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Building Bridges—Linking Communities and Key Stakeholders

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1. Introduction

Building Bridges (BB) aims to help communities resolve land tenure issues and other constraints to the sustainable management of their resources. The basic idea is to bridge the divide between communities and key stakeholders and among communities themselves through improved knowledge sharing and building relations of respect. The Bridges program introduces communication technology into communities – at this stage video – providing them with the tools to document and project their stories, news, needs and concerns to decision makers, to other communities and to the general public. Building Bridges is facilitating the opportunity for community voices to be heard and respected.

The Bridges program presently has two main initiatives: (1) The Mozambique effort to encourage community based journalism in order to improve communication linkages between communities and key stakeholder organizations; and (2) The "Legend Lake: A Talking Circle" encouragement of respect for different perspectives on land among communities which experience conflict over land. Both initiatives develop innovative ways to use new and traditional media to help "build communication bridges" starting with land issues but extending to other divisive questions as the need arises.

This paper describes the Community Communication Initiative featuring community based journalism. See http://www.terrainstitute.org/journalists.html for examples of the work done to date under this initiative.

See http://www.terrainstitute.org/legend_lake.html for information on the second initiative aiming to improve mutual respect among communities in conflict over land through discourse and education.

2. Community Communication

Effectiveness in reaching disadvantaged communities for resolving land issues and other pressing community needs is at the centre of the current aid effectiveness debate. When development is discussed by or among civil society / NGOs, government agencies, academia, and, the international donors and financial institutions, engaging and empowering community based development has been a common goal and challenge.

However, the gap between communities and key stakeholders remains a critical limitation in development planning and program effectiveness. To their credit, staff in government, international development agencies and donors usually pursue the objective of consulting communities in their design and

implementation of development projects. They convene community encounters; send media crews to gather "voices from the field"; invite NGO representatives and networks to regional or national consultations; send consultant teams to gather community inputs. However, even with their best intentions, their direct links to communities are sporadic; invitations to consultations are selective; venues can be intimidating for communities being unfamiliar with the conduct of formal consultations; there is unequal access to information; community leadership often lack gender balance; meetings are convened in official versus local languages and dialects, and predominately involve NGOs acting as spokespersons for the community. In almost all cases, there are no ongoing channels through which communities can directly exercise their voice, rights and needs into decision taking about development programs- decisions that may dramatic limit their futures, including their resource rights.

What is needed? Voice and opportunity. Communities need a means to project their concerns and needs outward. Key stakeholders need to provide the opportunity for community voices to be heard to help them implement more effective development programs.

Building Bridges is an innovative program that is helping to bridge the divide between communities and key stakeholders. It introduces communication technology into communities--at this stage video-- providing them with the tools to document and project their stories, news, needs and concerns to decision makers through internet based networking. Building Bridges is facilitating the opportunity for these community voices to be heard. Key stakeholders and the international community in Mozambique are being encouraged to become "subscribers" to the video clips produced by community based journalists being trained and supported by ORAM (Rural Mutual Assistance Association), a Mozambican NGO, and Terra Institute. Bridges helps in the strengthening of democracy, by empowering communities to have their say and exercise their influence to improve the effectiveness of development programs in resolving land issues and other constraints.

2.1 Pilot in Mozambique

Beginning in late November, 2009, ORAM and Terra chose two communities (Mucelo Novo and Trepano near Quelimane, Zambézia, Mozambique) which have worked with ORAM for several years on getting official land certificates to secure community management of their traditional lands. These certificates represent a substantial achievement for the communities which can now use their lands without fear of losing them, and can negotiate directly with investors who desire access to land, thereby enabling the community owners to get better deals than in the past. ORAM's work with communities on land tenure has also cemented trust relations between ORAM and the communities and gives ORAM special competence in dealing with a wide range of community development issues.

In the two selected communities, community leaders consulted among themselves to nominate two people from each community to be trained as community based journalists who can present community realities to the outside world, using their special and authentic knowledge. Training and mentoring of the four potential community based journalists began in January, 2010 with a two week introductory course conducted by Terra and ORAM, followed by a two month mentoring program which provided the CBJs with technical and journalistic support.

This training phase of the four CBJs was completed in March, 2010, and resulted in four "stories" prepared in video format with mentoring from local specialists in video productions and video editing. These are the first video stories of these emerging Community Based Journalists. There are three stories which demonstrate what communities have done in the recent past to resolve community problems, starting with land tenure security and health service delivery. The fourth story is on an ongoing problem that the community needs to resolve—lack of market access for agricultural products.

See http://www.terrainstitute.org/journalists.html for the clips produced to date and a short documentary on the origins and goals of the community communication initiative of the Bridges program.

The four journalists continue working with ORAM and with mentors to produce a second round of stories, and to become comfortable in using their credentials as CBJs to interview people outside their communities and expand the information they include in their stories. A Provincial Workshop was held in Quelimane in September, 2010 to present the four CBJs and their stories to government and NGO development specialists as well as to journalists and academics. Depending on funding, by the end of 2010 the goal is for there to be 20 such journalists. See the Community Based Journalism Network, www.cbjn.org, for more information.

The Bridges Community Communication Initiative is about to begin with CSO partners in India, Georgia, Peru and Afghanistan as funding becomes available. The International Land Coalition is providing evaluation and guidance for its members to incorporate lessons learned about the Bridges model into their member organizations' activities.

2.2 Advisory Board

The Editorial Committee of the BB Community Communication Advisory Board assists with mentoring the CBJs; reviews and critiques the communication clips which BB helps produce; shows national and international media and media foundations the importance of community based journalism. The Community Resource Tenure Committee advises the program on linking CBJs with community development programs and with potential subscribers; and monitors BB activities and advises on how to overcome difficulties.

Editorial Committee of the Advisory Board

1. Walterene (Walt) Swanston, former Director of Diversity Management for National Public Radio (NPR) in Washington, DC.   Walt is also assisting with fund raising.
2. Jerri Eddings, Program Director, International Center for Journalism, Washington, D.C.
3. Marcellus Alexander, President, Education Division of the National Association of Broadcasters, Washington, D.C.
4. Scotti Williston, Senior Producer in Residence, CUNY Graduate School of Journalism, former news producer for CBS in NYC and various postings abroad
5. Robert Naylor, Director of Career Development/News, Associated Press, New York City
6. Doug Mitchell, Co-Project Director
   "The New U: News Entrepreneurs Working Through UNITY."
7. Hernando Rojas, Assistant Professor, School of Journalism and Mass Communication, University of Wisconsin-Madison
8. Patty Loew, Associate Professor of Life Sciences Communication, University of Wisconsin-Madison.

Community Resource Tenure Committee of the Advisory Board:

1. Hubert Ouedraogo, Land Expert, African Land Policy Initiative, Burkina Faso
2. Grenville Barnes, Professor, University of Florida-Gainesville, USA
3. Tidiane Ngaido, Chief, IFPRI Regional Office for West and Central Africa, Dakar, Senegal

3. Further Information

The Building Bridges program is currently being piloted and funded by Terra Institute and ORAM. For more information about BB, visit the web site: http://www.terrainstitute.org/building_bridges.html. If you have story suggestions for our CBJs or other suggestions for the BB program, or if your organization is interested in providing program support, please contact Lynn Burns at Terra Institute   by Email: jdstanfi@wisc.edu or phone: 1-608-437-8716. For more information about Terra Institute or our programs please visit our website at: www.terrainstitute.org.