

Communicating innovation: the 'In the Field' project

Monica Janowski and Kaz Janowski

Under an apple tree in our garden in 1998, we talked about innovation and communication. Monica is a social anthropologist at the Natural Resources Institute (NRI) of the University of Greenwich, whose staff need and want to communicate the results of ground-breaking projects to a wider audience who are not scientists or specialists. Kaz is a radio producer at the BBC, which needs depth and really good content in programmes. We decided that there was potential complementarity there; and that we would try to make something happen.



Two years later, after discussions within NRI and between the NRI, the BBC and the UK Department for International Development (DFID), we succeeded in getting a series of 12 programmes commissioned by the BBC World Service, and in getting funding from DFID to support NRI's part in the collaboration. We called the series 'In the Field', with the subtitle 'Exploring Innovative Improvements to Livelihoods around the World'.

Making 'In the Field'

Building on earlier discussions, Monica put out the word at NRI asking for researchers to volunteer their projects as topics for programmes. The idea was that the researchers themselves, where possible, would act as 'barefoot reporters' and would carry out the interviews themselves, with villagers and local researchers in their project sites. At the core of each programme we wanted to have local people telling their own stories and talking about their feelings about the particular problem they had faced and how this had been tackled.

To act as reporters, NRI researchers needed practical training in using the equipment and in face-to-face interviewing skills.

Programmes in the "In the Field" Series

- The Buabeng-Fiema monkey sanctuary, Ghana
- Tree pods - a new way of feeding goats, India
- The need for agricultural land in the city, Ghana
- Stepping off the pesticides treadmill, India
- Vegetable gardens in the city, Zimbabwe
- Farmers who just don't farm, Poland
- Introducing ethical trade, UK and Ghana
- Different ways of understanding ethical trade, Ghana and UK
- Fighting the rat problem using new traps, Mozambique
- Alternatives to "slash and burn" agriculture, Bolivia
- Trading cocoa fairly, Ecuador
- Training "barefoot vets" to treat village animals, Indonesia

We arranged this at the BBC. The training was enjoyed by all; BBC staff found the topics of the research projects very interesting and the researchers were excited at the prospect of communicating their results to a wider and more general audience through their input to the programmes.

Once the researchers returned from the field, we used excerpts from the interviews, local music and sound effects to make the programmes, held together by a script read by a presenter. Where voice-overs in English were necessary, we used people from the countries concerned, so as not to distance them from the interviewees themselves. We also interviewed the researchers and included excerpts from these interviews in the programme, so that the researchers became 'characters' in the story too. Topics covered in the programmes were wide-ranging, both geographically and in terms of subject matter, from tackling the rat problem in Mozambique to trading cocoa fairly in Ecuador (see box on this page).

We worked closely with the NRI researchers, and through them their local research partners, to ensure that they, and local informants, were happy with what went into the programmes. We decided that this was very important since researchers told us that that in the past when they had been in touch with the media, whether print or broadcast, their work had often been misrepresented.

The 'In the Field' booklet and websites

To partner the radio series, we produced a booklet with the aim of consolidating what was in the programmes and to raise other related issues. The booklet was funded by DFID, and was sent out by the BBC free of charge to listeners, who were prompted to write in.

We tried to make the booklet as attractive and engaging as possible, with photographs of many of the villagers who talk to us in the programmes and of the villages they live in and maps showing the location of villages. The double page spread for each programme is separated into sections for ease of reading, entitled 'Setting the Scene', 'Defining the Problem', 'Taking Action', 'Global Relevance', 'Cast and Key Quote' and 'Thinking Points' (see example on p.24). There are also two double page spreads looking at cross-cutting issues related to tackling livelihood problems. To ensure that the text for the booklet was accessible, we brought in a popular science journalist to work with Monica on it.

