, the search for formats with wider reach became a natural progression. This paper looks at the development of the on-line platform for mentoring non-formal learning and some of the implications of what happens when traditional face-to face (F2F) workshops go online.

Community Learning Programmes (CLP's) address gaps in opportunities for individuals and groups to learn and share about community health and other critical local development concerns. Transformative Communication Partners-Caribbean is a partnership of communication specialists operating in the Caribbean, focussed on empowering individuals and groups to create their own media using ICTs and local communication channels. The objective is to combine local knowledge and understanding to develop culturally applicable messages more likely to stimulate behaviour change. TCPC is partnering with the Commonwealth of Learning (COL) to facilitate this process through the development of CLPs.

The partnership between both organizations started with F2F training in select communities and moved actively to incorporate new modalities to scale up delivery. Now at a mid-way stage, the process has so far highlighted three main areas: scale; quality and cost.

### **The first F2F CLP in Jamaica**

The first Community Learning Programme was developed in Jamaica in 2010 by JET FM, a rural community radio station with a mission to advance agricultural innovations in the community of Jeffrey Town, St. Mary. The choice of promoting agricultural awareness as the focal point of the station which started transmitting two years earlier in 2008, was a natural fit; after all farming is the main income generating activity in the small hillside community. But the need for farmers' radio aside, the community has also been grappling with its fair share of pressing social concerns and the radio station seemed the logical vehicle to lead the discussion of some of the issues. Enter COL and the CLP format.

The Community Learning Programme concept created by COL and its global partners, is a participatory process of developing audio programmes to support the delivery of educational messages intended to promote behaviour modification. It incorporates the Communication for Development approach of involving target groups and stakeholders in inclusive conversations that account for all perspectives. The process leads groups through a series of phases from analysis and planning, to design, development and delivery and ultimately evaluation. COL chose JET FM as its point of entry because of the station's courageous mission to use the airwaves for social good in a locally relevant way. For its part, the radio station could now identify a methodology that allowed different sectors in the community to play a proactive role in designing and implementing radio programmes that would raise awareness and hopefully lead to indigenous action based solutions. This would be a big step towards moving away from former prescriptive approaches that failed to yield significant results. The JET FM/COL collaboration facilitated by TCPC, presented all the prerequisites for the initiation of this new dynamic in non-formal learning.

The rationale for the CLP approach is built on research that shows that developing regions are increasingly vulnerable to a range of social development challenges with priority concerns in health, the environmental and youth disenfranchisement. Non-communicable diseases, for example, high blood pressure and diabetes are on the rise; threats from the effects of climate change are increasingly causing damage to infrastructure while lives are lost and youth unemployed and apathy are trending towards new levels of social upheaval across the Caribbean. The problem is

exacerbated by the reality that message delivery on alternate ways to address these problems locally has been ineffective, notably because many prescribed solutions ignore the cultural barriers that preclude adaptation. A vertical communication approach, in which stakeholders share their observations and knowledge, seems likely to lead to a more effective panacea.

TCPC collaborated with COL in the early stages to guide the process. This meant organizing small group discussions to identify the priority issues occupying the collective mind of the community, followed by the identification of the stakeholders' best placed to bring the necessary resources and commitment to the implementation. This was a long way off from the "predictable" exercise of using the "tried and proven format" of top-down, face-to-face workshops and sharing of profiles and case studies. This time pregnant teenagers, teen parents, and health workers were sitting at the same table, learning new media production skills together and brainstorming material for story based, action oriented learning programmes aimed at discouraging teens in the community from the popular practice of making babies as a means of personal validation and financial support.

The first F2F activity which took place over a 7 day period, went smoothly and resulted in the first episode in a series of thirteen programmes aptly titled "Me and Mi Baby" (me and my baby) exploring not only teen pregnancies, but the broader topics of maternal and child care. Unfortunately once the TCPC facilitators left, the second episode that the team had to negotiate on their own was a bit of a challenge to produce.

