



Building Whole Communities: Community Publishing's New Approach to Women and Development in Zimbabwe

by Richard Adams

As I approached the door to one of the two side-by-side, 15' x 15' offices that make up the headquarters of the Community Publishing Programme's National Bookteam, I heard a round of hearty laughter coming from inside. Kathy Bond-Stewart, Chris Hodzi, Lucia Chikuhuhu and Talent Nyathi - the four people who make up the Bookteam and who are responsible for publishing, so far, three of the most innovative development manuals around - were just recovering from the launch of their most recent book - a seven volume set on women and development entitled *Building Whole Communities*. In spite of their exhaustion, they continued to display the camaraderie and good humor that I had experienced in observing their work over the previous few months.



National Book Launch for *Building Whole Communities*

The Community Publishing Programme (CPP) is a part of Zimbabwe's Ministry of National Affairs, Employment Creation and Cooperatives. Founded in 1986, the CPP was begun as an attempt to decentralise and democratise the process of creating tools for use by village-level development workers. In the past few years it has developed a process for incorporating hundreds of voices of rural people in creating these books.

CPP is the brainchild of Kathy Bond-Stewart, whose experiences with adult literacy in South Africa, Portugal and Zimbabwe had brought her into close contact with the ideas of Paulo

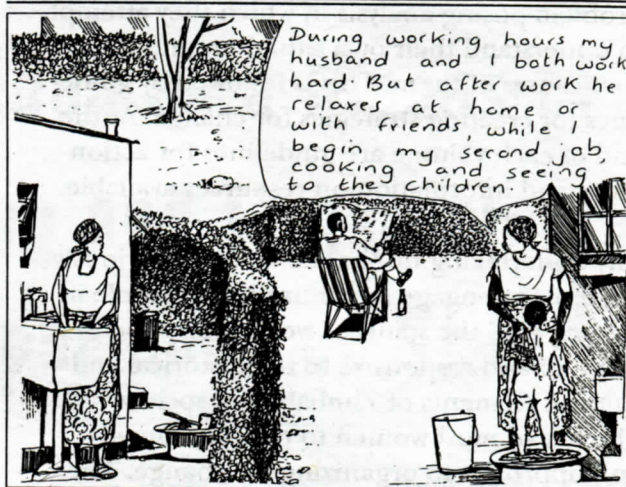
Freire. Chris Hodzi, who had done the illustrations for Anne Hope's and Sally Timmel's *Training for Transformation* and who had collaborated with Kathy on earlier publications, was the other original Bookteam member. Chris and Kathy crisscrossed Zimbabwe consulting with people about what they needed from and what they could contribute to a development manual that they could really use in their work in their communities.

In most cases, the Bookteam were the first central government officials in the young government of this southern African country to seek out and take seriously the ideas, the priorities, and the stories of rural workers in areas of the country remote from the capitol, Harare. The initial result was not only *Let's Build Zimbabwe Together*, a community development manual, but also an enthusiastic, energetic and dedicated group of development workers with a new-found sense of importance and competence and a real commitment to publishing more books.

Building Whole Communities is the third book to emerge from the Community Publishing process, following *Let's Build Zimbabwe Together* and *Building Wealth in Our Village*, an introduction to rural enterprises. By far the most ambitious undertaking by the Bookteam, this seven-volume set on women and development grew out of the same basic process which gave birth to the previous books. In all, about 2000 people, most of them from rural areas, were involved. The process includes many workshops explaining the purpose of the book and soliciting ideas, stories, etc.; an initial draft by the Bookteam; testing workshops to see how well the Bookteam has put everything together; a final draft; printing; and then a series of launchings introducing the finished book at national, regional, and local levels.

The result is a book which is full of the voices of the women, and men, of Zimbabwe. They are quoted and cited on almost every page, and their thoughts are given expression in the

The double workload (ie ordinary work plus domestic work and childcare)



Source: *Building Whole Communities*, Vol. 2

evocative drawings by Chris Hodzi which capture the essence of the issues of concern to women, but which also provide a number of Freirian "codes" which can serve as the basis of problem posing and problem solving. The juxtaposition of text and drawings, the concern with language which can be understood easily by people with minimal formal education, and the use of narrators throughout, make the book highly accessible for use in rural areas.

Each volume of *Building Whole Communities* focuses on a particular issue: an introduction to women in development; women's social and cultural situation; women's legal and political situation; women with special needs; and organizing for future. Highlighted in each volume are women's accomplishments as well as challenges for them to define and participate in areas where change is needed.

The volumes are constructed in such a way that reading them itself becomes a process of community participation. Each section begins with a brainstorming exercise. Then information and perspectives on the issue are provided, much of it being the words and ideas of rural women themselves. Next comes a guideline for analysis. Participants are encouraged to choose from among a series of pictures - the Freirian "codes" - one which represents the

issue most relevant to them. They then do a problem-posing analysis in which they attempt to understand their own situations and the root causes of them. This is followed by guidelines for creating strategies for change. At the end of each volume are guidelines for action plans and information on resources available.

Any undertaking in Zimbabwe which seriously attempts to engage communities of people in dealing with the status of women must be aware of and responsive to the historical and cultural elements of Zimbabwean society which lead most women to reject a women-only approach to organizing for change. The Bookteam takes this message seriously; and in producing *Building Whole Communities* it sought out and engaged men as participants. Frequently this involved inviting skeptical or even hostile men to book-building workshops and encouraging them to participate in participatory exercises which allowed them to listen to women and rethink their own assumptions. As a result, some of the most effective advocates for both the Community Publishing process and the women's book are rural men. Had it not been for this involvement, many of these men could have been powerful opponents to the kinds of possibilities for change which the book seeks to promote.

The good humor and commitment of the Bookteam is matched by the enthusiasm and energy of rural development workers who have engaged in the creation and use of these books. The whole process provides a model for the kind of development which truly engages voices of everyday people in creating priorities and strategies for change.

About the author: *Richard Adams* is Associate Professor of Sociology, Lewis and Clark College, Portland, Oregon, USA.

Building Whole Communities is published by the Government of Zimbabwe, and has only been available to community development workers in the country. However, arrangements are being made to make all of the Community Publishing books available on a commercial basis. Enquiries about the books and about the CPP itself should be addressed to:

The National Bookteam Community
Publishing Programme
Ministry of National Affairs,
Employment Creation and Cooperatives
Private Bag 7735, Causeway
Harare, Zimbabwe