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A Memo to Developers

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A MEMO TO DEVELOPERS

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COVER NOTE ---

The cover design for this document is based on a traditional "Adinkra" symbol drawn from the rich tradition of the Ashanti in Ghana. Traditionally these symbols are printed on cloth by local artisans and the cloth is worn primarily by the men for ceremonial and festive occasions. Any attempt to render the full traditional significance of this and other "Adinkra" symbols would fall short. Their meanings are inextricably woven into the fabric of the wisdom of proverbs, used in particular circumstances to bring home lessons that have been taught for generations.

This particular symbol has been used to teach lessons about interdependence, especially among members of the same family. The two heads of the siamese twin crocodiles depicted in the symbol might "fight to taste the food" but in reality they "feed the same stomach."

We have chosen this symbol to suggest a broader notion of interdependence, within the family of man. Recognition of this link between the black and white races, the developed and developing nations, has implications for educational and development programs undertaken anywhere in the world. Through collaboration with individuals and organizations in Ghana, we have struggled to implement a new way for organizations in developed and less developed nations to work together, a way which will recognize our interdependence.

......Jan Smith
A MEMO TO DEVELOPERS

Between January, 1976 and September, 1977, a nonformal education team from the University of Massachusetts (U.S.A.), Center for International Education engaged in an exploration of cultural groups as potential community development resources. As part of its nonformal education project with the People's Educational Association (P.E.A.), the UMass team also worked with the Institute of Adult Education (I.A.E.) at Logan. The P.E.A. has four active cultural group branches in the Eastern Region, and these formed the core of the research. A report is now being prepared for submission.

It is our belief that the findings of this study will be of great interest to development agencies and we have prepared this "memo" to communicate these results to development workers and planners.

Robert Russell

The Indigenous Cultural Group

In our project area (Esoridua, Eastern Region), cultural groups are popular, common, self-sustaining, locally organized and often associated with village church or voluntary groups. They generally do not depend on district or regional administrative or financial assistance. The more common activities that the groups engage in are choral singing, traditional dancing and drumming. However, when skilled leadership is available, these groups have been able to recruit women and young people. They usually have from two to forty members, and members tend to be in their late teens and twenties. Groups include one-year to three-year terms.

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A MEMO TO DEVELOPERS

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The Indigenous Cultural Group

In our project area (Koforidua, Eastern Region), cultural groups are popular, common, self-sustaining, locally organized and often associated with village church or voluntary groups. They generally do not depend on district or regional organizational or financial assistance. The most common activities in which they engage are choral singing, traditional drumming and dancing, and, when skilled leadership is available, drama. They usually have from ten to forty members from the same village or geographic area. While most members tend to be in their late teens to late twenties, some groups include ten-year
olds and senior citizens. Leaders usually are older than other members and are often local school teachers.

During our study most commonly expressed purposes for individuals joining a cultural group were as follows:

1. Fellowship: people seek socially acceptable ways of getting to know each other. A cultural group supplies this.

2. Enjoyment: having fun and enjoying the opportunity for an artistic and creative experience within the village and in the surrounding area.

3. Self-Improvement: through participation in the educational activities of the group.

The most commonly expressed purposes for the formation of a cultural group were:

1. To provide entertainment and education to fellow villagers in the local community.

2. To assist the townspeople to observe traditional and customary events such as puberty rites, funerals, marriages, divorces, etc.

3. To teach and thus preserve traditional customs like the putting on of cloth, singing and traditional drumming and dancing.

4. To bring messages of spiritual comfort to the village.

Cultural groups are a living repository of traditional Ghanaian culture. Members often feel a responsibility for passing on that culture to the younger generation.
Nature of Involvement

The University of Massachusetts (UMass) team worked intensively with four P.E.A. cultural groups in the Eastern Region. Our objective was to develop ways through which these cultural groups might begin to match up community development projects with their normal activities. We assumed that cultural groups were undervalued, little recognized, yet highly usable resources for development projects at the village level and believed that they could be made more available to community development planners with a minimum of work. We subsequently concluded that cultural groups can be important resources as "communications" components of any development project.

Our day-to-day involvement with the cultural groups was through an in-service training workshop. We arranged with each cultural group to conduct with them a "one-day school" in their own village. The purpose of the school was to demonstrate to the leaders and members how they might become involved in a community development project chosen and initiated by themselves.

During the first part of the workshop or "school", the cultural group "adopted" a problem suggested jointly by the chief, his elders, local government officials, extension agents, members of the local village development committee, and all of the cultural group members. The second stage of the workshop involved the working up of a number of short plays or skits that (a) clearly defined the chosen problem, (b) put forward a special plan for its solution, and (c) identified
local institutions and local people responsible for taking action after the workshop. The cultural group then presented to the public an evening performance including drumming and dancing, singing, and all of the worked up skits.