### **That was a great 7day workshop – now what?**

Although the F2F workshop resulted in one quality episode, participants found it difficult to navigate follow-up programmes on their own. There was a clear need for consistent mentoring in order to sustain production. Because the team was experimenting with a new process, guidance was critical. The agreed solution to this challenge was a period of mentoring during which a TCPC representative would visit the community to observe and guide the team through subsequent programmes. Over the next 3 months, this resulted in seven visits to the community; hours of travel time and costs for accommodation and meetings. There was no question that the process was richly rewarding for the participants, the programme producers and the mentors, but the costs were becoming prohibitive. Not only was it proving difficult to replicate the model simultaneously in other communities because of the time involved, but sustainability was also a cause for concern. Participatory processes are longer to do. Getting consensus means taking time for discussion, agreement and compromise. Time is money, for marginalized

youth who, for the most part, have no income and need to hustle to make it through one more day. Another way of doing things had to be devised.

### **Expansion in the region – Belize on board.**

The quest to test the relevance and applicability of the CLP model in other Caribbean territories took the team to two separate communities in Belize between September 2010 and August 2011. Though the culture and dynamics were different, the needs were the same. In Belize, non-communicable diseases like hypertension and diabetes are threatening the health of residents primarily due to poor diets and a lack of awareness, while poor practices in maternal and child care have resulted in high rates of child mortality. The common thread in all sites (Belize and Jamaica) was the need to increase knowledge and change attitudes and behaviours in a culturally relevant way.

At the community and Ministry of Health levels in Belize, there was instant buy-in to the idea of producing targeted community learning programmes. Indigenous groups, notably the Mayan women of the Toledo district and the Garifunas in Stan Creek, quickly saw CLPs as beneficial learning tools for their remote community residents. The challenge was, based on the lessons learnt in Jeffrey Town, how to spend enough time building capacity within these groups where their experience of media had until now been solely as consumers. This new thrust was about mentoring groups to empower themselves to negotiate media creation for their own expressed needs. In order to treat with these groups in the customary manner, the costs would quadruple due to sheer distance! Although the Caribbean is a relatively small region, travel within the islands is cumbersome and costly, therefore travel between countries to deliver face-to-face workshops was not a cost effective proposition.

In this first attempt at scaling up using F2f methods, TCPC spent approximately CAD 30,000 on airfare, accommodation, stipends and fees, resulting in one series of seven programmes which did not meet the full criteria for participatory communication and one series of four health programmes which, although developed using the principles of collaboration, was difficult to sustain beyond the fourth episode. After one year the results were discouraging and proved beyond a doubt that the model could not stand up to scalability using the F2F format. Clearly the model was beneficial, but how to deliver it without expending a huge investment in time and money. The end did not justify the means – in three locations the result was one full programme series on maternal and child care which met the CLP standard admirably, one campaign on non-communicable diseases that while entertaining did not meet standards and one partial series of four health

programmes which showed promise but lacked the commitment to sustain it. Total investment CAD40,000!

## **The Decision to Experiment On-line**

The idea of ODL's (online distance learning courses) as a solution began to germinate while the Belize scale up project was being developed. TCPC and COL were determined to arrive at a cost effective framework to advance the use of CLPs in the region. The solution that evolved was a scale-up model driven by E-Courses and online mentors supported by CLP "in country champions". The latter is a variation of the "train the trainers" concept as the "County Champions" are intended to be responsible for mobilizing groups and co-ordinating the face-to-face learning activities that TCPC believes must stand behind online delivery. The role is an important one, given that F2F elements are being diminished while the need to maintain strong connections with groups remains important. Consultations began with the three programme teams (a total of eight groups) participating F2f in Jamaica and Belize. Learners indicated their interest in continuing the activities online, though there was some trepidation about whether or not they had the needed skills to work on the platform. In all three locations it was verified that internet accessibility was sufficient to make this potential delivery mode doable. TCPC and COL were also anxious to test the possibilities for simultaneous engagement of participants across the Caribbean region.

On this basis, the Caribbean Institute of Media and Communications (CARIMAC) at the University of the West Indies, was invited to partner on this refocused direction of the CLP project, given the obvious synergies that exist: the centre of mutual interest being the increased use of multi-media in significant new areas within the region. Between March and July 2012, the first two, online courses in Scriptwriting and Sustainability were rolled out using CARIMAC's moodle platform. New materials were built out to increase the capacity of the learning content therefore material originally covered in a 4-hour F2F workshop session became a 6-week, thirty-six hour, module on "Scriptwriting for CLPs". The module titled "Sustainability for Community Learning Programmes" which had previously not been part of the F2F offerings, was created based on an identified need among participating groups.

