



THE ACTION PROGRAMME: A CATALYST TO CURRICULUM CHANGE

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1. The ACTION programme: meeting school and community needs

ACTION's Roots: ACTION magazine Combining the merits of PC's with giant newspaper printers enables the production of a mass-media educational resource. By exploiting this resource, a relatively small team of people can have enormous information disseminating potential. ACTION has focused on developing attractive, accessible materials with emphasis on graphics, picture strips and photo-montage. Specific applications for these materials include:

- the alleviation of school resourcing problems through the provision of high-quality, low-cost materials;
- the presentation of materials in minority languages;
- as a medium for the dissemination of ideas specific to a project such as the CAMFIRE programme;
- as a formative evaluation medium in the development of textual materials in the curriculum development process.

All growing children deserve access to lively and topical learning aids. Yet the cost of this provision means that this need often remains unfulfilled. ACTION was established as an NGO project in Zimbabwe in 1987 to stimulate interest and debate in environmental and health issues in schools and their immediate communities within Zimbabwe and the wider SADC region. The project work addresses issues of widespread concern to countries striving to maintain their investment in a future educated generation: the development of new indigenous curricula; the provision of quality educational resources in bulk, both cheaply and efficiently; the empowerment of the learner; and support for minority cultures.

Today the project shares the development, production and distribution costs of publishing a children's magazine and associated literacy materials, posters and teachers guides with NGO partners in Zimbabwe, Botswana, Malawi and Namibia. ACTION materials have been seen and read by around a million school children and 100,000 teachers in Southern Africa.

ACTION has been used as a catalyst for curriculum change. Its AIDS issue was one of the first materials produced in Zimbabwe highlighting how people can protect themselves from HIV. Its disability issue told the stories of disabled children through their eyes and showed the need for able-bodied people to change their attitudes. Its

CAMPFIRE issue reflected the community's desire to manage their own resources and illustrated how wildlife could be managed as a valuable community resource. Its pesticide issue highlighted the folly of people using ever stronger chemicals and gave information about safer alternatives.

Through the provision of cheap copyright free materials, ACTION magazine has been modified and adapted for literacy books (Namibia), posters (Zambia) and flip charts (Zimbabwe). Its issues have been translated into 11 African languages include Tonga, Shangaan, Ndebele, Shona, Seswati, Tsawana, Chichewa and Njanja allowing children and their immediate communities to share ideas and experiences around environmental health issues.

2. Growing Minds

The Commons without the tragedy: ACTION and CAMPFIRE But providing information alone is often not enough. In rural Africa, conservation, rural development and political empowerment are inseparable. For people who live closest to the land, the issue is survival not conservation. the loss of land and its productivity stands as the most pressing problem facing Africa today. In some places the land literally disappears down river when torrential rains come, leaving both people and wildlife impoverished. Elsewhere people live on old infertile soils that cannot support intensive agriculture or grazing. A solution often advocated is to leave natural vegetation and wildlife in place - but in order to survive people often destroy native species in order to plant crops.

3. ACTION for Teachers

The campfire (Communal Areas Management Programme for Indigenous Resources) programme brings land into the foreground. More than just a shift in perspective, CAMPFIRE gives people an alternative to destructive uses of the land by making wildlife a valuable resource. Wildlife in fact, is the most economically and ecologically sound land use in much of Zimbabwe. CAMPFIRE begins with the question of why people should be motivated to conserve the environment. Who benefits from it? Who pays the cost and who manages it? Right at the start a key question within CAMPFIRE was 'what kind of environmental education do we want in Zimbabwe? The educational needs identified by beneficiaries included information, ideas and skills concerning resource management, institutional development and financial investment. Through a participatory process of research, developing materials and training, ACTION has provided:

- awareness raising, information education and training regarding natural resource management, utilisation and conservation to schools and communities
- institutional development education in order that participation in democratic CAMPFIRE structures could be encouraged and maintained
- development education focusing on measures which would enhance the quality of life so that participants could make informed decisions concerning their use of CAMPFIRE revenues.

Specifically, ACTION, at the request of regional education authorities, has facilitated the development of CAMPFIRE Environmental Science Exhibition in 21 educational districts where the educational style and structure of the exhibition aims to contextualise science education around community needs together with an associated changing balance in favour of process rather than product. ACTION's strategy and capacity building interventions include the professional training of teachers, teacher trainers and judges in problem-solving and science process skills related to collections, investigations and design and technology. Establishing democratically elected cluster and district committees and providing these members with training in administration and financial management, in order that the capacity for sustaining the programme is built at the local level, is a key strategy. To date professional teacher institutions have been established in 21 districts, each with their own constitution, elected representatives and bank account. Roles and procedures have been developed and committees are beginning to identify, plan and budget locally not only for their science education INSET needs but also for CAMPFIRE Science exhibitions held at a 'cluster' and district level.