As a result of "one-day school" sessions in two villages in the Koforidua district, some impressive results were achieved. In Suhyen, near Koforidua, the P.E.A. cultural group established a day care center for market and farm women. Many townswomen had complained for years of the lack of day care facilities for working mothers, and of the resulting health and accident risk to small children not properly attended. After putting on a drama about the problem, the cultural group leaders and members actually shouldered the responsibility for beginning the day care center. As of this writing, they have registered nearly thirty children and have requested aid from appropriate local agencies to help run the center.

In another village, after a series of skits on the need for a health center, the chief and elders (who were also involved in the production of the skits) set up a committee to oversee the development of a health center. They invited representatives from the district health offices to assist, received donations of land for a permanent site, and received a pledge of temporary housing for a small clinic to begin immediately.

Our preliminary assessment of the capacity of cultural groups to apply their rather advanced communications skills to development projects has been positive. We have found that with a small investment
of properly trained technical extension agents, motivation and resolve for taking significant action can be generated at the village level. Furthermore, little training and time are necessary to convince a cultural group to undertake some community development or community education activity. The drain on the group's momentum and willingness to support such projects can be minimized when the "adopted" project is also "adopted" willingly and enthusiastically by a ministry's extension agent.

**Why It Worked**

Through involvement of a cross-section of a town's leadership in selection of a problem for dramatization, a healthy and friendly competition between the leaders of the cultural group and the traditional leaders of the town was created. During the skits, the chief was reminded of his obligations and responsibilities to the townspeople. At the same time, the skits usually showed that problems are best solved by working with the elders and the chief, and not without them. The leaders of the cultural group gained an opportunity to exercise their strength and skills in solving typical local problems and showing their leadership in a non-threatening way. The overall effect was to increase the available leadership working in the village and, more importantly, to demonstrate a standard plan of action to a large cross-section of villagers, both citizens and leaders. The skits also clearly pointed out who was responsible for providing the day-to-day leadership for solving the chosen problem.
Limitations

Together with the exciting potentials that cultural groups bring to development projects, we have observed some limitations.

1. Cultural groups are not projects in themselves; they should be thought of as a communications section of a more broadly based development activity.

2. There is a limit to the amount of time and commitment individual cultural group members are willing to give to community projects. While small and simple community projects are well within the scope of a cultural group's traditional activities, any new community project activities must remain enjoyable to hold the interest of members who join the cultural group to have fun. If participation in the cultural group becomes tedious or boring due to community project activity, the conditions that make the group "live" and work successfully will be destroyed. In these circumstances, members may drop out or become dissatisfied with the group as a whole.

3. If a cultural group is expected to solve any given village problem, it should be linked to some other organization's extension system, such as that of the Ministry of Agriculture, Women in Development, D.S.W.C.D., or the district or village development committee. While cultural groups could be considered "experts" in communications and public relations, most of their members have little training in or knowledge about village development theory and practice. These skills must
be supplied by other experts or extension agents who are working in the field.

4. Cultural groups have no national support organization to help them undertake development projects. This has made it difficult for individual cultural group leaders to recognize their potential role in development, and has made it as difficult for any agency or ministry to recognize their usefulness as extension resources at the grass-roots level.
Who Can Use Cultural Groups?

Any development project in Ghana that requires "feedback" from the grass-roots or on-going assessment of village level attitudes as part of its program should be interested in possible applications of cultural groups to these tasks. Any project that needs a high level of two-way communication between the village audience and extension workers should explore the potential of cultural groups to serve this function. We have seen cultural groups teach detailed technical and social information to an illiterate audience in the local cultural and linguistic vernacular. The communications forms the cultural group employs, drama, dance and music, are the most believable to a local village audience. If we ask ourselves who or what villagers would consider the most reliable source for new information--radio, newspapers and written materials, the occasional visit of the extension worker, or the local cultural group--we could conclude that on grounds of familiarity and demonstrated expertise, the villagers would find the latter two in combination very credible.

Cultural groups are established, motivated, organized and skilled groups of communicators whose leadership and membership are usually well-disposed to adopt development projects in their local areas. A small group of trained professional leaders might tour an area working with the local cultural groups. In this way, the groups could be induced to merge their traditional activities with an ongoing national or regional development project and to communicate messages that are part of a planned development strategy. Because of the particular process that is used in creating skits and dramas, new information
about local development conditions and public attitudes that is generated lends itself to "trickling down" as well as "bubbling up" the administrative ladder. Cultural group leaders with modest training can easily adapt their skills and experience to other workshop and training situations where role play, dramatic demonstrations, or the application of music or drama to learning goals would be useful. Wherever there is a need to develop broad-based motivation and resolve in a community around a locally conceived and well-defined development project, a cultural group is an effective vehicle for meeting this need.