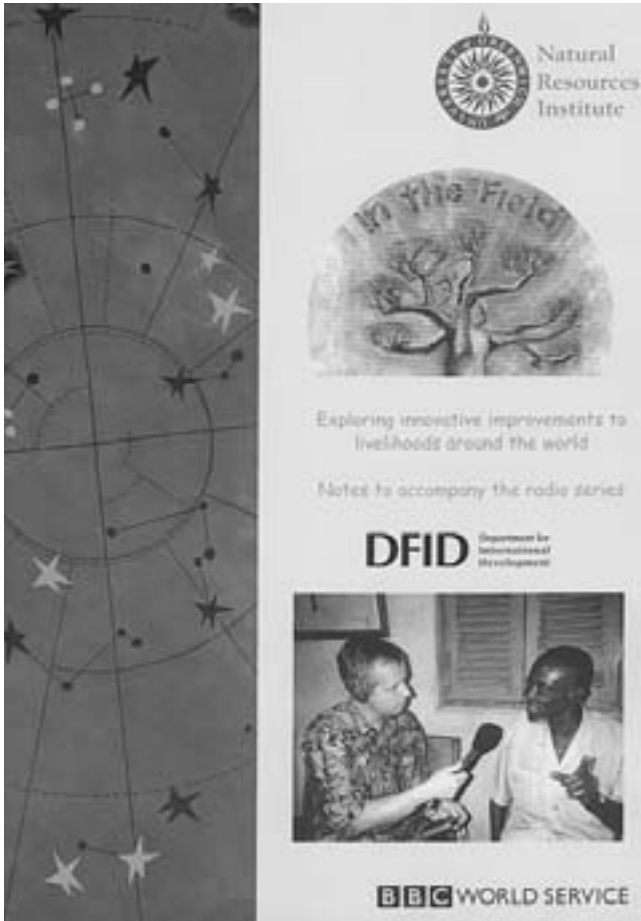
In addition to producing the booklet, we presented the text, photographs and maps in downloadable form on a series website at the NRI (<http://www.nri.org/InTheField/>). The audio of the programmes is on a series website at the BBC (http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/sci_tech/features/field/index.shtml).

The series was first broadcast on the World Service between January and March 2001. It went out for the second time between January and March 2002.

Who was listening and what did they think?

Our hope with the series was to increase appreciation of the common issues and problems affecting people in different parts of the world, and how these can be tackled effectively. We also hoped that this would stimulate and encourage local initiative to tackle problems of this kind.

Our potential audience for these programmes was very wide, since they were going out through the BBC World Service, which has a diverse audience all over the world, ranging from



opinion leaders to people at village level in countries where English is spoken as a second language. To find out whether we had been successful in our aims, we wanted first of all to try to find out who was listening to the programmes, who was writing in for booklets and what they thought about the series, website and/or booklet. We were particularly interested to know whether people at village level were listening to the programmes and writing in for the booklet.

Since we didn't have funds to do research locally on response to the programmes, we relied on response to the booklet, with which we enclosed a feedback form. In this we asked listeners/readers to let us know something about who they were, how they might use the material and what they thought of it. We had a healthy response, from all over the world, to the offer of the notes, both on the feedback form and by email. The initial print run for the booklet was quickly exhausted and a reprint was arranged in early 2002, in time for the second transmission of the series in January that year.

We have had a number of requests from people at institutions who see the material as a valuable resource for teaching and for teacher training, both in the South and in the North. This includes teaching in schools, at university level and teaching extension workers at village-level.

We have also had many responses from people who were interested on a personal level in the programmes. These demonstrate the chords which the programmes seem to have touched in relation to individual work and also in relation to interest in how people live in other parts of the world, and how these parallel respondents' own experiences. For example, a comment from Chun-Quan Meng in X'an in China: *'I enjoyed 'In the Field' very much. It is an interesting and practical agricultural programme. On January 30th's programme you review vegetable farming in Harare. It is a wonderful topic. It reminds me of my farming activities in the 1970s when I was a*

farmer at a small mountain village about 140 km SW of X'an. At that time I grew vegetables for making money. Nowadays I usually grow vegetables on the balcony of my house for enjoyment. Anyway, I love looking at and caring for vegetables.'

Another from Huthyfa H. Mohammed in Baghdad, who has 'an interest in global issues and self-improvement': *'I am enormously grateful and thankful for the significant help you afford me throughout your fundamental informative programmes broadcasted by your unique World Learning. In the Field, one of these lively and provoking programmes to which I keep listening intensively, since it enhances my knowledge and invigorates my experience as long as I live in the modern world'.*

From Anish Damodaran a livestock inspector from Kerala in India, who was attracted by the programme on paravets in Indonesia: *'I have been working in villages as a livestock inspector for about 5 years. I will try to become a barefoot vet. This article has been a great source of inspiration. This has been an idea I have been keeping for a long time. At some point in my life I will go back to teaching. Then these notes can be a study material. I will share these notes with anybody who is interested to do first aid for animals, to love them or as a hobby'.*

An educational role for 'In the Field'

Because we received so many responses from educational institutions saying how much they liked the programmes and notes and that they were already using the booklet in teaching, we decided that it would be worthwhile to formally pilot the use of the notes and radio programmes in teaching.

