

NEWSLETTERS AND BOOKLETS

Newsletters and booklets use the written word and pictures to communicate information, news and opinions. They rely upon the recipients being literate in the language of the publication. Newsletters and booklets can be produced locally and circulated to a small number of people, or printed in large numbers for much wider distribution.

Advantages of Newsletters and Booklets

The main advantage of using the written word as a communication method, is that written information is permanent. It is a long lasting information source which does not rely upon human memory.

Newsletters and booklets:

- Can be written by the community for the community.
- Can include community views and opinions.
- Can be circulated locally or more widely to share ideas with the outside world.
- Success can be measured by feedback from readers, such as letters to the editor.



Villagers reading 'Baobab' newsletter in East Kochia, Western Kenya.

Practical Action East Africa

How to use Newsletters and Booklets

At the simplest level a newsletter can be hand written and duplicated for a small number of people, such as members of a local club or group. More sophisticated publications may be produced for circulation to larger audiences, but this type of venture will require writing and editing skills and access to duplicating equipment or printing services.

To produce a newsletter or booklet:

- Determine the purpose of the newsletter and the target audience.
- Decide upon the frequency of publication.
- Identify appropriate production and duplicating skills and equipment.
- Calculate the production costs and the means and costs of distribution. (Where appropriate consider electronic distribution e.g. by e-mail)
- Consider the language to be used and the newsletter name.
- Decide on design, layout and use of pictures and drawings. If the audience has low literacy levels use numerous pictures, illustrations and cartoons.
- Ensure that the content is relevant and engaging for the target audience. Remember that collecting material content can be difficult and time consuming.
- Encourage readers to contribute opinions and material for future issues.
- Consider offering advertising space as a means of funding the newsletter.

Constraints of Newsletters and Booklets

- The written word is unfamiliar to people with an oral tradition of communication.
- Non-literate people, or those reading a different language are unable to read or contribute to newsletters.
- Newsletters and booklets can be costly and time consuming to produce and distribute.

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Real Life Story

Local Newsletter for Local Residents

In September 2001 the 'Kitale' newsletter was first published. This was a new newsletter produced specifically for the residents of Kitale town in Western Kenya. The editor, Mr Otieno Mboya explained the objectives of the newsletter in his first editorial, ' To keep residents of Kitale informed about development activities in Kitale and the rest of the country and to provide a forum for organisations and individuals to share experiences, exchange views and up-date the community on their activities'.

Kitale is published 3 times a year, and has sections which include local news, opinions from community members and information on a variety of development topics. The newsletter remains very popular amongst residents, but the publishers, Kitale Municipal Council, experience ongoing challenges. The financing of the newsletter remains difficult: efforts to attract advertisers have not proved very successful and a small price to readers has to be charged. Members of the editorial board have to offer their time voluntarily. Collecting material for each issue of the newsletter is also a challenge, although readers are always encouraged to contribute, it can be difficult to get non-literate members of the town to contribute.

Real life story courtesy of Practical Action East Africa

BP-PUP project

Further reading

- Storytelling Practical Action Technical Brief
Community/Street drama Practical Action Technical Brief
Exposure Visits Practical Action Technical Brief
Public Gatherings Practical Action Technical Brief
Information, Communication, Learning selection of Practical Action Technical Briefs
Using Existing Mass Media Practical Action Technical Brief
Podcasting: Recording and Using Local Voices for Knowledge Sharing Practical Action Brief



March 2002 issue of 'Kitale'

technical brief

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Practical Action is a development charity with a difference. We know the simplest ideas can have the most profound, life-changing effect on poor people across the world. For over 40 years, we have been working closely with some of the world's poorest people - using simple technology to fight poverty and transform their lives for the better. We currently work in 15 countries in Africa, South Asia and Latin America.