Ten participants representing seven development organizations started and completed both courses. These participants, already trained F2F in the use of the CLP matrix tool<sup>1</sup> to generate content as well as basic radio production skills, were

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<sup>1</sup> The CLP matrix was created by COL partner Charles Simbi in Malawi as a method of interrogating topic issues by determining current positive and negative behaviours associated with the practice, long term effects of negative

successful in adapting to the online environment (despite earlier misgivings) and received step-by-step guidance in preparing actual scripts for their programmes. The second course was an exercise in preparing local sponsorship proposals in order to sustain the programme series. At the end, each programme team had written scripts and completed and delivered sponsorship proposals to at least two local businesses. Neither of these activities could have been achieved F2F without a significant investment in costs. In sharp contrast to the F2F workshops, the entire online activity was put together and completed at a cost of approximately CAD3500.

### **Jamaica, St. Lucia and Trinidad -more scale-up**

Following the initial observations and positive feedback from participants, plans were immediately made to roll-out additional courses inviting participation from new groups in additional territories. Scalability was being put to the test. In 2013, a twelve-week online course in CLP research and planning was designed and implemented. New elements were added including five online mentors and two trained E-facilitators. This time, forty-two participants from twenty groups in Jamaica, Trinidad and St. Lucia participated. Thirty-two participants completed the course and eight programmes are currently in the production phase.

### **Initial Observations**

The most significant observations of the move online ranged from the expected to the unexpected specifically in the areas of scale, quality and cost.

#### **Cost**

- **Significant reduction in training costs**  
F2F it required approximately CAD 40,000 to train three programme teams, whereas five programme teams were trained online at less than ten percent of that cost – CAD 3,500. While it was anticipated that online courses would be more cost-effective, the magnitude of the savings was a pleasant and welcome surprise.

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behaviours, recommended alternate practices and cultural barriers that might be associated with recommended solutions

## Scale

- **The ease of scalability**

It was relatively easy to market the modules to community development groups beyond radio stations, based on the international “buzz” around C4D. As the shift from a hierarchical view of communication to a people centred inclusive approach is accepted, both local and international organizations have begun to embrace the need for staff to understand these processes. This coupled with the cost effectiveness of this mode of delivery augers very well for scalability.

- **The convenience of the distance education mode for a range of development groups**

It was often difficult to schedule 5-6 day F2F workshops because of the need for time-off from work to allow participants to attend. In the current situation where social development organizations employ barely minimum staff in order to meet costs, going online means learning new skills without losing time on the job.

## Quality

- **Greater depth of materials**

Since delivery time is not as a great an issue online, materials can be expanded to offer a more comprehensive understanding of critical components in content gathering and production. The material covered online is expanding the capacity of learners to more effectively make the shift from media consumers to media creators.

- **High rate of completion.**

While 10 participants is a small number and it’s certainly too soon to make a critical judgement in this area, the follow-up course with forty-two registrants and thirty-two completers represents a 70% completion rate. TCPC believes that with further improvements to course content (in particular making sure that potential learners are equipped with the digital skills to master online study), the completion rate will improve.

- **The need for communication skills training**

This was an unforeseen outcome. The paucity of communication education and skills training opportunities in the region was brought to the fore as a result of these course offerings. It revealed the need amongst community media and C4D practitioners in the region to access immediately usable

courses (preferably, certified) in this skills area. This created something of a demand and certainly an enthusiastic response to the course.

- **The creation of new materials**

The availability of OERs in media skills development has been enriched.

Other implications to note:

- Three participating community development groups have opted not to use terrestrial radio for the broadcast of their audio programmes as formative research conducted in the online course reflected that their target audience find social media more accessible. These groups have decided to explore the option of using online media and social networks to publish audio. This observation suggests that participants will make their own decisions for usage based on research and their operating contexts.
- In the online configuration, participants are central to the process: they are involved because they want to be and not because they are “selected”; they have the flexibility to access the work and learn process at their own convenience with enough time to study at their own pace.

## **The Next Steps**

The real test of quality scalability is to be seen in the 2013-2014 cohort when Southern and Eastern Africa, India and Bangladesh join the Caribbean online to access four courses over six-months. The intention is to engage 150 or more learners in the first Participatory Communication for Change Programme. The future of CLPs in the Commonwealth seems set for a promising future online. The next phase of development will be the real test.