We have therefore set this going in a number of institutions around the world, both in the North and in the South. We identified schools, colleges and universities to pilot the material both through the responses which the BBC received from listeners and through contacts which the NRI has with institutions around the world.

As well as making class sets of the booklet available to teachers piloting the material, we wanted to make it possible for them to use the radio programmes themselves in teaching. Although the radio programmes are posted on the BBC series website, it is not always easy for institutions, particularly in the South, to play these in a classroom. We have therefore produced cassettes containing the radio programmes, which we are sending out free of charge to educational institutions involved in piloting.

Reaching down to village level

We haven't heard as much as we would like from listeners right down at village level, although most of our correspondents seem to have close contact with villages either personally or professionally. In order to ensure that we are succeeding in reaching into villages, we are hoping to go more local through rebroadcasting. We have received several requests to allow rebroadcasting of the series on local radio stations, which the BBC allows free of charge.

We are particularly interested in an initiative in Zambia, where rebroadcasting is being combined with setting up Listener Groups to discuss the programmes at village level, whose members use wind-up/solar-powered radios.

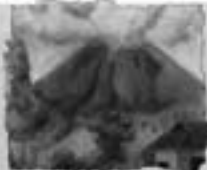
Conclusion: the benefits of partnership and the future

We feel that the 'In the Field' collaboration between the BBC and the Natural Resources Institute has been a great success. The two sides brought very different backgrounds, skills, and networks to the table, and we found that these were complementary in many ways. From the BBC's point of view, the collaboration with the NRI has meant access to a network of knowledge and village-level research; from the NRI's point of view, the BBC has access to a wide audience of people in all walks of life, also at village level, far beyond the NRI's project areas.

Training 'barefoot vets' to treat village animals

Introduction

Everybody knows that doctors are vital to the health of a community. But how about vets? Without them, sick animals die, investment in improved livestock is hampered and livestock-rearing communities remain poor. Yet in much of the world, trained vets are very hard to find.



Defining the problem

And that was the case in the district of Wonorejo, the most densely populated part of northern Sulawesi in Indonesia. In this mountainous volcanic area, among the profusion of people, rice fields, vegetable patches and groves of olive trees, live large populations of animals. There are 922 villages, and in them almost every household has at least one pig, kept for slaughter or as a source of income, and a handful of chickens, ducks and goats. Many have cows that plough fields as well as providing meat, and a good number have working horses. A recent census put the total livestock at almost 2 million.

But, until 1997, they all had to share a single fully-qualified vet. "There should be someone to give animal health services in each village, living in the community," said government vet Cakra Laksono ("Lack"). Plenty of vets get trained, but few want to stay in the area.

This is partly because few communities can afford their high fees, and partly because most ambitious vets want to move on to places where they can make more money. For Lack, the solution is to find a middle way -- to create community vets, rather than formal health services create community horses. Farming communities need local people trained in a few of the basic skills of veterinary science -- such as giving vaccinations, stitching wounds, treating common diseases, castration and artificial insemination. "They need to be people living and working in the community and charging affordable prices."

Global relevance

The new service gives villagers greater confidence in their livestock. Spurned Wuloh, An cartoonist, says that formerly she was of a loss when her pig got sick. She didn't know how to cure them and had to sell it. "Wuloh, they died. With person Hengly Sankah on call in her village, she feels that sick pigs can be cured, as the rate she pays whenever she goes out to buy a new one is less. The result is that she has not just got healthier pigs, but is prepared to buy 'a better breed of pig," she says. And that is a lesson with a global message.

Taking action

Lack is one of the organizers of a project launched in Sulawesi in 1997 by the District Livestock Service, with backing from the Indonesian and British governments, that offered basic veterinary training to 40 local farmers. The aim was to create a core of part-time local "barefoot vets" - sometimes known as "barefoot vets" - able to practice certain skills independently but with periodic supervision to check their work.