As a result of the work of the UMass team with the Peoples' Educational Association in the Eastern Region, there are now six trained and experienced cultural group leaders able to work with other cultural groups who could:

1. Run a workshop that would assess the development problems in a village as the villagers and village leaders define them.

2. Develop a plan of action which would contribute to the solution of one of these problems.

3. Inspire village-wide motivation and resolve towards the solution of one of these problems.

4. Help identify resources both human and institutional to help solve the problem.

During a recent leadership training seminar conducted by the leaders of four P.E.A. cultural groups in the Eastern Region, participants were asked to comment on the effects the one-day schools and follow-up acti-
vities had had in their villages. A very interesting list of both positive and negative effects was reported and is reproduced below:

Question: What are the effects that you observed during and after the cultural group's one-day school in your village?

Answers:

1. Communication --In a very broad sense, there was a greater exchange or communication going on between the townspeople and the cultural group.

2. Awareness --A practical solution to commonly recognized community problems was presented to the villagers.

3. Learning from other geographic areas --As each workshop involved leaders and members from other cultural groups, the leaders came to recognize and learn about problems that other villages and towns were having. A sense of what the district-wide development problems were was created.

4. Awareness and social responsibility within the cultural group --Within the group, awareness about village problems was raised; this was followed by individual group members taking action.

5. Resource Identification --The skits identified local and regional resources to contact or tap relating to the problem.
6. Involvement

--The one-day school helped even outcasts in the village get involved in community development. The community development problems were tackled by people other than the traditional leaders and town development committee; many villagers were involved in development who had never been involved before.

7. Talent

--New and undiscovered talent in the existing cultural group membership was uncovered.

8. Members

--Either more members were recruited to the cultural group or the public was made more enthusiastic about the cultural group by the skits.

9. Friendships

--More friendships and relationships were established within the cultural group and within the village as a result of the workshops.

10. Time

--The one-day school engaged the participants in constructive activity.

11. Change

--The one-day school actually brought change into the village.
12. Change in individual status
--Participation in skits that were presented to the public often changed a person's social standing, usually for the better.

13. Personal power
--Participation in the skits increased individuals' personal power in the village; their credibility was enhanced.

14. Information transfer
--The audience learned facts from the skits.

15. Identification
--People in the audience identified with the characters, and thus had their positions in society reflected back to them.

16. Suspicion
--When women members of the cultural group attended evening performances their husbands often became suspicious of their activities.

17. Ridicule of public officers
--In some cases a skit that criticized town or public officials gained the displeasure of those officials.

18. Responsibility of town development officers and elders
--Some skits pointed out specific responsibility for action within the town's leadership. The skits also identified the process through which a problem could be solved.
An analysis of these observations will demonstrate that there are many exciting and important uses to which cultural groups can be put. The UMass team feels that their most practical and immediate use lies in their ability to serve as an important communications channel in the link between village needs and problems and the ministry extension workers who are trying to organize and direct village development. The cultural group can serve in a unique and highly technical role, assisting the extension worker and the townspeople to understand and communicate with one another.

A number of questions have emerged in the course of this study and many of these remain unanswered. These are presented below in hope that they may assist developers in focusing their thoughts for subsequent discussion concerning the development potential of cultural groups.

1. How willing will local development workers be to interact with cultural groups?

2. Do cultural groups really represent a cross-section of a village's population? Will their definition of important local problems be shared by other groups in the town?

3. How technical can the information be that skits and drama try to communicate? Can the information generated about development needs really be as effectively "trickled down" as "bubbled up" the administrative ladder?

4. How can a development planner join cultural group activities to already existing plans or projects? What are the criteria
for determining when, how and if cultural groups should be used?

5. What are the support needs of a cultural group or of a cultural group trainers?

6. Will voluntary and independent cultural groups in a specific area be interested in involving themselves with local development agencies on a regular basis? Can they afford to do this?

7. Will the activities of cultural groups only result in more pressure being put on line ministeries to provide scarce resources, or can they be used to martial and create local resources?

The UMass team would enjoy subsequent conversations on these or any other questions that developers may have about the nonformal education project in which we are involved or the potential applications of cultural groups to development projects in Ghana. We can be reached through the Center for International Education, University of Massachusetts, Amherst, Massachusetts, U.S.A. or the Institute of Adult Education, P.O. Box 497, Koforidua, Ghana. The Association of People for Practical Life Education (APPLE), P.O. Box 4625, Accra, Ghana, is now administering a project using cultural groups and questions or comments can also be referred to them.