A second major strand within CAMPFIRE involves supporting the Ministry of Education Sport and Culture in introducing appropriate knowledge, ideas, skills and behaviors linked to community based natural resource management within schools, particularly in the 33 existing CAMPFIRE districts which lie in remote, economically marginalised areas of Zimbabwe. This has involved ACTION employing a participative approach to curriculum design which 'triangulates' between educational stakeholders, teacher practice in the classroom and existing pupils knowledge and skills concerning wildlife management. In this process teacher views have played a central role, since effectively it is teachers who have the power over innovation and change in the curriculum. The modified curriculum, which was approved this year, is now to be implemented beginning in the year 2002. While Action has focused on integrating wildlife management issues within Agriculture, the activity has also provided both financial and professional support for the whole Agriculture syllabus to be revised and updated - its first major change for over 10 years. So ACTION is developing secondary school materials for forms 1 - 4, infusing wildlife management within English, Geography, Science and Accounts while developing new 'core' and 'option' modules for wildlife management within Agriculture.

4. Communities

ACTION has also worked with schools, their development communities, parents and local representatives in the development of school-community environmental policies and plans. While this work has the potential to enable schools to become more responsive to community needs, it has also proved the most problematic to sustain, given that funding is channeled by the donor through local government rather than education departments. In many instances the demands and policies proposed locally through a participatory grassroots process have been at variance with those of district planners operating under 'directives' from a central Ministry. Nevertheless where synergy has been developed between line Ministry district departments promoting

integrated local planning, income generating natural resource activities for the community, instigated and supported by the school, have resulted.

5. ACTION support for other agencies

While ACTION is one of nine Zimbabwe agencies collaborating in support of rural communities wishing to manage their wildlife resources, ACTION's role also includes helping these organisations develop awareness, guidance and training materials. With WWF (SARPO) ACTION is working to develop simple guides and training materials that can be used by district officials, committee members and extension workers involved in the management of large wild animals.

ACTION supports and promotes partnerships with other environmental and development agencies by undertaking consultancy work locally and internationally. On behalf of organisations, ACTION designs and develop educational and training materials, provides training in educational publishing, prints high quality materials at low cost, conducts research and develops strategies for environmental education and provides access to an environmental education reference library, resource collection and databases.

Some of ACTION's recent activities include producing a guide to understanding and influencing behaviours for people involved in community based natural resource management for the Biodiversity Support Project (USA). On behalf of Danida, ACTION is helping to develop a communications strategy to improve district environmental action planning and the management of natural resources by community groups in 11 districts of Malawi.

Based at the Mukuvisi Woodlands, Harare, ACTION is opening a printing service that will be accessible to all NGO's at low cost. Small grants for successful applications to help them develop environmental or health education materials will be part of this service, together with advice on writing, editing, design and production.

6. Lessons Learned

What are some of the lessons learned by ACTION?

- It is possible to develop a mass-media resource in a participatory and constructive manner that ensures relevance and topicality amongst readers in Zimbabwe and other Southern African stages.
- The impact of SAP's on fragile economies has lessened the amount of money made available for textbook materials by government and increased the importance of magazines such as ACTION as a means of cost-effectively filling a 'short term gap'. An enabling national framework policy for EE creates greater opportunities for developing and sharing materials such as ACTION within and among southern African countries.
- Merely developing materials does not ensure their effective use. Financial and human resources are also required to promote the materials, sensitize different

- audiences in their use and monitor and evaluate their impact.
- Distribution of EE materials must be locally managed and effectively monitored through collaborative contractual arrangements with partners.
 - Schools and other educational institutions require a 'minimum number' of materials to be supplied if they are to make optimal use of them. A policy for the management of information resources within a school is just as important for their effective use.
 - An environmental magazine can be used as part of a wider policy to support vernacular languages and spread information from the school to the community via the kind of interpersonal communication that is conventionally thought to be most effective at changing behaviour.
 - Through science exhibitions, pupils can identify and solve their local, social, environmental, economic and political problems.
 - Learning from each other is essential to development.
 - Grassroots beginnings of projects and institutions (committees) to support and steer competitions enable them to run over a long period.
 - Exhibition project results can be used as starting points for community income generating projects.