Many of the new graduates were not strictly new to treating animals. In the absence of Western-style veterinary services, traditional methods survived in these villages. Rather than rejecting the practitioners of the tradition, Lack's team recruited them, giving them training in modern methods as well.

One such is school caretaker Hengly Sankah. "I used to treat animals before using traditional medicine and a lot of modern medicine that I learned by reading the brochures that come with the medicine," he says. He reckons that before training his success rate was only 30-40%. But now it is much higher, around 90%. Veterinary work has become a major activity for him, with 50 or more animals treated each month.

The graduates do not provide their services free. After getting their training they go into business. "There is a high demand for the service," says Lack. "Farmers are willing to pay because they know that it is an investment for them to have healthy animals."

And we are not simply talking farm animals. The district's district is also famous for its residents who have been reared here for 300 years. One of Hengly's customers, Sanji Sankah, is a local jockey and horse trainer as well as a farmer who keeps cows for ploughing his rice fields. 40 are now kept by Hengly.

The training project involved 40 farmers being trained over six days during 1997 and 1998, with regular follow-up sessions and assessments. "Today, not only are the graduates doing a roaring trade, they are attracting others into the business. Farmer Brian Barry was trained at a partner after being recruited by the fellow farmers in his village in 1997. Now to share the Livestock Association and is training others, such as fellow village Jales Rumanis, to carry on the work. "I'm looking forward to practicing my skills as a trainer," he says proudly.

Cost-Key Quote

"I used to treat animals before using traditional medicine and a lot of modern medicine that I learned by reading the brochures that come with the medicine." ... Hengly Sankah, part-time farmer from Kawangin Das village.

- * Cakra Laksono ("Lack"), government vet and project worker
- * Brian Barry, from Kawangin village, chairman of Farmers Association
- * Sanji Sankah, jockey, horse trainer and farmer
- * Spurned Wuloh of Kawangin Das, farmer
- * Jales Rumanis, trainee partner

Thinking points

- * Community vets can be as important to a village as community nurses.
- * Traditional animal health care can be ideal candidates for training in modern methods.
- * Farmers are more willing to invest in their animals if they are confident that they can be cured of disease.

Crucially, as far as the NRI is concerned, the BBC has the ability to make interesting and lively programmes that have a wide popular appeal, translating the findings of research projects into something that is human and accessible. This is something which NRI scientists do not have experience in, and consequently it is difficult for them to communicate the findings of their projects directly to the people they most want to reach – potential beneficiaries of their new knowledge at village level around the world.

The fact that the programmes have been transmitted on the BBC World Service all-English stream is both a help and a hindrance to communication. A major plus is that programmes can be made which are listened to around the world, and that the drawing of parallels between problems and solutions in different places is encouraged in a way that would not be possible through a purely locally-focused series. However, most people in most countries do not understand English and they can have access to the programmes only through an intermediary. We hope that in many countries where English is a second language there will be at least a few people in each village who will listen to the programmes and tell others about them. However, we do have concerns about the exclusion of many people because the means of communication is English. Rebroadcasting in languages other than English, maintaining the original interview village-level extracts and translating the script and voice overs, is a way of overcoming this problem.

The feedback forms and emails we have received are only partial commentaries on response to the material. We do not have very much information on the kinds of people who are

responding in this way, and on the responses of groups of people, in particular within communities at village level. It would be very useful to be able to carry out research at village level in conjunction with local broadcasting of 'In the Field' through a local radio station. This would enable us to make an assessment of the responses of different categories of people – for example young/old, women/men, poorer/better off – within communities.

This in turn would allow us to begin to see how this kind of approach, combining broadcast information with printed information, can be used at village level to disseminate information on useful technologies and to stimulate debate on important topics. A particularly exciting idea would be to set up links between discussion groups and/or interest groups (with, for example, the same technical problems) in different parts of the world through an initiative where the same material is used in different places. This could potentially be linked to the connection of the villages to the internet which is developing in different parts of the world.

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Copies of the booklet can be obtained free of charge from : World Learning, BBC World Service at the address above or e-mailing world.learning@bbc.co.uk They can also be found on www.nri.org/InTheField

For class sets of the booklet and the cassettes contact Monica Janowski at the above address.

"In the field" will be transmitted for the third time on the BBC World Service in mid-October 2002